

Written Answers.

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

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

1. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the reason companies that do not have a business premise cannot access funding from the small business assistance scheme for COVID; the funding available to outdoor adventure and corporate events industry that has been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18072/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am acutely aware of the difficulties that the necessary ongoing Covid-19 restrictions are putting on businesses right across the country. With this in mind the Government has put in place a comprehensive package to help businesses and workers during the pandemic, including the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), low-cost loans, the deferral and warehousing of tax liabilities and the waiver of commercial rates.

I would urge business owners to seek the supports outlined above if they have not already done so. I would also suggest they contact their Local Enterprise Office who can signpost them and advise them of supports that may be available for their business.

Budget 2021 provided a significant package of tax and expenditure measures to build the resilience of the economy and to help vulnerable but viable businesses across all sectors. Details of the wide range of supports available are on my Department's website.

The Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID which I recently announced aims to provide grants to businesses ineligible for the Government's other existing schemes and is designed to help with fixed costs.

Applicant businesses are required to operate from a building, or similar fixed physical structure on which business rates are payable. Where the rate account is addressed to a landlord for one or more tenant businesses the grant must be applied for and paid to the operating business in each case. The intention behind this provision is to assist businesses operating from fixed premises to meet some of the ongoing fixed costs of maintaining those premises.

The Government is very much open to proposals as to how we can help businesses further. However, our schemes are there to help meet fixed costs that cannot be avoided and to provide basic weekly income support up to maximum of €350 per week. We are not providing compensation for loss of personal income above this level or compensation for loss of profits for any sector.

The outdoor adventure industry is under the remit of my colleague, Minister Catherine

Martin, in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media. An allocation of €55million was secured by that Department in Budget 2021 for a programme of funding under the strategic Tourism Business Continuity Scheme. The Scheme is designed to help strategically important tourism businesses through a direct financial contribution to support them with future operational and continuity plans. Fáilte Ireland is responsible for developing and administering the Scheme. Phase One of the Scheme, which ran from 11th February to 8th March, was open to outdoor activity providers. The process of payments to successful eligible applicants has commenced.

It should be noted that all Business schemes are being reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Workplace Relations Commission

2. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of complaints made to the WRC regarding the refusal of landlords to accept the housing assistance payment in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18093/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is administered by the local authorities who pay landlords directly. Pat 4 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 made legal provision for the Housing Assistance (HAP) Scheme. The provisions of the Act were commenced and extended on a phased basis by various regulations and in particular by SI No 404 of 2014 – Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 (Commencement of Certain Provisions Order 2014. The Equal Status Acts 2000-2015 prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services and The Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 inserted the “housing assistance” ground.

The following are the number of complaints relating to alleged discrimination under the HAP Scheme to end February 2021 that were submitted to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for adjudication.

Number of HAP Complaints received	2019	2020	1 Jan 2021 to 28 Feb 2021
	106	62	4

The volume of HAP complaints must also be assessed against the total number of complaints received for adjudication before the WRC. For instance, during 2018 the WRC received 7,724 complaint applications comprising 15,451 individual complaints and during 2019 the WRC received 8,309 complaint applications comprising 20,939 individual complaints.

Full details of complaints submitted for adjudication in each year are set out in the WRC Annual Reports.

Workplace Relations Commission

3. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of complaints upheld by the WRC regarding the refusal of landlords to accept the housing assistance payment in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18094/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varad-

kar): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is administered by the local authorities who pay landlords directly. Part 4 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 made legal provision for the Housing Assistance (HAP) Scheme. The provisions of the Act were commenced and extended on a phased basis by various regulations and in particular by SI No 404 of 2014 – Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 (Commencement of Certain Provisions Order 2014). The Equal Status Acts 2000-2015 prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services and The Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 inserted the “housing assistance” ground.

The following are the number of complaints relating to alleged discrimination under the HAP Scheme to end February 2021 that were submitted to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for adjudication.

Number of HAP Complaints received	2019	2020	1 Jan 2021 to 28 Feb 2021
	105	106	30
Upheld	24	6	None to date

The volume of HAP complaints must also be assessed against the total number of complaints received for adjudication before the WRC. For instance, during 2018 the WRC received 7,724 complaint applications comprising 15,451 individual complaints and during 2019 the WRC received 8,309 complaint applications comprising 20,939 individual complaints. Complaints may be subject to a variety of outcomes including being successfully mediated or withdrawn prior to the hearing.

Full details of complaints submitted for adjudication in each year are set out in the WRC Annual Reports.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

4. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will allow rural-based businesses, such as a lawnmower repair businesses, to opt for the Covid restrictions support scheme if a significant portion of their customers are unable to travel to their premises due to travel restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17744/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar : I am keenly aware that businesses are continuing to make massive sacrifices to protect their communities and I am committed to ensuring that the Government will offer as much assistance and support as possible. My Department has worked to ensure that appropriate supports are in place, please see attached link for further details on the various schemes available: Government supports for COVID-19 impacted businesses - DETE (enterprise.gov.ie)

As part of Budget 2021, the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), is operational through Revenue and offers a targeted, timely and temporary sector-specific support to businesses forced to close or trade at significantly reduced levels due to COVID of up to €5,000 per week. You may wish to contact my colleague the Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe T.D. in relation to your query on the Covid restrictions support scheme as remit for this scheme lies with the Department of Finance.

The Government’s Small Business Assistance Scheme for Covid (SBASC) may be of rel-

evance to the businesses that are not eligible for the CRSS. Applicant businesses to the SBASC are required to operate from a building, or similar fixed physical structure on which business rates are payable. Where the rate account is addressed to a landlord for one or more tenant businesses the grant must be applied for and paid to the operating business in each case. The intention behind this provision is to assist businesses operating from fixed premises to meet some of the ongoing fixed costs of maintaining those premises.

IDA Ireland

5. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the guidelines his Department has given to the IDA to ensure its new office in Israel, in the conduct of its business, adheres to EU law and the exclusion of illegal settlements which are not recognised as part of the territory of Israel by EU law and therefore not part of the free trade agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17817/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): IDA Ireland's overseas teams and office network are vital to support the agency's efforts in winning new Foreign Direct Investment across the world. From time-to-time IDA seeks to expand its global network of offices and teams. Many firms are looking to expand into new markets and Ireland is a proven location for global companies to grow and serve their customer base in the Europe, Middle East and Africa region.

IDA Ireland has decided to tender for a part-time Israel based Business Development Consultant. This person will represent IDA to support its efforts to win new investment. This is a model used across many territories. The Business Development Consultant will be expected to identify Israeli-headquartered target companies with potential for investing in Ireland, engage with senior decision-makers in these companies and present Ireland's value proposition as an investment location.

IDA Ireland has advised my Department that as part of its normal evaluation and due diligence process across all regions, it considers many factors including societal and reputational risk, that could be associated with investment activities prior to accepting a client into its portfolio.

My officials have advised IDA of Ireland's well known position on the illegality of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, which informs our engagement with the State of Israel across a range of bilateral issues, including trade. Ireland distinguishes between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

The EU and its Member States, including Ireland, are wholly opposed to Israeli settlements, which are contrary to international law, and are damaging to the prospects of peace.

UN Security Council Resolution 2334, adopted on 23 December 2016, calls on all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. This Resolution reflected the position already held by Ireland, the EU and the UN for many years.

Ireland consistently raises human rights issues in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory at the highest international levels, including most recently at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Ireland remains steadfast in its support for a comprehensive two state solution which protects the future of both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

As an Agency of my Department, I expect IDA Ireland to align with Ireland's position on this matter.

Covid-19 Pandemic

6. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his attention has been drawn to possible plans at EU level to impose bans on exports of Covid-19 vaccines to certain non-member states due to similar restrictions in certain countries; and the way in which this may impact on international agreements and on the supply chains of pharmaceutical companies based here. [17838/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has been engaged on the matter of the EU vaccination authorisation mechanism since the EU's initial Implementing Regulation (EU 2021/111) was adopted in late January, 2021. This Implementing Regulation sought to monitor vaccine exports from the EU to 3rd countries for an initial period of 6 weeks. It was succeeded by Implementing Regulation (EU 2021/442) which extended the monitoring and authorisation period to 30 June 2021.

The European Commission has since adopted a third Implementing Regulation (EU 2021/521) which provides additional authorisation criteria that Competent Authorities within each Member State must consider when assessing any vaccine authorisation request received, including exports to 3rd countries with large vaccine manufacturing capacity and exports to 3rd countries with a higher vaccination rate than the Union, or where the epidemiological situation is less serious than in the Union.

Export authorisation requests for vaccine exports are submitted to the Competent Authority where the vaccine or its active ingredients are manufactured. Currently, Ireland does not manufacture final vaccines for export, however, in fulfilment of our legal obligations, my Department's Trade Licensing & Control Unit has been designated Ireland's "Competent Authority".

Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, has been clear that the mechanism underpinned by the Regulation(s) is focused on export monitoring and transparency and is not designed to be an export ban. The export authorisation mechanism has been adopted to preserve the security of EU and global supply chains by introducing the principles of reciprocity and proportionality. The new legal act gives Member States the necessary degree of flexibility to authorise exports unless they cause concern, on a case-by-case basis.

The Commission has stated that the application of the authorisation mechanism should be carefully considered by the Competent Authorities, in conjunction with the Commission, to ensure that decisions are made in a balanced way in order to maintain complex supply chains while safeguarding the availability of vaccines for EU citizens on an equitable basis. Competent Authorities will assess the situation in the EU regarding Advanced Purchase Agreement (APA) commitments, but also the situation in the destination countries. It is also important to record that the most vulnerable countries, including least developed countries and dependent countries within the EU's geographic sphere continue to be exempt from the mechanism.

The Commission is eager to ensure that EU citizens receive a fair share of vaccines, having regard to the Union's €2.7b investment in vaccine development, and to invite other vaccine producing 3rd countries to open their own exports of vaccines. In this regard, I am pleased to record that export data resulting from the mechanism's monitoring function demonstrates that the EU is the main exporter of vaccines globally. Export figures up to 25 March 2021, show that 77 million vaccine doses were exported out of the EU since 1 December. Moreover, virtually

every application within the EU for an authorisation has been granted.

As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland supports the pursuit of open, free trade rooted in the multilateral, rules-based system and the WTO. From first principles, we require a very high burden of justification for the introduction of any export monitoring or control measure. We endeavour to ensure that when any such measures are introduced that they are very tightly focused and timebound. Ireland appreciates the highly integrated and global nature of supply-chains for vaccine manufacturing and the vital importance of unrestricted movement of goods to the viability of multinational manufacturing. Accordingly, my Department will continue to advocate for the earliest feasible conclusion of the existing measures, which are currently designed to run until 30 June 2021, as well as for the highest thresholds of justification to be applied when assessing export authorisations received from industry.

Finally, I might also note that in light of the worldwide need for vaccines in the context of COVID-19, the Commission is also working with industry to endeavour to ensure maximum manufacturing capacity is committed to vaccine production.

Redundancy Payments

7. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the measures that will be put in place to ensure workers on lay off will be able to access statutory redundancy payments swiftly in the event that their employment is no longer available after the current Covid-19 restrictions on redundancy are lifted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17841/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Government has always been clear that the emergency measure relating to redundancy entitlements following temporary periods of lay-off and short-time work introduced due to Covid-19 is a temporary measure. When the emergency measure ends eligible employees will be able to avail of their entitlement to make a claim for redundancy to their employer.

Under the Redundancy Payments Act 1967, it is the employer's responsibility to pay statutory redundancy payments to eligible employees, in the first instance. However in situations where an employer is unable to pay these entitlements due to financial difficulties or insolvency, an application for payment under the Redundancy Payments Scheme may be submitted to the Department of Social Protection. The Department can make the statutory redundancy payment to eligible employees on behalf of the employer. The Redundancy Payments Scheme is funded from the Social Insurance Fund.

Following receipt of the application and the required documentation, the Department of Social Protection would normally issue payment within 6 weeks.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

8. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the concerns of the retail industry will be taken into consideration (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17848/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am keenly aware of the critical role that the retail sector plays, as the largest private sector employer in Ireland, in contributing to the Irish economy.

1 April 2021

The past year has been a difficult year for all businesses, including retailers. The impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit have posed significant challenges for businesses and it is vital that businesses continue to develop their resilience in the face of these and future challenges.

I would like to thank retailers for their continued support of the national effort through this unprecedented public health crisis.

Decisions on lifting the current temporary restrictions are made by Government based on health advice. I know that adequate notice is important for the sector and I will provide as much notice as possible based on the timing and nature of the decision by Government.

S.I. No. 701 of 2020 Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 10) Regulations 2020 and S.I. No. 4 of 2021 Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 10) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/1f150-view-statutory-instruments-related-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>) clearly sets out the temporary restrictions under Level 5. A list of essential services can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c9158-essential-services/> and the list of essential retail outlets at Level 5 can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60ecc-essential-retail-outlets-for-level-5/>

The decision to move to full scale Level 5 was not taken lightly and all factors were considered.

Under Level 5, only essential retail outlets will remain open and all measures in Level 5 will stay in place until at least April 5 2021. Further information can be found on <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2dc71-level-5/>

Level 5 does not restrict people from purchasing any product, it does however restrict people from physically going into non-essential stores. This is to stop people making unnecessary journeys, congregating and browsing for non-essential goods, to limit the spread of the virus.

Under the current temporary restrictions while click and collect of non-essential retail items is no longer permitted, click or phone and delivery can continue.

We are asking retailers to fully get behind the spirit of the regulations. In particular, we are asking retailers with mixed retail offering which have discrete spaces for essential and non-essential retail to ensure the strict separation of relevant areas.

An Garda Síochána are engaging with retailers and enforcing the regulations where necessary.

Minister English has met regularly with Retail Forum members and representatives from the retail grocery and distribution sector to continuously discuss and assess adherence to the public health restrictions.

COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 - The Path Ahead which can be found on <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/resilience-recovery-2020-2021-plan-for-living-with-covid-19/> sets out the approach to the next phase, which is subject to ongoing review and taking into account the evolving epidemiological situation.

The Government is aware that some businesses are concerned that some landlords are continuing to insist on the payment of rents and leases as normal despite their premises being closed. At the same time, we must remember that landlords have their own financial obligations, like debt repayments, insurance, or security costs, that still need to be paid. One person's

rent might be another person's income or pension.

The issue of commercial rents is primarily a contractual matter for the parties involved. The Government has urged landlords and tenants to talk to one another and come to some arrangement, as it is in everybody's interest that terms are amicably agreed.

With this in mind, on 1st October 2020, the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment published the Code of Conduct between landlords and tenants for commercial rents, which was developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and based on examples from other jurisdictions. The aim of the voluntary Code is to facilitate discussions between landlords and tenants impacted by COVID-19. It sets out a structured approach for engagement between both commercial landlords and tenants, based on their mutual interest in continuing to work together. The Code can be found on the Department's website.

The Government has introduced a wide range of supports to help businesses impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and they can be found on the Department's website <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

The Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID is a new €60million grant scheme I announced recently and applications are now being taken by the Local Authorities. The closing date for this scheme is 21st April, 2021. It is a scheme designed to support those who are ineligible for CRSS and other sectoral schemes. The scheme will provide a grant of €4,000 to businesses to assist with their fixed costs eg rent, utilities, security etc. Your business may be eligible for this grant.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

9. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will consider a compensation package for retailers of clothing and footwear that had forward purchased seasonal stock which now remains unsold due to Covid-19 restrictions and cannot be returned to the suppliers due to the nature of the purchase contracts; if zero interest loans through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland or other entities will be considered for the sector; if retailers depending on the sale of seasonal stock will be allowed to open under separate regulations for their trade; if the click and collect facility will be allowed; if such affected retailers will be exempted from the rule under the employment wage subsidy scheme relating to a monthly drop in income of 30% to allow the support to continue thereby assisting with cash flow and enabling existing levels of employment to continue; if the Covid restrictions support scheme will be increased for these retailers; if he will devise a plan of ongoing supports for this sector based on the suggestions and considering the challenges the sector faces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17857/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am keenly aware of the critical role that the retail sector plays, as the largest private sector employer in Ireland, in contributing to the Irish economy.

The past year has been a difficult year for all businesses, including retailers. The impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit have posed significant challenges for businesses and it is vital that businesses continue to develop their resilience in the face of these and future challenges.

My colleague, Minister English, as chair of the Retail Forum, has met regularly with Retail Forum members and representatives from the retail grocery and distribution sector to discuss and assess matters impacting the sector as a result of COVID-19 and Brexit.

1 April 2021

I would like to thank retailers for their continued support of the national effort through this unprecedented public health crisis.

Decisions on lifting the current temporary restrictions are made by Government based on health advice. I know that adequate notice is important for the sector and I will provide as much notice as possible based on the timing and nature of the decision by Government.

The Government has introduced a wide range of supports to help businesses impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and they can be found on the Department's website <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

My colleague the Minister for Finance is responsible for matters relating to the COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme.

The Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID, which I launched, is a €60million grant scheme that was announced by Government recently and applications are now being taken by the Local Authorities. The closing date for this scheme is 21st April, 2021. It is a scheme designed to support those who are ineligible for CRSS and other sectoral schemes. The scheme will provide a grant of €4,000 to businesses to assist with their fixed costs eg rent, utilities, security etc.

Further details of this scheme are also available on <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

All Government COVID support schemes are being kept under review.

EU Regulations

10. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the way the EU environment taxonomy will impact on future corporate reporting obligations. [17870/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Taxonomy Regulation (2020/852) introduces an EU wide unified classification framework ('taxonomy') for determining whether an economic activity is environmentally sustainable, for the purpose of establishing the degree of environmental sustainability of an investment.

The Regulation will also apply to undertakings that are subject to the obligation to publish a non-financial statement under the Non-Financial Reporting Directive (2014/95/EU). The requirement to publish a non-financial statement is transposed in S.I. 360 of 2017 as amended. It applies to public-interest entities that are large and have more than 500 employees including banks, insurance undertakings, listed entities and public limited companies. Arising from the Taxonomy Regulation they will be obliged to disclose in the statement their turnover, investment or expenditure associated with environmentally sustainable activities under the taxonomy framework.

Article 8 of the Taxonomy Regulation sets out that the EU Commission are to adopt delegated acts by June 2021, which will specify the content, presentation and methodology of the information to be disclosed by undertakings subject to the Non-Financial Reporting Directive.

The EU Commission is also reviewing the Non-Financial Reporting Directive and a legislative proposal is anticipated in April.

Departmental Staff

11. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17907/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information required by the Deputy for staff of my Department by grade and gender is provided in tabular form below. This data is sourced from the National Shares Services Office and is reflective of the position at 29 March 2021.

GRADE DESCRIPTION	GENDER TOTALS	TOTAL
ASSISTANT SECRETARY		7
Female	2	
Male	5	
PRINCIPAL OFFICER		55
Female	30	
Male	25	
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL		145
Female	68	
Male	77	
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER		138
Female	78	
Male	60	
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER		32
Female	17	
Male	15	
TOTAL STAFF		377

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

12. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will consider implementing a mechanism for businesses to switch from lesser Covid restrictions support scheme payments to greater small business assistance scheme for Covid payments or to claim the balance under the scheme to augment their Covid restrictions support scheme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17934/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): CRSS was designed to provide a well targeted support to assist those public facing businesses located in areas where public health restrictions were in place. The amount payable was based on the eligible business's turnover for a comparative period pre-pandemic. Turnover provided an equitable proxy by which to calculate the costs which the business incurred, meaning that payments were commensurate with these ongoing costs.

The SBASC was designed to provide assistance to those businesses who do not qualify for CRSS or other similar sectoral support schemes. As SBASC is being administered by the 31 Local Authorities, a requirement was that the Scheme be straightforward to administer for both applicants and administrators alike, which is why a flat rate payment of €4,000 for Q1 was decided on.

The first quarter payment for SBASC is specifically for businesses that are not in receipt of

the CRSS during that period and under the terms of the it is not possible to receive both SBASC and CRSS at the same time.

The Deputy will recall we announced at the time of the launch of the SBASC that these payments are not designed to compensate for lost income and are designed to ensure that assistance is provided for unavoidable fixed and ongoing costs to enable businesses to resume when restriction levels are eased. It is also important to note that CRSS has been available to eligible businesses since October 2020 and has included several bonus payments throughout that period, whereas SBASC will only cover period since the start of 2021.

I wish to assure the Deputy, however, that all schemes for which my department is responsible are kept under constant review.

Enterprise Support Services

13. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the financial assistance and other supports available to local authorities and community groups to develop digital hubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17953/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): On 15 January last I published Ireland's first National Remote Work Strategy to make remote working a permanent option for life after the pandemic. A key action within the National Remote Work Strategy is to extend the mapping and classifications of hubs - as completed by Western Development Commission on the Atlantic Economic Corridor - across the country to develop national data on hub infrastructure. Enterprise Ireland is actively working to support the implementation of this strategy through:

- mapping and classification of hubs;
- mapping regional and local need to inform future investment in enterprise centres/hubs; and
- investment in remote work hubs and infrastructure in under-served areas thus underpinning the development of the national hubs network.

On 20 November 2020, I announced €8.24m in grants for 95 Enterprise Centres around the country administered through Enterprise Ireland. The funding will ensure that the Enterprise Centres, many of which have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, can sustain their businesses, pivot and further develop their services to support the next wave of Irish start-up companies. Enterprise Centres provide important infrastructure for entrepreneurs and are an essential part of the start-up ecosystem across Ireland. The Centres, many of which are regionally based, provide space, mentoring and support to start-up founders and teams, helping them to scale internationally.

To date, my Department has provided funding of €250 million to support the establishment of approximately 270 enterprise centres throughout Ireland and administered by Enterprise Ireland. This investment has enabled the establishment of physical space for entrepreneurs, start-ups, scaling companies, SMEs and a balance of small scale FDI; delivery of enterprise relevant programmes to companies; and provision of physical space to support remote working.

Since 2017, Enterprise Ireland has administered Departmental funding to 91 projects totalling €16,434,595 under both the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and the Community Enterprise Centres Schemes. An emerging feature of projects funded under these schemes is the

provision of physical space to support remote working.

Currently there is an Enterprise Ireland open ‘Regional Development Feasibility Fund’ that promoters, looking to scope out and investigate the viability of larger full-scale projects such as remote working hubs, can apply for. A feasibility grant of €15,000 or 50% of eligible costs, whichever is lesser, is available to qualifying applicants meeting the required criteria.

Departmental Data

14. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17970/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar) : I understand that the Deputy has clarified that she is seeking details of any ‘personal information on private persons’ sent from my Department to the Department of Health during the period in question.

From a review of files in the time available there are no records of data sets or databases containing personal information shared by my Department with the Department of Health since 2000.

General Data Protection Regulation

15. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of general data protection regulation, GDPR, and data information requests from 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined, in tabular form. [17988/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy for my Department and the Offices under the aegis of my Department is set out in the tables at the following link.

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-04-01_pq15-01-04-21_en.docx

Covid-19 Pandemic

16. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if urgent consideration will be given to the reintroduction of click-and-collect services for small and medium enterprises in the retail sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18017/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I understand this is an incredibly difficult time for businesses across the country and I would like to thank them for their efforts at this difficult time. By each of us following the spirit of the rules and working together we can hopefully ease some restrictions soon.

1 April 2021

S.I. No. 701 of 2020 Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 10) Regulations 2020 and S.I. No. 4 of 2021 Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 10) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/1f150-view-statutory-instruments-related-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>) clearly sets out the temporary restrictions under Level 5. A list of essential services can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c9158-essential-services/> and the list of essential retail outlets at Level 5 can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60ecc-essential-retail-outlets-for-level-5/>

Under Level 5, only essential retail outlets will remain open and all measures in Level 5 will stay in place until at least April 5 2021. Further information can be found on <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2dc71-level-5/>.

COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 - The Path Ahead, which can be found on <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/resilience-recovery-2020-2021-plan-for-living-with-covid-19/>, sets out the approach to the next phase, which is subject to ongoing review and taking into account the evolving epidemiological situation.

All decisions taken by Government on the timing of any lifting of restrictions are informed by the public health advice at the time.

Minister English has met regularly with Retail Forum members and representatives from the retail grocery and distribution sector to continuously discuss and assess adherence to the public health restrictions.

The Government has introduced a wide range of supports to help businesses impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and they can be found on the Department's website <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>

It is important to monitor gov.ie for the latest information, public health advice and guidelines from Government in relation to COVID-19.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

17. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will amend the conditions of the small business assistance scheme for Covid, SBASC, to enable small enterprises that are in receipt of support under the Covid restrictions support scheme, CRSS, to transfer to the new scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18060/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): CRSS was designed to provide a well targeted support to assist those public facing businesses located in areas where public health restrictions were in place. The amount payable was based on the eligible business's turnover for a comparative period pre-pandemic. Turnover provided an equitable proxy by which to calculate the costs which the business incurred, meaning that payments were commensurate with these ongoing costs.

The SBASC was designed to provide assistance to those businesses who do not qualify for CRSS or other similar sectoral support schemes. As SBASC is being administered by the 31 Local Authorities, a requirement was that the Scheme be straightforward to administer for both applicants and administrators alike, which is why flat rate payment of €4,000 for the first quarter of 2021 was decided on.

Under the terms of the scheme it is not possible to receive SBASC for periods when businesses are in receipt of payments for CRSS. SBASC is available for Q1 2021 for those businesses that are not in receipt of the CRSS for Q1.

As we indicated at the time of the launch of the SBASC, these payments are not designed to compensate for lost income but to make a contribution to fixed costs and to ensure that assistance is provided for unavoidable fixed and ongoing costs to enable businesses to resume when restriction levels are eased. It is also important to note that CRSS has been available to eligible businesses since October 2020 and has included several bonus payments throughout that period, whereas SBASC will only cover the period since the start of 2021.

I wish to assure the Deputy, however, that all schemes for which my department is responsible are kept under constant review.

Waste Management

18. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the savings achieved by diverting one tonne of paper, cardboard and plastic from landfill to incineration or to recycling, respectively in terms of reduction in greenhouse gases, reduction in pollution or other damage to the environment, reduction in costs of processing the waste and the creation of a product for new uses; and the estimated value of each of these savings. [17880/21]

33. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the savings achieved by diverting one tonne of compostable material from landfill to incineration or to recycling respectively, in terms of reduction in greenhouse gases, reduction in pollution or other damage to the environment, reduction in costs of processing the waste and the creation of a product for new uses; and the estimated value of each of these savings. [17874/21]

34. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the savings achieved by diverting one tonne of paper, cardboard and plastic from landfill to incineration or to recycling, respectively in terms of reduction in greenhouse gases, reduction in pollution or other damage to the environment, reduction in costs of processing the waste and the creation of a product for new uses; and the estimated value of each of these savings. [17875/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 18, 33 and 34 together.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for compiling Ireland's national greenhouse gas emission inventory on an annual basis, and publishes information online at <http://epa.ie/ghg/>. In 2019, Ireland's provisional GHG emissions are estimated to be 59.90 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂eq). The waste sectors contribution to this figure is based on emissions from solid waste disposal, composting, waste incineration (excluding waste to energy), open burning of waste and wastewater treatment and discharge. The entire waste contribution is estimated at 1.5% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions in 2019.

The EPA also compiles national statistics on waste generation and management in Ireland. EPA figures indicate 2.9 million tonnes of municipal waste was generated in Ireland in 2018, of which 38% was recycled, 43% was used in energy recovery and 14% was landfilled. Figures show that disposal of municipal waste to landfill has fallen sharply over the last 20 years reducing from 58% in 2010 and over 80% in 2001. The Landfill Directive sets a limit on the quantity of biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill; by 2020, it had to be reduced to 35% of the

total quantity (by weight) of biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) produced in 1995. Ireland has been in compliance with this target for some time with 145, 000 tonnes of BMW disposed to landfill in 2019. Further information on Ireland's national waste statistics is available at <http://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/>.

The EPA have recently published the results of research examining the impact of Ireland's landfill policy on greenhouse gas emissions from the waste sector over the period 1990 to 2018. The authors note that the net methane emissions from MSW landfilled was lower by 56.5% compared to their peak in 1995 with analysis indicating that Ireland's policies regarding landfilling of waste has been associated with a substantial reduction in methane emissions in the waste sector. This research is available at <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/sss/ex-postanalysisoftheimpactofnacionallandfillpolicy.html>.

In addition, work is being carried out in the context of the forthcoming Climate Action Plan to provide a means for calculating emissions savings arising from diverting material away from disposal or recovery, further up the waste hierarchy into recycling or reuse.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

19. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if, in the context of setting carbon reduction baselines, credit is given to this country for the amount of wetlands, bog lands, forestry, trees, hedgerows and grasslands when compared with other food producers throughout Europe and elsewhere, whose production methods do not equate with this country in terms of emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18011/21]

21. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the eco-friendly nature of Ireland's agri-food production sector is taken into account in the context of carbon reduction with particular reference to permanent pasture, hedges and forestry and wet areas; if not, if Ireland is being treated in the same manner as other countries that do not have a beef eco-friendly production method; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17656/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan) :
I propose to take Questions Nos 19 and 21 together.

As set out in the Programme for Government, we are committed to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030, equivalent to a 51% reduction over the decade and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The Programme for Government also recognises the special economic and social role of agriculture and the distinct characteristics of biogenic methane, as described by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in terms of plans and strategies to achieve these targets.

While emissions from the agri-food sector have continued to increase, Irish agriculture has a positive international reputation in terms of producing high quality, sustainable produce. The long-term challenge for the sector is to fully contribute to achieving a climate neutral economy no later than 2050, while not compromising our capacity for sustainable food production. The Government is committed to finding the balance between environmental, climate and biodiversity needs and supports for farmers.

Measurement of agriculture and land-use emissions from each Member State is carried out on a consistent basis, which captures the individual characteristics of each Member State, including Ireland.

Article 13.7 of the Paris Agreement, of which both the EU and its Member States are signatories, requires signed parties to provide regular greenhouse gas emissions inventories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in order to track both a country's achievement of their nationally determined contributions and climate policies as well as regional climate policies, and the world's progress in limiting global warming. The UNFCCC reporting guidelines on annual inventories for Annex I Parties (which covers EU Member States) require that Annex I Parties should use the IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories to measure emissions inventories. This ensures consistency of measurement across Member States.

Compensation Schemes

20. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans to compensate drift and draft net fishers affected by the 2007 ban on commercial salmon fishing; his views on whether the hardship scheme introduced following the ban should be reopened to relevant fishers who did not avail of it at the time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18061/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Commercial fishing for salmon is by way of public licence which does not confer any rights on the holder. In that regard the issue of compensation does not arise.

In order to comply with the EU Habitats Directive and the principles of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO), the Government decided in 2006 to cease all indiscriminate commercial fishing in the sea and to manage all salmon fisheries strictly in line with scientific advice. On foot of that decision, in 2007, the Government introduced a hardship scheme open to all holders of a commercial salmon licence.

Funding of €25m was made available for direct payments to former fishermen, based on their track record in the fishery, with a further €5m available for projects in affected communities.

The scheme closed in 2008 with all funds expended and there are currently no plans to introduce a similar scheme.

Question No. 21 answered with Question No. 19.

Postal Services

22. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications further to Parliamentary Question No. 59 of 3 March 2021, if An Post will be contacted in relation to the matter given the person has not been contacted in order to resolve the issue; if the matter will be highlighted with the relevant authorities in order to rectify same (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17660/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): As I indicated in my previous reply to the Deputy this is an operational matter directly for An Post. The matter has already been referred to the company to investigate and respond directly to the individual concerned. The Deputy's further Parliamentary Question had been brought to the attention of the company.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

23. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the full extent of existing capacity to sequester carbons by way of permanent grassland, forestry, trees, hedges and wetlands in Ireland; if this has been taken into account in determining the baseline for carbon emissions in this country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17667/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan) : The Programme for Government outlined a commitment to evaluating the potential for contributions towards our climate ambition from land-use improvements and set in train the development of a land-use plan, based on its findings. This review will include farmland, forests and peatlands so that optimal land use options inform relevant government decisions. The review will balance environmental, social, and economic considerations and involve a process of evaluation of the ecological characteristics of the land. It will include consideration of emissions to air and water, carbon sequestration, and climate adaptation challenges. The working group with responsibility for this review is being jointly managed by my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

While EU Member States currently report emissions and removals from the land use sector, such emissions are not currently accounted for in relation to the calculation of compliance with emissions targets in the period to 2020. This will change with the application of a new EU land use accounting system for the period 2021-2030 which will apply from 2023 (when accounting will commence retrospectively for the year 2021) and will set specific targets for emissions and removals from land use. The impact of emissions and removals from five out of six land use sectors will be included in the new system from 2021 to 2025 (Managed Cropland, Managed Grassland, Afforestation, Deforestation, and Managed Forests), with Member States having the option to include the impact of the sixth, “Managed Wetland”, in this first period. Ireland opted in to include the impact of Managed Wetland on greenhouse gas emissions and removals for the period 2021 to 2025. This voluntary accounting puts Ireland on a stronger footing for accounting for greenhouse gas emissions and removals and in making the strategic changes required to support the country to meet our national, European and international climate change targets.

Ireland’s National Inventory Report 2020, published by the Environmental Protection Agency, reports that Ireland was a net emitter from the land use sector in 2018, emitting a total of 4.3 MTCO₂eq.

Air Quality

24. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the amount of dedicated funding that will be provided to each local authority to monitor and enforce the smoky coal ban and any future solid fuel regulations as part of the forthcoming clean air strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17700/21]

25. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the forthcoming clean air strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17701/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 24 and 25 together.

My Department is currently working to finalise Ireland's first National Clean Air Strategy. While it was originally my intention to launch the Strategy alongside a public consultation on a new solid fuel regulation for Ireland, recognising the urgency of taking action to address the health impacts of domestic solid fuel burning, I have chosen to progress the development of enhanced solid fuel regulations in advance. This decision will also allow submissions received during the public consultation process to inform and contribute to the final strategy document.

The Strategy will identify and promote the integrated measures and actions across Government that are required to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner air, while delivering on wider national objectives. In line with the Programme for Government, the Clean Air Strategy will also support the development of a regional approach to air quality enforcement and a multi-agency approach to clamping down on the sale of high-sulphur content fuel imported from the UK.

Such coordinated action is required given the links between burning of solid fuels and the health effects of air pollution, as well as the potential for market distortion for businesses properly adhering to the regulations.

Discussions with the Local Authority sector have commenced with the intention of establishing dedicated resources within regional lead authorities to provide co-ordination, expertise and advice to support consistent implementation of air quality legislation across the country. My Department is fully committed to supporting Local Authorities in this regard, including through the provision of additional supports for the most effective model of enforcement.

National Broadband Plan

26. Deputy Claire Kerrane asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the position regarding the 70 primary schools which are to be connected to broadband as part of the National Broadband Plan by the end of quarter 1 of 2021; the number of these schools that have been connected; if this timeframe will be reached for all 70 schools; if not, the expected timeframe for the remaining schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17758/21]

27. Deputy Claire Kerrane asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications when broadband will be rolled out to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17760/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26 and 27 together.

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 31 March, some 293 BCP sites have been installed by NBI and will be connected with high speed publicly accessible broadband through a service provider contract managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development. School BCPs will be provided with high speed broadband for educational use as part of this initiative through 'service provider' contracts managed by the Department of Education. Further details can be found at <https://nbi.ie/bcp-locations/>.

As of 31 March, 112 Schools have been installed by NBI with high speed broadband of which 35 schools have been connected through the Department of Education contracts with the re-

maining 35 schools in the process of being connected.

An acceleration of the schools aspect of the BCP programme was announced last December. This will see some 679 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by end 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. The individual school referred to by the Deputy is one of these 679 schools that are now to be connected ahead of the original schedule and I understand from National Broadband Ireland that the anticipated date for installation is in Q4 of this year

National Broadband Plan

28. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the roll-out of broadband in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17766/21]

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

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.

I am advised by National Broadband Ireland that, as of 24 March 2021, over 196,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed. In County Kerry there are 26,988 premises in the Intervention Area of which 16,382 premises have been surveyed including in the areas of Muckross, Fossa, Kilcummin, Lissivigeen, Ballycasheen, Faha, Firies, Ballyhar, Curraheen, Abbeydorney, Kilflynn, Firies, Castlemaine, Ardfert. Surveys are underway in Rathmore, Knocknacopple, Mounthorgan, Kilquane Upper, Barraduff, Cloonteens, Gneevgullia, Tureenamult, Renasup, Castlegregory, Aughacasla, Camp, Knockbrack, Maum, Lougher, Inch, Annascaul, Derrygorman, Ballyglasheen, Brackluin, Ballintarmon, Drom, An Clochan, Kilshannig, Fahamore, Candeehy Breanainn, Ballyheigue, Glenderry, Ladywell, Banna, Lerrig, Ballymacandrew, Causeway, Foxfort, Ballymacaquinn, Ballinloch, Dromartin and Beenconeen. Build works have started in the areas around Tralee in Curraheen, Abbeydorney, Kilflynn, Firies, Castlemaine and Ardfert. Pre-works in the Kilarney area have also commenced.

Further details are available on specific areas within County Kerry 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 that NBI is working to provide more detail on its website, with a rolling update on network build plans. NBI also has a dedicated email address, reps@nbi.ie, which can be used by Oireachtas members for specific queries.

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 24 March, 290 BCP 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 Development for publicly accessible sites and the Department of Education for schools. BCP sites installed in Kerry are Gneeveguilla (Tureencahill), Railway Station Heritage Centre and Community Space, Inch Community Centre, Kielduff Community Centre and Cillín Liath. Cable Station and Chapeltown are installed and connected. Further details can be found at <https://nbi.ie/bcp-locations/>.

Boheeshil National School, Dunloe Upper and Coars National School are connected as part of this initiative. My Department continues to work with the Department of Education to prioritise schools with no high speed broadband, within the Intervention Area, for connection over the term of the NBP. In this regard, an acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan was announced in December which will see some 679 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. Further details are available on the NBI website at <https://nbi.ie/primary-schools-list/>.

Energy Efficiency

29. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if there are grants available to install a wood pellet stove; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17777/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers a range of grant schemes to support homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their properties. Partial grants are available for individuals that can afford to contribute to the cost of upgrades as well as free energy efficiency retrofits for people at risk of energy poverty. Since 2000, over 400,000 homeowners have upgraded their homes with support from these schemes. This has resulted in warmer, healthier and more comfortable homes that are easier and cheaper to heat and light. The 2021 budget for SEAI residential and community schemes is €221.5 million – the largest ever allocation for these schemes.

SEAI grants encourage homeowners to reduce heat loss through the installation of insulation and ventilation in the first instance, before moving to replace heating systems. This is in line with the fabric first principle and best practice.

Grants for residential pellet burning heating systems are not available as an individual measure. However, grants for pellet burning stoves are available when included as part of a wider energy efficiency upgrade under the Community Energy Grant Scheme and the National Retrofit (One-stop-shop development) Scheme. Stoves installed must meet certain requirements and specifications.

The Programme for Government and the Climate Action Plan set ambitious targets to retrofit 500,000 homes to a Building Energy Rating of B2 and to install 400,000 heat pumps in existing buildings over the next 10 years. Heat pumps are an attractive and extremely efficient alternative to stoves. Furthermore, heat pumps are very economical to run offering lower energy costs to homeowners as well as reduced carbon emissions.

Outside of the residential sector, the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) has been developed to financially support and stimulate the adoption of renewable heating systems by

commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating and other non-domestic heat users not covered under the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. The SSRH, which is operated by the SEAI, provides an operational support for biomass boilers and anaerobic digestion heating systems. Eligible renewable energy technologies are supported through a multi-annual payment, for a period of up to 15 years, on the basis of prescribed tariffs. The National Development Plan sets out an allocation of €300 million for the roll-out of the scheme for the period up to 2027. The introduction of the scheme provides an indirect stimulus to the indigenous wood pellet industry.

Further information on SEAI grants is available at www.seai.ie/grants or by calling 1850 927 000.

Waste Data

30. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the volume of materials collected across the network of bring centres; the composition of same; and the way this has changed compared with five and ten years ago, respectively. [17871/21]

31. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the way materials collected at bring centres are processed, broken down by the amounts that go to hazardous waste disposal, to reuse outlets and to recycling; the way the residue is disposed of; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17872/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 30 and 31 together.

In 2018 137,000 tonnes of waste materials (excluding waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) and construction and demolition (C&D) waste) was collected at the various civic amenity sites in Ireland. This was an increase of approximately 7,000 tonnes on volumes collected in 2013.

The 2018 total included 30,000 tonnes mixed residual waste, 28,000 tonnes bulky waste, 18,400 tonnes garden waste, 15,000 tonnes wood and 8,950 tonnes metals. Hazardous waste, which includes items such as batteries, paints, inks, hydraulic or lubricating oils, aerosols and detergents, amounted to 2,200 tonnes.

All materials accepted at civic amenity sites are segregated at the point of deposition into the various waste streams.

- **Municipal Waste Streams** - The materials are shipped for processing at Material Recycling Facilities where they are baled for reprocessing. Any material not suitable for reprocessing (approximately 10%-20%) is prepared to Solid Refuse Fuel (SRF) specifications for use as a replacement fossil fuel.

- **C&D Waste Streams** - The materials are shipped to C&D sorting facilities where the streams are separated into their component parts. All the sorted material is recycled/recovered apart from C&D fines which is generally estimated at < 1% of the total stream and this is sent to landfill for disposal.

- **Hazardous Waste Stream** - Hazardous materials are packaged into UN containers on the civic amenity site and exported for recovery at waste to energy plants abroad.

- **Compost Materials** - All material is shipped for recycling to Compost and Anaerobic Di-

gestion facilities in Ireland.

- WEEE - WEEE is collected for recycling /reuse by the Producer Responsibility Initiative (PRI) schemes.

- Reuse - The direct reuse of materials takes place at a number of civic amenity sites and consideration is being given to expanding this.

The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, which I launched in September 2020, contains a commitment to formalise the role of civic amenity sites and agree a standard list of waste streams to be accepted at such sites. In this regard the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, with support from my Department, have recently published a National Review of Civic Amenity Sites, which is available online at: <http://www.southernwasteregion.ie/content/national-review-civic-amenity-sites> .

Discussions have commenced with the local authority sector on implementation of the report recommendations. This will allow civic amenity sites to play a greater role in our transition to a more circular economy through measures such as coordinated education and awareness programmes, greater uptake of reuse schemes, standardising a list of waste streams accepted at such sites and collective approaches to extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes, and this will assist in continuing our success in reducing the amount of waste disposed of at landfills.

Waste Data

32. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the estimated proportion of the volumes put onto the market that are recovered in respect of each of the extended producer responsibility, EPR, schemes; the volumes that go to reuse outlets and to recycling; the way the residue is disposed of; the estimated cost of the scheme per tonne placed on the market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17873/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The specific information sought is not held by my Department.

The EPA is the competent authority with responsibility for compiling waste data in Ireland and publishes annual reports on this. These reports assess Ireland's performance against the recycling and recovery targets set out in EU and national legislation. Details of these national waste statistics can be found at www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/ .

Information on the operations and finances of each EPR scheme is provided in their Annual Reports, which are published on their individual websites. Under their respective Ministerial approval EPR schemes are required to attain national and EU targets and to promote reuse, recycling and other forms of recovery. They must also ensure that their actions proactively enable Ireland to transition towards a circular economy.

Questions Nos. 33 and 34 answered with Question No. 18.

Waste Data

35. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the current recycling rates achieved in Ireland on compostable materials and on each of the main categories for which waste recycling targets have been set for 2030; the respective levels that prevailed five years ago; and the target to be achieved in 2030. [17876/21]

36. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the composition of all waste generated in Ireland across all sectors, not just in the municipal waste stream; and the way the weight of each category has evolved compared with five and ten years ago, respectively. [17877/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 35 and 36 together.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the competent authority for the collation of national waste data and reports annually on Ireland's performance against the targets set out in EU and national legislation.

The EPA's latest national waste statistics summary report for 2018 (available at <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/stats/wastereport2020/#d.en.69209>) includes key trends for 2018, and progress to targets. The report shows that the quantity of Irish waste treated by composting and anaerobic digestion rose to 436,000 tonnes in 2018, an increase of 15% on the previous year. Of this amount, 56% consisted of municipal waste, while other sources included wastes from agriculture, horticulture, forestry and food preparation and processing, and waste from waste management facilities and water/waste water treatment sludges. Information on volumes of waste accepted for composting or anaerobic digestion, on an annual basis going back to 2005, is available at <http://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/composting/>

The EPA also provides information on Ireland's progress in meeting targets under EU waste legislation including the Waste Framework Directive, the Landfill Directive and the Producer Responsibility Directives (Packaging and Packaging Waste, End-of-Life Vehicles, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment, Batteries and Accumulators), and provides information at <http://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/targets/>. Further information on individual waste streams, historical data, and the latest available data for Ireland is available at <http://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/>.

Departmental Staff

37. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administrative officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department, by gender, in tabular form. [17908/21]

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

Grade	Female	Male
Assistant Secretary	1	4
Principal Officer	13	24
Assistant Principal	55	74
Higher Executive Officer	43	33
Administrative Officer	20	29

Departmental Data

38. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Depart-

ment has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17971/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department and the Department of Health are working together on the Warmth and Wellbeing housing retrofit pilot scheme. This work involves sharing files relating to the scheme. This does not include any personal data.

My Department shares no other files or databases with the Department of Health.

General Data Protection Regulation

39. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of general data protection regulation, GDPR, and data information requests from 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined, in tabular form. [17989/21]

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

GDPR Subject Access Requests

Year	Requests Received	Requests Withdrawn	Invalid Requests	Valid Requests	Refused Requests	GDPR Complaints Received
2018	1	-	-	1	-	0
2019	6	1	1*	4	2**	1
2020	9	5	1*	3	1**	1
2021 to date	2	1	-	1	0	0

* *Invalid on the basis that no valid ID was supplied to my Department.*

** *Refused on the basis that no records existed in my Department.*

Driver Licences

40. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the proposed legislation giving asylum seekers the right to apply for an Irish driver licence, as promised in the White Paper on direct provision; if the legislation is on track to be introduced before summer 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18031/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton) : As set out in the Programme for Government, the Government will act on interim recommendations from the Chair of the Expert Group on the Provision of Support, including Accommodation, to Persons in the International Protection Process (Asylum Seekers) to improve conditions for asylum seekers currently living in the system. This includes the ability to apply for driver licences.

Currently, Ireland does not issue driving licences to applicants for international protection as their residence status in the State is not yet determined. To provide for the change in policy and to change the law to allow such applicants access to a driving licence, there are a number of

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complex legal, administrative and technical issues to consider and resolve. One of these issues is connected to the primary legislative proposal to grant the Minister for Transport the power to revoke a driving licence, planned for inclusion at committee stage hearing of the Road Traffic Bill 2021. The Bill is expected to be introduced to the Houses shortly, after the Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications has concluded pre-legislative scrutiny. Secondary legislation changes will also be required.

While the legislative requirements are being examined, work is continuing on the administrative and technical solutions needed. It is not possible at this time to give a definitive date yet for when these changes will be in place. However, I am assured that my officials are working hard, in close cooperation with all the stakeholders, to make this happen.

Bus Services

41. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport if each new BusConnects route will be tendered in a competitive tendering process when each existing Dublin Bus route is replaced by a new revamped route; if not, if each route will be directly awarded by the National Transport Authority, NTA; if the company operating the existing most approximate route to the new route will be automatically selected to operate the new route system in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17657/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally.

I have, therefore, forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Services

42. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the high cost of monthly and yearly travel passes for bus travel in Dublin (details supplied); if he plans to reduce the costs of public transport and bus fares in Dublin specifically; the time-frame for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17658/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for regulating fares charged by public transport operators.

I have, therefore, forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Remote Working

43. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport the reason a person (details supplied) is not being permitted to work from home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17664/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I as Minister for Transport do not have responsibility for the operational matters of An Garda Síochána. Section 26 of *The Garda Síochána Act 2005* specifies that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and control of the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including arranging the recruitment, training and appointment of its members and civilian staff.

Coast Guard Service

44. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport the reason the cliff rescue services that was provided by the Irish Coast Guard has been terminated; and if he will consider undertaking a review of the entire Irish Coast Guard service in order that a vision for the future can be forged. [17779/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The Irish Coast Guard continues to work towards resuming Cliff Rescue operations at the 17 locations around the coast, which have been affected by the temporary suspension which arose from a cross-functional assessment carried by the Coast Guard. This assessment evaluated necessary actions relating to procedures, equipment, training and the oversight and assurance mechanisms necessary to ensure the continued safety of its personnel. As a matter of priority, the Irish Coast Guard is actively working on addressing all issues now identified and reinstating the provision of Cliff Rescue services as quickly as possible.

Irish Coast Guard (IRCG) Management acting within the Department of Transport's organisation structure and accountability framework, and in response to the recommendations as listed within Reports, No. MCIB/266 and the AQE - Review of the Oversight of Search and Rescue (SAR) Aviation Operations in Ireland (2018), has embarked upon an extensive programme of reform. Doing so affords the IRCG the opportunity to demonstrate to all those who partake and/or avail of its services, that its operations and supporting activities are being managed in accordance with best practice and legislative requirements.

Coast Guard Service

45. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport the position regarding the suspension by the Irish Coast Guard of cliff rescue teams; the reason for this; when this will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17792/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The Irish Coast Guard continues to work towards resuming cliff rescue operations at the 17 locations around the coast affected by the temporary suspension. Safety matters are currently being addressed to facilitate the lifting of the temporary suspension of the operations.

Driver Test

46. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport when driver theory tests will resume; the steps that will be taken to address the backlog of applicants waiting to take the driver theory tests (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17806/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The Driver Theory Test has not been deemed by Government to be an essential service under level 5. As a consequence, the service is closed while level 5 restrictions remain in place. Custom-

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ers who have a Driver Theory Test scheduled during the level 5 restrictions will be contacted to notify them that their test will be rescheduled free of charge when the service resumes. Updates around the resumption of tests will be published on www.theorytest.ie.

The RSA is engaging with its service provider to examine ways of increasing the number of tests within the current health constraints for when services resume. In this regard, the aim is to double capacity at test centres over a three-month period. Subject to decisions on future Covid 19 restrictions, this will mean that additional capacity would be made available in April, May and June 2021.

In addition to the increased capacity initiative, the RSA is working to deliver an online driver theory test service. The online service has been trialled on a pilot basis for those taking a theory test for trucks and buses and is now being evaluated with a view to extending the online service to all test types during 2021. However, scaling up operations to facilitate higher numbers will take time to achieve.

Road Projects

47. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the new Limerick to Foynes road; the funding that has been secured to build the road; the estimated cost of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17815/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and securing exchequer funding in relation to the National Roads Programme. Once funding arrangements have been put in place with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 and in line with the National Development Plan (NDP), the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for TII, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. This is also subject to the requirements of the Public Spending Code Guidelines and necessary statutory approvals. In this context, TII is best placed to advise on the current status and funding of this proposed project.

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

Local Authority Staff

48. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport if approval has been given formally to local authorities to hire additional staff as part of the Sustainable Transport Initiative; if the terms of conditions and salaries under which such staff may be hired have been agreed; the number of such staff hired to date by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17849/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public and sustainable transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including resourcing.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department announced funding in January for up to 248 new jobs in local authorities around the country to expand walking and cycling facilities all over the country. This increase in resourcing reflects the significantly increased funding of €1.8bn for walking and cycling over the planned lifetime of the Government. The additional staff will

be dedicated to delivering and promoting active travel in Ireland and will work across design, communication, community liaison and construction oversight.

The NTA has developed a five year walking and cycling infrastructure delivery plan, including consideration of necessary institutional arrangements and resource requirements needed to ensure delivery of the active travel infrastructure programme. It is my understanding that the NTA are currently in the process of contacting local authorities to advise them of the number of resources authorised for funding under this plan and the terms and conditions involved.

In relation to the number of staff hired to date, I have referred this aspect of the query to the NTA. If you don't receive a response within 10 working days, please contact my private office directly.

Bus Services

49. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport if it is planned to devolve decisions in relation to the siting of bus shelters and other minor works from the NTA to the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17850/21]

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

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the question to the NTA who will provide an explanation of the siting process to the Deputy directly. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Seirbhísí Dátheangacha

50. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Iompair cén fáth nach bhfuil leagan dátheangach ag a Roinn don mhana agus lógó Transport for Ireland agus an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge á cur san áireamh; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [17853/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as a chuid ceisteanna.

Mar Aire Iompair, tá freagracht orm as beartas agus maoiniú foriomlán maidir le hiompar poiblí. Níl baint agam, áfach, le hoibríochtaí iompair phoiblí ó lá go lá.

Is é an tÚdarás Náisiúnta Iompair (NTA) a bhainistíonn láithreán gréasáin Transport for Ireland (TfI). Dá bhrí sin, is faoin NTA atá na saincheisteanna a ardaíodh, agus chuir mé ceisteanna an Teachta ar aghaidh chuig an NTA le haghaidh freagra díreach. Cuir in iúl do m'oifig phríobháideach mura bhfaigheann tú freagra laistigh de dheich lá oibre.

Tá an Roinn ag obair faoi láthair ar nuashonrú á ról don Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 agus beidh sé ar fáil le breathnú ar ár suíomh gréasáin go gairid. Tá cóip den Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 ar fáil i nGaeilge anois ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne.

Driver Test

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51. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport when it is planned to allow driver instructors to recommence in-car driving instruction, in view of the large number of persons who need to learn to drive, particularly front-line workers in rural areas without good public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17855/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Last October the decision was taken at Government level, on the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and other public health experts, that no driving lessons can proceed under level 5 restrictions other than for essential workers who have already been scheduled a confirmed date for a driving test.

While officials both in my Department and in the Road Safety Authority are working extremely hard to ensure that driving instruction will return to normal capacity as soon as it is safe to do so, any decision here will ultimately be that of Government.

School Transport

52. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport if a closing date has been set for schools to make an expression of interest for inclusion in the safe routes to school initiative; and if a scoring and weighting system has been identified for choosing schools across the various features mentioned in the initial launch. [17884/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): I was delighted to recently launch Safe Routes to School which will support active travel infrastructure for selected schools around the country. The programme will see circa €15 million of funding this year to support walking/scooting and cycling to primary and post-primary schools.

As the Deputy is probably aware, the Safe Routes to School programme aims to create safer walking and cycling routes within communities, alleviate congestion at the school gates and increase the number of students who walk or cycle to school by providing walking and cycling facilities.

All schools are eligible to apply to the programme and information has recently been circulated from the Departments of Education and Transport to schools nationwide. The selected schools will be guided through the application process and will work with a designated infrastructure officer from Green-Schools who will liaise with the school and local authority as works are planned and carried out.

Schools will be selected for participation in the coming months in the programme for 2021 based on a mix of criteria including school type, location and school's commitment to sustainable travel. The programme will select a number of schools for participation this year, with further opportunities for schools that are not successful in their application to reapply at a later date.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

53. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport if a broad policy framework has been developed to shape the expenditure of the €1.8 billion for cycling and walking infrastructure; and the key performance indicators used in choosing projects. [17885/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Government has committed that €1.8bn in cross-Government funding will be spent on walking and cycling over the lifetime

of the Government. This investment will support the delivery of of almost 1,000 kilometres of improved walking and cycling infrastructure by 2025 as well as additional investment in Greenways.

As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including cycling and walking infrastructure.

Details of individual projects are matters for the NTA and the relevant local authorities; accordingly I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

54. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport the details of the cycling and walking initiatives in Dublin city and Fingal in the first round of funding allocations; and the forecast numbers for users of the new facilities when fully in place. [17886/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including cycling and walking infrastructure. In February 2021 the NTA published details of the allocation of grants totalling €240 million under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grant Programme 2021, to support the implementation of sustainable transport projects by local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area and the regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. This represents an increase of €130 million on last year's allocation and will support the addition of 233 new projects to the NTA's investment programme in 2021.

The full list of allocations is available on the NTA website at the following link: <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021-Issued-Allocations-Final.pdf>

Details of individual projects are matters for the NTA and the relevant local authorities; accordingly I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Departmental Staff

55. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Transport if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administrative officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department, by gender, in tabular form. [17920/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The gender breakdown of the grades Higher Executive Officers, Administration Officers, Assistant Principal Officers, Principal Officers and Assistant Secretaries in my Department is set out below in the following table. Professional & Technical grades are mapped to their administrative equivalents.

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Administrative Staff			
Assistant Secretary*	3	2	5
P.O.	12	11	23

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Grade	Female	Male	Total
Special Adviser**	1	1	2
A.P.*	37	25	61
A.O.	16	15	32
H.E.O.	46	31	77
Total Administrative Staff	115	85	200
Professional/Technical (P/T) Staff			
P/T P.O equiv. *	1	18	19
P/T A.P equiv.	3	47	50
P/T A.O/H.E.O equiv.	4	55	59
Total Professional/Technical (PT) Staff	8	120	128
Total at these grades	123	205	328

*includes staff serving in an acting capacity.

** the two Special Advisers detailed are assigned to Minister of State Naughten. Minister Ryan's Advisers will be accounted for in the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communication's response.

Departmental Data

56. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17982/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): A schedule of data sets, databases and file types shared by my Department with the Department of Health is provided below.

Transfer	Purpose	Data Provided	Method of Transfer	Frequency
Driver Contact Information File	To provide driver contact information for the purposes of COVID-19 contact-tracing	File containing driver contact details	Bulk Data File via Secure Staging Server	Once only
Vehicle Contact Information File	To provide vehicle owner contact information for the purposes of COVID-19 contact-tracing	File containing vehicle owner contact information	Bulk Data File via Secure Staging Server	Once only

General Data Protection Regulation

57. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of general data protection regulation, GDPR, and data information requests from 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined, in tabular form. [18001/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows in respect of the Department of Transport.

Year	No. of GDPR Information Requests	Number Refused
2018	22	NIL

Year	No. of GDPR Information Requests	Number Refused
2019	17	NIL
2020	19	NIL
2021	3	NIL

National Car Test

58. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport the reason persons who missed their NCT appointments due to the lockdown in the past year, particularly persons over 70 years of age are being penalised if they go for an NCT now; if the NRA will waive any penalties and agree to issue the NCT certificate for the full relevant period, depending on the age of the car; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18036/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): While it is not possible for me to comment on individual circumstances, I would firstly seek to clarify to the Deputy that all Member States of the European Union are required by law to carry out a periodic roadworthiness inspections on motor vehicles at regular intervals throughout the vehicle's lifecycle. This is an essential safety check and an important road safety measure that provides for a reduction in road accidents by detecting defects such as faulty brakes, worn tyres or defective headlights.

The applicable dates for periodic testing and voluntary testing is provided for by national legislation. Under Regulation 3(2) and 3(3) of the Road Traffic (National Car Test) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 415/2017), the initial test due date for a vehicle is determined using the date of registration of that vehicle and subsequent test due dates fall on anniversaries of that date. Accordingly, all test due dates are predetermined based on the date of registration of a vehicle. It is important to note that the NCT certificate relates only to the condition of testable items at the time of the test and does not constitute a warranty for their condition for the subsequent 12-month period. Any NCT certificate issued in respect of a vehicle is only valid up to the test due date that falls after that certificate was issued.

There are no current plans to amend this legislation in respect of test due dates.

I of course believe that safeguarding public health is of paramount importance at this time. I am advised by the RSA that the NCT Service has put in place a broad range of measures to ensure that they are compliant with health and safety guidelines and public health advice, including restricting the use of waiting rooms, and that this is notified to customers via the NCT website. I am also given to understand that the NCT Service has requested that elderly or vulnerable customers do not attend in person but instead arrange for someone to present their vehicle in their stead, where possible. Information about the protocols which have been put in place is available from the NCTS website <https://www.ncts.ie/1123/>

It is also possible to call the NCTS booking number on **01-4135992** and speak to one of their representatives.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

59. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the Covid restrictions support scheme is biased against rural-based businesses; the action he will take to rectify this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17745/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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. Details of the CRSS are set out in Finance Act 2020 and detailed operational guidelines, which are based on the terms and conditions of the scheme as set out in the legislation, have been published on the Revenue website.

To qualify under the scheme, a business must carry on a trade or trading activities, the profits from which are chargeable to tax under Case I of Schedule D. The trade must be carried on from a business premises that is located in a region subject to restrictions introduced in line with the Government's 'Living with Covid-19 Plan', with the result that the business is required to prohibit or significantly restrict customers from accessing its business premises.

To make a claim under the CRSS, a business must be able to demonstrate that, because of the Covid restrictions, the turnover of the business in the period for which the restrictions are in operation, and for which a claim is made, will be no more than 25% of an amount equal to the average weekly turnover of the business in 2019 (or average weekly turnover in 2020 in the case of a new business) multiplied by the number of weeks in the period for which a claim is made.

An eligible business can make a claim under the CRSS for a cash payment known as an "Advance Credit for Trading Expenses". The cash payment will enable an eligible business to meet costs associated with its business premises, such as rent, insurance and utilities, at a time when, because of the specific terms of the Covid restrictions, it cannot, for a period of time, provide goods or services to customers or can only do so to a limited extent. The cash payment will be equal to 10% of the average weekly turnover of the business in 2019 up to €20,000 and 5% thereafter, subject to a maximum weekly payment of €5,000, for each week that the business is affected by the Covid restrictions. For a business established between 26 December 2019 and 12 October 2020, the claim will be based on the average weekly turnover of the business in the period between the date of commencement and 12 October 2020 (subject to a maximum weekly payment of €5,000).

The amount to which a business is entitled under the CRSS is based on turnover of the business rather than where the business is located, subject to the requirement that the business is located in a geographical region for which Covid restrictions are in operation. All parts of the country are subject to the same level of Covid restrictions under current public health regulations.

Revenue has published detailed statistics on the main COVID-19 subsidy schemes since late March 2020, including the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) and the Covid Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS). These statistics are available on the Revenue website and are updated on a weekly basis at this link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/number-of-taxpayers-and-returns/covid-19-support-schemes-statistics.aspx>.

The county breakdown shows that businesses from all counties are availing of the scheme and less than one quarter of the premises receiving CRSS support are based in Dublin.

Economic Policy

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the status of specific economic interventions that might be needed in the economy if and when Covid-19 is brought under control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17639/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): We are in a period of unprecedented uncertainty. Our current focus is on maintaining existing supports and ensuring that they continue to support those most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Government has introduced a number of schemes to support individuals and businesses who have been impacted by the pandemic. Of the three primary schemes, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment has paid out nearly €7 billion to individuals who have lost their jobs, the two Wage Subsidy Schemes have provided support of over €5 billion to impacted businesses, and the most recent measure, the Covid Restrictions Support Scheme, has paid over €400 million in direct support to firms that have had to close due to public health restrictions.

The public finances can absorb this shock. Letting debt rise on a one-off basis in order to provide support to the economy is the appropriate budgetary response. When the public health situation allows, it is my expectation that economic growth will play the most significant role in boosting taxes and restoring the public finances to a sustainable setting.

Once the pandemic has passed and the temporary measures unwound, we will have a better understanding of the economic and fiscal situation and whether any further more targeted interventions might be needed.

Brexit Supports

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of actions to date to combat the economic impact of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17640/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The new Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and UK is a positive conclusion to the transition period. However, the new agreement still represents a break from previously existing arrangements, and thus a permanent shock to the Irish economy. Therefore, Brexit will still have a negative economic impact on the Irish economy and living standards compared to the previous relationship.

For Irish exporters, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement is positive, compared to a no-deal scenario, as it will provide for zero-tariffs and zero-quota trade for qualifying EU and UK goods. However, it is important to note that the agreement does not completely mitigate against trade frictions in the form of non-tariff barriers, such as customs checks and procedures. So, while tariffs and quotas have been avoided for qualifying goods, non-tariff measures or non-tariff barriers represent a change in trading relations and an increased cost to trade. In addition, disturbances to retail and distribution supply chains could have a direct impact on Irish consumers through reduced competition and higher prices. Further import controls will be introduced by the UK, on a phased basis from October 2021, on certain categories of EU goods, including plant and animal products.

The Government has put in place extensive financial supports for sectors over recent years to assist businesses prepare for and mitigate the impacts of Brexit, including various financial, advisory, and upskilling supports. The Government has also invested heavily in our port infrastructure, as well as working closely with businesses to navigate the new customs arrangements. A range of Government support is available to Irish exporters, including training and grants, to help businesses deal with these changes. It is vital that business prepare for the further changes which will arise over the coming months due to the UK's new import controls.

The successful negotiation of the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland, as part of the Withdrawal Agreement, delivered key economic objectives for Ireland. The Protocol secures

Ireland's place within the Single Market, avoids a hard border on the island, protects the all-island economy, and provides Northern Ireland with unique access to both the British internal market and the EU single market.

In the weeks since the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, a level of trade friction has been evident. Given the phased basis of the new import controls which are being applied by the UK, it will take time for these to feed through to overall exporting activity, and to assess any associated economic impact.

The Government remains focused on protecting our economic and financial interests, and will continue to work to minimise the disruption that Brexit will have on the economy and peoples' livelihoods to the greatest extent possible.

Insurance Industry

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department continues to monitor developments in the insurance industry, with particular reference to the need to provide cover for all types of insurance at viable rates particularly small and medium sized businesses in the aftermath of Covid-19; the status of the development of a new insurance reform action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17641/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government has prioritised the reform of the insurance sector in order to improve the cost and availability of this key financial service, including for businesses. The *Action Plan for Insurance Reform* sets out 66 actions in this regard across several policy areas, including my Department, with 95% due to be completed by the end of 2021. At its most recent meeting, the Cabinet Sub-Group on Insurance Reform, which oversees the implementation of the Action Plan, reflected upon the considerable progress made in the first three months of this year. Achievements include:

- The creation of an *Office to Promote Competition in the Insurance Market* within the Department of Finance.

- The adoption of new *Personal Injuries Guidelines* by the Judicial Council.

- The launch of a public consultation on proposals to reform the *Personal Injuries Assessment Board* .

Priorities for the next three months include: strengthening the laws on perjury, expanding the National Claims Information Database so that it publishes its first report on employer and public liability insurance, and examining the Central Bank's final report on differential pricing so that we can respond accordingly.

A key action of the Government's insurance reform agenda is the establishment of *The Office to Promote Competition in the Insurance Market* within my Department, chaired by Minister of State Fleming. Its role is twofold: to assist in the reduction of insurance costs and the increase of the availability of cover, including for businesses, by promoting competition in the Irish insurance market. It will employ a strategic approach to the promotion of insurance competition, including encouraging transparency and championing the provision of information in relation to the insurance market and available products. Since its establishment, the Office has held a number of meetings with several important stakeholders, including representatives of the insurance industry and business groups as well as representatives of civic society to discuss consumer empowerment, and increasing provision of relevant information. It has also had useful discussions with other state regulators and the Central Bank on promoting competition

issues.

The Action Plan also prioritises working to protect customers during and after the COVID-19 crisis. In our ongoing engagement with the insurance industry, Minister of State Fleming and I have repeatedly raised this issue and emphasised the importance of treating customers honestly, fairly and professionally. This has resulted in a number of insurers announcing forbearance measures and motor insurance rebates for customers. The industry's response to the pandemic will remain a feature of our future engagement, including at the upcoming meetings between Minister of State Fleming and insurers.

I can assure the Deputy that we will continue to engage extensively on this matter and monitor developments in the sector as the Government drives forward the insurance reform agenda. Minister of State Fleming and I look forward to continue working with colleagues and stakeholders to implement further aspects of the Action Plan, with a view to improve both the cost and availability of insurance for all consumers, businesses and community groups.

Economic Policy

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he expects the economy to remain competitive in the short to medium-term notwithstanding the impact of Brexit and the Covid-19 virus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17642/21]

67. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that Ireland remains an attractive location for foreign direct investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17646/21]

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he remains satisfied that economic progress can continue notwithstanding international turbulence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17648/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63, 67 and 69 together.

Approaching the pandemic, the Irish economy was in a healthy position. Strong rates of economic growth had been recorded for a number of years, the labour market was effectively at full employment, while surpluses were recorded on the current account of the balance of payments and the government budget balance. While the negative effects of Covid-19 and Brexit are significant, these factors support the enduring competitiveness of the Irish economy.

While the domestic sector suffered a severe hit last year, the multinational sector has proven resilient demonstrating the competitiveness of Irish exports on world markets. Indeed, the IDA's results for 2020 suggests foreign companies continue to value our FDI strengths. These include our talented and flexible workforce, a track record as a successful home to global business, and a hard-won reputation as a pro-enterprise jurisdiction.

As the global economy is experiencing the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic in a reasonably symmetric way, Ireland's relative competitiveness on the international stage is not expected to be significantly affected. As a result, the recent series of surpluses in Ireland's current account are expected to continue. The 2020 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook ranked Ireland as the 4th most competitive country in the EU and the 12th most competitive country in the world.

In light of the vaccine rollout and the recovering international economy, the outlook for Ireland's economy over the short-to-medium term has improved. For instance, the EU Commis-

sion is forecasting GDP growth of around 3 ½ per cent this year and next. However, there is a considerable degree of uncertainty surrounding the short-term economic outlook. The pace and extent of any economic recovery this year will ultimately depend on many factors, including the speed at which Covid-19 vaccines can be rolled out, the time it takes to suppress the current surge of the virus, as well as the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on the Irish economy.

Equally, as a small open economy Ireland is particularly exposed to external risks, including the international development of the pandemic, the extent of permanent damage to the global economy – so-called “scarring” effects, as well as premature fiscal or monetary tightening. External risks will continue to be monitored carefully by my Department.

My Department will publish updated macroeconomic forecasts with the Stability Programme Update in April.

Mortgage Interest Rates

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which it might be possible to bring mortgage interest rates here into line with those applicable throughout Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17643/21]

71. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether house mortgage costs here will fall into par with those available in other EU member states in the Eurozone or outside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17650/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 71 together.

I am aware that the general level of interest rates on new mortgage lending in Ireland are higher than is the case in many other European countries, though it should also be noted that recent trends indicate that certain mortgage rates have been falling. For example, the interest rates on new fixed rate mortgages (excluding renegotiations) have fallen from 4.11% in December 2014 to 2.65% in January 2021.

However, Irish mortgages can have different characteristics from those offered in other countries making the direct comparison of headline rates not fully consistent. For example, many Irish banks include incentives such as cash back offers which reduce the effective Irish mortgage interest rate. Also Irish mortgages are also generally not subject to upfront fees which are typically charged by banks in some other EU jurisdictions.

Nevertheless, there are a number of important factors which will likely influence the interest rates charged on Irish mortgages such as:-

- credit risk and capital requirements which in Ireland are elevated due to historical loss experience;
- the level of non-performing and restructured loans which is higher in Ireland relative to other European banks;
- there are lower levels of competition in the Irish banking market compared to other jurisdictions.

However, the Central Bank has a range of measures to protect consumers who are taking out a mortgage. The consumer protection framework requires lenders to be transparent and fair in all their dealings with borrowers and that borrowers are protected from the beginning to the

end of the mortgage life cycle; through protections at the initial marketing/advertising stage, in assessing the affordability and suitability of the mortgage and at a time when borrowers may find themselves in financial difficulties. In particular, the Central Bank introduced a number of increased protections for variable rate mortgage holders which came into effect in February 2017. The enhanced measures, which are provided for in an Addendum to the Consumer Protection Code 2012, require lenders to explain to borrowers how their variable interest rates have been set, including in the event of an increase. The measures also improve the level of information required to be provided to borrowers on variable rates about other mortgage products their lender provides which could provide savings for the borrower and signpost the borrower to the CCPC's mortgage switching tool.

The Central Bank also introduced additional changes to the Consumer Protection Code in January 2019 to help consumers make savings on their mortgage repayments, provide additional protections to consumers who are eligible to switch, and facilitate mortgage switching through enhancing the transparency of the mortgage framework. Consumers can reduce average pricing in the mortgage market by availing of switching options to ensure that recent and potential future price reductions pass through to the greatest number of customers possible. Indeed the Central Bank advises that a recent study by it estimated that three in every five 'eligible' mortgages for principal dwelling homes stand to save over €1,000 within the first year if they switch and €10,000 over the remaining term.

Ultimately, however, the price lenders charge for their loans is a commercial matter for individual lenders. As Minister for Finance I cannot determine the lending policies of individual banks including the interest rates they charge for mortgages and other loans. Nevertheless, I will continue to work with the Central Bank and also engage with lenders to encourage, within a framework which seeks to maintain overall financial stability, greater benefits for borrowers.

Financial Services Sector

65. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he continues to monitor activities in financial circles post-Brexit with a view to ensuring that financial services here are not in any way disadvantaged as a result of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17644/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has been participating in whole of Government preparations for Brexit since before the UK referendum in 2016 and, in line with the Government's overall approach, this work intensified during 2020 ahead of the end of the transition period.

My Department has been working closely with the Central Bank of Ireland and the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), through the Financial Stability Group, and through the Brexit Contact Group, to limit the impact of key identified risks in the Irish financial system and review progress on readiness planning. This work and engagement has sought to ensure that the sector is adequately prepared, and that financial services firms and market participants have contingency plans in place to cope with the possible effects of Brexit, with as little disruption for consumers, investors and markets as possible. On the basis of its work and engagement across the sector, the Central Bank has been able to assure me that the financial services sector is well prepared and resilient enough to manage the changes associated with Brexit.

Since the end of the transition period, my Department, the Central Bank of Ireland and the NTMA have been monitoring developments and activities in the financial sector and this monitoring will continue in accordance with their respective responsibilities.

The Deputy may be aware of the recent successful migration of Irish securities settlement, from the UK CREST system to Euroclear Bank Belgium. The UK decision to leave the EU precipitated the need to migrate the Irish system to an EU entity. This migration ensures that Ireland remains well connected into the heart of the EU's capital markets - with the stable investment and legislative environment that comes with that access and activity.

In addition to the financial services provisions included in the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, both the EU and the UK agreed to establish a Memorandum of Understanding on structured regulatory cooperation on financial services. This is currently being progressed and it is a welcome measure which will support continued cooperation between the EU and UK in financial services.

The nature, scale and complexity of Ireland's international financial services sector will change in a number of ways as a result of the financial services firms relocating from the UK as a result of Brexit and those looking to set up operations in the EU for the first time. The industry in Ireland has become broader and more diverse with more firms carrying out a greater range of regulated activities than at any time.

The full impact of Brexit for Ireland's international financial services sector may not materialise for some years. At present, firms are establishing the foundations of a new or significantly expanded presence in Ireland, creating a platform for future growth opportunities in all sectors: insurance, banking, and investment management.

A number of government strategies have sought to grow the international financial services sector over the last number of decades, and these strategies were in place long before Brexit. The latest iteration of these strategies is '*Ireland for Finance*', the strategy for the development of Ireland's international financial services sector to 2025'.

The Government and various state agencies continue to implement that Strategy, (and indeed industry lead on some appropriate action measures under the annual action plans) and are working to fully capture any opportunities for inward investment that emerge through promoting Ireland's strengths as a leading financial services centre.

Economic Policy

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the economic fundamentals remain stable here notwithstanding the impact of Brexit and Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17645/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Prior to the pandemic Irish economic fundamentals were very strong, with robust growth, a labour market close to full employment, and dual surpluses in the current account of the balance of payments and the public finances. The outbreak of the pandemic turned the economy on its head in the space of a few weeks, with the introduction of Covid-19 restrictions resulting in a sharp contraction in domestic economic activity last year. However, in keeping with the pattern seen in other countries, the economy rebounded as restrictions were eased.

My Department, along with the ESRI, conducted an analysis of the sectoral overlap between the Covid-19 and Brexit shocks to help us plan accordingly. The key finding of the analysis is that there is limited overlap of the sectors exposed to the different shocks. No sector was found to be severely affected by both shocks. While the analysis was based on the assumption of a 'disorderly' Brexit, this general conclusion is still applicable today. Nevertheless, there still remains considerable uncertainty surrounding the economic outlook as it will depend on many

factors, including the speed at which Covid-19 vaccines can be rolled out which is itself a function of supply.

As the vaccine programme steps up throughout the second quarter this year and beyond, Covid related restrictions will gradually be eased and a sustained economic recovery can then take hold in the second half of the year. The recovery in the domestic economy should be supported by the release of pent-up demand financed by the unwinding of historically high levels of household savings.

While the effects of Covid-19 have been severe, our resilience and strength comes from being an economy that remains open to investment and facilitates trade across our borders. This has proven to be the fundamental strength of the Irish economy over decades and is still the case today.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 63.

Tax Code

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that taxation matters remain within the competence of national governments throughout the European Union and that no decisions are taken to jeopardise same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17647/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware tax sovereignty is an important issue for Ireland.

Ireland believes that the current unanimity based voting procedure which applies among EU Member States is the most appropriate voting system in the area of taxation. Indeed, over the last 4 years, over 20 taxation initiatives have been agreed by Member States through this voting process. This is an average of one initiative being agreed every 3 months. This includes important Directives on VAT, administrative co-operation, Anti-Tax-Avoidance and also the EU list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions.

Given this impressive record of achieving agreement at EU level on tax issues, I do not see the need to move away from the requirement for unanimity, which has worked so well to date. For example, most recently, the seventh iteration of the Directive on Administrative Cooperation (DAC7) to introduce new exchange of information provisions for digital platforms was only proposed by the Commission last July, agreed among Member States in December, and was adopted on March 22.

Ireland's tax sovereignty is an important issue for Irish citizens. In the run up to the Lisbon Treaty referendum, EU leaders made a public political commitment confirming that the Treaty did not impinge on Member States' tax sovereignty, and I believe that this commitment was a significant factor in the people's decision to accept the Treaty.

The Programme for Government affirms that taxation is a national competence. Ireland has been consistently clear that unanimity is the appropriate voting system for any tax proposals at EU level, and I am confident that this will remain the case.

Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 63.

House Prices

1 April 2021

70. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance if he will take action to discourage house price increases that currently make it difficult or impossible for first time house buyers to build or acquire a home of their own; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17649/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance continues to monitor all aspects of the housing market, including the rate of property price inflation. As of January 2021, annual property price inflation stood at 2.6 per cent.

The Government's primary response to mitigating residential price inflation is to increase supply. I am encouraged by the stability in new dwelling completions last year in spite of the challenges of the pandemic. According to the Central Statistics Office, there were 20,676 residential units completed in 2020, just 1.9 per cent lower than the 21,087 new units completed in 2019.

Of course, further progress is required and that is why the addition of new and affordable homes continues to be supported through Government action. To this end, in Budget 2021, I amended the Stamp Duty Residential Development Refund Scheme to include operations commenced by 31 December 2022 and extended the time allowed between commencement and completion of a qualifying project by six months to two-and-a-half years. This will encourage the development of residential properties on non-residential land. The provision of affordable homes was also supported through the Budget with an allocation of €50 million to the Serviced Sites Fund to provide infrastructure to support the delivery of homes to purchase at discounted prices.

The Government also continues to support first-time buyers. In Budget 2021, I extended the July Stimulus measures of the Help-to-Buy scheme to the end of 2021, which will provide further support to first-time buyers with the deposit they need to buy or build a new house or apartment. First-time buyers who are unable to secure a commercial bank loan can also avail of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. This is a Government-backed mortgage on competitive terms for first-time-buyers nationwide to purchase a new or second-hand home or to self-build.

In addition to the measures taken at budget-time, my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, recently published the Land Development Agency Bill 2021. The Bill establishes the Land Development Agency (LDA) on a statutory basis and sets out the core goals of the LDA to undertake strategic land assembly and utilise state lands to build affordable homes.

All of these measures testify to the need to take a multi-faceted approach to increase the supply of new housing and I will continue to work closely with my Government colleagues to ensure this is delivered.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 64.

Mortgage Lending

72. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance if he will request the Central Bank to enable applicants for mortgages to use their time in rented accommodation as a reference for the ability to service a mortgage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17651/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland, as part of its independent mandate to preserve and protect financial stability in Ireland, has statutory

responsibility for the regulation of mortgage lending by banks and other regulated entities.

In line with this mandate, the Central Bank introduced macroprudential measures for residential mortgage lending in February 2015. The objective of these mortgage measures is to increase the resilience of the banking sector and households and to reduce the risk of credit-house price spirals from developing. The mortgage measures apply certain loan-to-value (LTV) and loan-to-income (LTI) restrictions to residential mortgage lending by financial institutions regulated by the Central Bank. For primary dwelling mortgages, the LTI limit is 3.5 times the borrower's income. For first-time buyers (FTBs), the LTV limit is 90% of the value of the residential property and for second and subsequent buyers the LTV is 80% of the value of the residential property. However, lenders have a limited flexibility at their own discretion to provide to provide some mortgage lending in excess of these thresholds.

While regulated lenders must comply with the various rules within the macroprudential and consumer protection frameworks, the extension of credit by lenders to potential customers is a commercial decision for the lender themselves, and each lender will have its own individual credit lending policies. Before providing a mortgage, a lender is required to undertake thorough creditworthiness assessments and satisfy itself about the ability of the borrower to repay the mortgage. This assessment must take into account the individual circumstances of the borrower, including personal circumstances and financial situation. In this context lenders can and do take into account rental payments when making their affordability assessment as part of regular underwriting process to assess borrowers' ability to repay a mortgage.

However, the significant differences between the nature of a rental contract and a mortgage contract to purchase a home should also be borne in mind. A house purchase and associated mortgage contract usually has a more long term character than a rental contract and so will leave the house purchaser/mortgage borrower more exposed to future shocks to incomes, house prices and interest rates in for a longer period of time. Also the ability to make regular repayments – evidenced through rental payments – does not substitute or remove the need for the borrower to have a down payment deposit to purchase a house for a house. Such a down payment provides the homeowner and borrower with an important prudent level of initial equity in the house and so can help households to absorb some fall in house prices before the borrower could fall into negative equity.

Economic Policy

73. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he expects, along with his EU colleagues, to design a benign lending system to assist economic recovery and job retention in the aftermath of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17652/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, on 21st July 2020, Heads of State and Government reached agreement on the €1.074 trillion Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and €750 billion recovery plan “Next Generation EU” (NGEU), totalling €1.82 trillion. The centrepiece of the NGEU is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, made up of €312.5 billion in grants and €360 billion in loans.

In order to avail of funding under the grants element of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, all Member States must submit a National Recovery and Resilience Plan by 30 April 2021.

Member States may also seek a loan under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, however, details on how the loan facility will operate are not available yet.

Tax Data

74. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of extending the sugar sweetened drinks tax to beverages containing milk fats with more than 119 milligrams of calcium per 100 millilitres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17690/21]

75. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from the sugar sweetened drinks tax since its inception in 2018 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17691/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 75 together.

I am advised by Revenue that the yield from Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax (SSDT) in 2018 and 2019 is published on the Revenue website at the following link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/excise/net-receipts-by-commodity.pdf>

The provisional receipts for 2020 and the first three months of 2021 are shown in the table below.

Year	€m
2020	31.3
2021 (3 Months)	5.9

In relation to Question 17690/21, tax return information available to Revenue does not include data on products not currently within the scope of the SSDT. Therefore there is no basis to estimate the yield from the extension proposed by the Deputy

Tax Data

76. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the annual increases in the retail price of the most popular price category for a 20-pack of cigarettes since 2011; the portion of the increase related to taxes; the portion of the increase due to price rises by the tobacco industry in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17692/21]

77. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised annually if tobacco taxation were to be increased annually on a pro-rata basis in order that all packs of 20 cigarettes cost at least €20 by 2025; the estimated revenue that would be raised annually if an equivalent annual tobacco tax on roll-your-own cigarettes was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17693/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 77 together.

I am advised by Revenue that the annual increases in the retail price of the most popular price category (MPPC) for a 20 pack of cigarettes since 2011 are shown in the table below, together with the portions related to tax increases and trade increases.

Year	MPPC	Tax	Trade	Total	MPPC
-	at 1 January	Increase	Increase	Increase	at 31 December
-	€	€	€	€	€

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Year	MPPC	Tax	Trade	Total	MPPC
2011	8.55	0.25	0.10	0.35	8.90
2012	8.90	0.28	0.12	0.40	9.30
2013	9.30	0.10	0.10	0.20	9.50
2014	9.50	0.40	0.10	0.50	10.00
2015	10.00	0.50	0.00	0.50	10.50
2016	10.50	0.50	0.30	0.80	11.30
2017	11.30	0.50	0.20	0.70	12.00
2018	12.00	0.50	0.20	0.70	12.70
2019	12.70	0.50	0.30	0.80	13.50
2020	13.50	0.30*	0.20	0.50	14.00
2021	14.00	0.20**	0.00	0.20	14.20***

*The tax increase in 2020 of €0.30 represents an increase of €0.50 in excise in October 2020 and €0.20 reduction in VAT from 23% to 21% on 1 Sep 2020.

**The tax increase in 2021 was €0.20 for the increase in VAT to 23% on 1 March 2021.

***The latest price for the MPPC at 31 March 2021 is €14.20.

In relation to Question 17693/21, I am advised that given the range of prices of cigarette packs in the market, it is not possible from the available information to estimate the yield from a minimum €20 charge on all 20 packs.

However, Revenue's Ready Reckoner at link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>

shows a wide range of detailed information, including on page 25 estimates for the yield from changes in duties on cigarettes (these estimates assume pro-rata increases in other tobacco products).

The Ready Reckoner can be used to estimate the yield from increasing the tax on a pack of 20 cigarettes to €20 from the current MPPC. The timing of the yield would depend on the timing of the price changes chosen over the period to 2025.

Tobacco Control Measures

78. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the funding provided to the Revenue Commissioners for 2020 and 2021 to combat tobacco smuggling; if the Revenue Commissioners are developing a dedicated anti-smuggling strategy; if the Covid-19 pandemic has had any impact on the Revenue Commissioners combatting smuggling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17694/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue is a fully integrated tax and customs administration and, as a result, I am advised that it is not possible to disaggregate the resources deployed, or funding dedicated, at any given time to combat tobacco smuggling. Revenue currently has approximately 2,000 staff engaged on activities that are dedicated to targeting and confronting non-compliance. These front-line activities include anti-smuggling and anti-evasion, investigation and prosecution, audit, assurance checks, anti avoidance, returns compliance and debt collection. Resources allocated to these different aspects of enforcement and compliance work are continuously adjusted in response to changes in the level of risk in

different sectors.

Revenue takes an integrated approach to combatting all forms of illegal trade and shadow economy activity, including combatting the illicit tobacco trade. I am advised by Revenue that, in its experience, those involved in the illicit tobacco trade do not necessarily confine themselves to a particular commodity type. As a result, Revenue implements an integrated approach to all forms of illegal trade as distinct from a product or commodity specific focus.

Revenue's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 includes a focus and commitment to confronting non-compliance, which includes tobacco smuggling. This commitment is given operational priority each year in divisional business plans and operational plans that reflect the particular nuances of some illegal trades and the modus operandi of those involved. Revenue's actions under these operational plans are designed to maximise coordination Revenue-wide and deliver the best impact for the effort involved.

I am advised by Revenue that it implements a range of measures to identify and target the smuggling, supply or sale of illicit tobacco products, with a view to disrupting the supply chain, seizing the products and, where possible, prosecuting those involved. Revenue develops and shares intelligence on a national, EU and international basis, uses analytics and detection technologies and ensures the optimum deployment of resources on a risk-focused basis.

The smuggling of tobacco products has a transnational and cross border dimension and, in addition to Revenue's ongoing cooperation with An Garda Síochána in this area, I am advised that Revenue also works closely with its counterparts in other jurisdictions including colleagues in Northern Ireland through the Cross Border Joint Agency Task Force (JATF), and international bodies including OLAF (the EU's anti-fraud agency), Europol and the World Customs Organisation.

Finally, I am advised that Revenue's activities aimed at combatting tobacco smuggling continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This work yielded excellent results and in 2020 Revenue seized 48.1 million illicit cigarettes and approximately 7,100kgs of illicit tobacco.

Tax Data

79. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount of revenue that would be raised annually if an excise tax of €0.06 per ml of electronic cigarette liquid was applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17697/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Tax return information available to Revenue does not include data on products that are not currently within the scope of tobacco taxation or other Excise charges. Therefore, there is no basis for Revenue to estimate the yield from the Deputy's proposal.

Cycle to Work Scheme

80. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications under the cycle to work scheme in 2020 and to date in 2021; the cost of the scheme in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17703/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 118(5G) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the cycle to work scheme. This scheme provides an exemption from benefit-in-kind where an employer purchases a bicycle and associated safety equipment

up to a maximum of €1,250 (and €1,500 in respect of pedelecs) for an employee to use, in whole or in part, to travel to work. Safety equipment includes helmets, lights, bells, mirrors and locks but does not include child seats or trailers.

The cycle to work scheme operates on a self-administration basis, and relief is automatically available provided an employer is satisfied that the conditions of their particular scheme meet the requirements of the legislation. There is no requirement for an employer to notify Revenue of the operation of the scheme. This approach was taken with the deliberate intention of keeping the scheme simple and reducing administration on the part of employers.

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

Tax expenditure reports prepared by my Department have estimated the cost in the full years referenced at €4 million but have been clear that this figure was an estimate as separate returns are not required for the same reasons as mentioned above.

Cycle to Work Scheme

81. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance his views on expanding the reach of the bike-to-work scheme beyond PAYE workers to all persons, that is, employers, sole traders, students, jobseekers, disabled, unpaid home work and the retired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17704/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 118(5G) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997) provides for the Cycle to Work scheme. This scheme provides an exemption from benefit-in-kind (BIK) where an employer purchases a bicycle and associated safety equipment for an employee.

Under section 118B TCA 1997 an employer and employee may also enter into a salary sacrifice arrangement under which the employee agrees to sacrifice part of his or her salary, in exchange for a bicycle and related safety equipment.

Where a bicycle or safety equipment is purchased under the Cycle to Work scheme or through a salary sacrifice arrangement certain conditions must be met, for example:

- The exemption applies to the first €1,250 of expenditure incurred by the employer in obtaining a bicycle and related safety equipment. This exemption limit is increased to €1,500 for pedelecs or ebikes and related safety equipment. Employers may incur costs in excess of these limits, but any such excess will not qualify for the exemption and will be liable to tax. A salary sacrifice arrangement is subject to the same monetary limits.

- The bicycle and related safety equipment must be new and must be purchased by the employer.

- The bicycle and related safety equipment must be used by the employee or director mainly for the whole or part of their journey to or from work.

- An employee or director can only avail of the Cycle to Work scheme once in any 4 year period. A salary sacrifice arrangement is subject to the same time limits and any salary sacrifice arrangement entered into must be completed within a 12 month period.

The Cycle to Work scheme is only applicable where the bicycle and safety equipment is provided by an employer to either a director or someone in its employment. Thus, where an employer-employee relationship does not exist, for example, in the case of self-employed in-

dividuals, students, retired individuals, job seekers or those in unpaid work, such individuals can't qualify for the scheme. Likewise, salary sacrifice arrangements may only be entered into between an employer and a director or employee.

Further guidance regarding the Cycle to Work scheme and salary sacrifice arrangements can be found on Revenue's website.

Tax Data

82. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of category A vehicles that were charged with the nitrogen dioxide emissions levy in 2020 and to date in 2021; the revenue raised each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17710/21]

83. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised if the current nitrogen dioxide levy was doubled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17712/21]

84. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised annually if the current nitrogen dioxide levy was applied to both category A and B vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17714/21]

85. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised annually if the current nitrogen dioxide levy was doubled and extended to both category A and B vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17716/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 to 85, inclusive, together.

In relation to Question 17710/21, I am informed by Revenue that the number of category A vehicles that a Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) emissions charge was applied to in 2020 and in January and February 2021 is provided in the table below.

Vehicle Type	year	No	Revenue raised€ millions	Total - new and used€ millions
New	2021*	33,403	4.82	8.15
Used	2021*	11,221	3.33	
New	2020	80,267	12.00	32.50
Used	2020	74,705	20.50	

*January and February only.

In relation to Question 17712/21, if the charge was doubled (to €10 on the first 40mg, €30 on the subsequent 40mg, and the remainder charged at €50 per mg, subject to a maximum charge of €9,700 on diesel vehicles and with all others incurring a maximum charge of €1,200), the yield is estimated to be in the region of €65 million based on 2020 vehicle sales and assuming no behavioural change arising from the increase.

Regarding Questions 17714/21 and 17716/21, I am informed by Revenue that based on 2020 sales figures for both category A and category B vehicles, the revenue that would be raised annually if the current NOx emissions charge was applied to both categories is estimated to be in the region of €60 million. If the NOx emissions charge was doubled, the estimated yield would be in the region of €120 million across both category A and B vehicles.

This estimate assumes no behavioural change in response to the potential large increase in

the overall Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) charge that would apply to category B vehicles, as a significant proportion would incur the maximum NOx charge of €4,850.

Insurance Industry

86. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that insurers have refused to provide flood risk cover even in situations in which no flooding has ever occurred; if his Department or the regulator has protocols in relation to transparency and proportionality in such situations; and if such cases fall within the remit of the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman. [17789/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): AT the outset, it is important that I remind the Deputy of the fact that the provision of insurance is a commercial matter for insurance companies, which is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. Consequently, neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance (Solvency II Directive).

Having said that, I am conscious of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses. Current government policy in relation to increasing flood insurance coverage is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to managing flooding problems. To achieve this aim there is a focus on:

- Investing almost €1 billion in flood relief measures over the lifetime of the National Development Plan 2018-2027;

- Implementation of flood relief management plans by the Office of Public Works (OPW), and;

- Maintaining channels of communication between the OPW and the insurance industry, in order to reach a better understanding about the provision of flood cover in affected areas.

The above approach is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and industry representatives Insurance Ireland, who meet on a quarterly basis to help implement this initiative. This provides for the exchange of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes which should in turn provide a basis for the increased provision of flood insurance in these areas.

I acknowledge that while there has been an overall increase in the provision of flood insurance between 2015 and 2020, some householders are still experiencing difficulties. This is particularly the case for households in areas with demountable flood defences. Indeed, this is one of the key themes that arose from my Department's Public Consultation on Climate Change and Insurance. My officials engage with both Insurance Ireland, the OPW and other stakeholders regarding flood defence schemes and how the levels of insurance cover might be improved in areas where flood defence works have been completed. This is a difficult issue, however the Deputy should be assured that Minister of State Fleming and I will also continue to engage on all aspects of insurance reform, including flood insurance issues, and that every effort is being made to encourage a responsive approach from the insurance industry. As recent as last month Minister of State Fleming participated in a meeting between Insurance Ireland and OPW Minister of State Donovan on the issue.

Furthermore, as the Deputy may be aware, the Central Bank of Ireland's Consumer Protec-

tion Code states that a regulated entity must ensure that in all its dealings with customer it acts honestly, fairly and professionally in the best interests of its customers and the integrity of the market. In the event that an insurance undertaking refuses to quote a consumer for property insurance, the Consumer Protection Code states that an insurer must inform the consumer of its refusal and its reasons for refusing cover.

Finally, individuals who feel they have been unfairly treated by an Insurance or Financial Services Provider can make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman. I would also note that Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance cover, including flood insurance. This can be accessed at: feedback@insuranceireland.eu.

EU Funding

87. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance if Ireland will be applying for loans under the EU recovery and resilience facility; if so, the amount that will be applied for; the potential interest rate and terms in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17795/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Recovery and Resilience Facility makes provision for lending by the European Commission to Member States.

Member States must submit an application for a loan to the European Commission before 31 August 2023 (for approval by the European Commission prior to 31 December 2023). No information of the loan terms and conditions is available at this stage.

Consideration of whether Ireland should seek to avail of the loan element will take place when the relevant information on loans becomes available from the European Commission.

EU Funding

88. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance the gross liability for Ireland in relation to the EU recovery and resilience facility; the amount it varies from €18.7 billion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17796/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, on 21st July 2020, Heads of State and Government reached agreement on the €1.074 trillion Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and €750 billion recovery plan “Next Generation EU” (NGEU), totalling €1.82 trillion. The centrepiece of the NGEU is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, made up of €312.5 billion in grants and €360 billion in loans.

In order to avail of funding under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, all Member States must submit a National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Ireland’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan must be submitted to the European Commission by 30 April 2021 and will set out a package of both reforms and public investment projects which will be implemented by 2026. The Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, working with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Finance and Enterprise, Trade & Employment, are responsible for the preparation and coordination of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Reforms and Investments attracting funding under the NRRP will be paid on a performance basis through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, in other words, when agreed milestones and targets are achieved, drawdown of funding can happen.

In May 2020, the European Commission produced a needs assessment underpinning the proposed NGEU. In this needs assessment the European Commission estimated that Ireland's contributions to the NGEU package would be in the region of approximately €18.7 billion over the next thirty years. However, this estimate was inaccurate for a number of reasons and was intended only as an illustrative example of what might be and was not based on real budget figures.

At this time of crisis, the Covid recovery funds are needed now, and will be received by Member States up to 2026, but will be paid back over 30+ years. These repayments are not expected to begin for a number of years yet, and the contribution Ireland will make has yet to be determined and will depend on our share of the overall EU budget over the course of those repayments. They will also depend on what new Own Resources are agreed at EU level. It is not possible to give an accurate overall figure at this time.

EU Funding

89. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Finance the amount in grants Ireland will receive from the EU recovery and resilience facility; if the figure of 0.989 or 186 billion on Annex IV is accurate at time of passing the regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17797/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, on 21st July 2020, Heads of State and Government reached agreement on the €1.074 trillion Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and €750 billion recovery plan "Next Generation EU" (NGEU), totalling €1.82 trillion. The centrepiece of the NGEU is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, made up of €312.5 billion in grants and €360 billion in loans.

Under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Ireland's current grant allocation is €914.6 million (current prices). Under the Recovery and Resilience Facility regulation, 30% of the total grant element will be kept on hold until 2023, to then be disbursed to Member States using a revised allocation methodology based on actual GDP output. Latest Commission estimates suggest that this additional allocation to Ireland may be approx. €74.6 million (current prices), but this figure will not be confirmed until 2022.

EU Regulations

90. Deputy Richard Bruton asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the new EU environment taxonomy will impact on future regulation of the financial sector and projects put forward for funding under green bond funding. [17868/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the past number of years, and in particular following the launch of the European Commission's Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth in March 2018, we have witnessed significant progress at EU level in the area of sustainable finance, with Ireland engaging constructively on the related legislative proposals. This includes agreement on the Taxonomy Regulation in June 2020, which together with the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation, will be the cornerstone of the EU's sustainable finance regulatory architecture.

In particular, the application of the Taxonomy Regulation, which establishes a harmonised classification system for environmentally sustainable activities, will have a significant role in supporting the mobilisation of capital towards sustainable investments. Through providing

common definitions to companies, investors and policymakers on what constitutes an environmentally sustainable economic activity, it can create security for investors and protect private investors from greenwashing. Additionally, it can assist companies in planning for the low-carbon transition.

The EU taxonomy will be an important driver in supporting implementation of the Green Deal, which will simultaneously support the development of the sustainable finance sector. As the Deputy will be aware, the Irish Government has long recognised the importance of sustainable finance as well as its associated opportunities. Reflecting this, sustainable finance is a horizontal priority within the Government's strategy for the further development of the international financial services sector, 'Ireland for Finance'. The strategy strives to make Ireland a true leader in the field of sustainable finance, in particular through further enhancing and deepening the base of expertise and activity in sustainable finance. It is important that the financial sector is prepared for the new regulatory regime, and in this vein, the Ireland for Finance Action Plan 2020 contained an action focussed on the development and delivery of educational programmes on sustainable finance, including on the EU taxonomy. Through Action 32: *Deliver training programmes in sustainable finance and responsible investment supported by the Sustainable Finance Skillnet*, Action Plan 2021 continues this focus on skills development.

Green bonds also play an increasingly important role in financing assets needed for the low-carbon transition. However, currently there is no uniform green bond standard within the EU. Establishing such a standard was a recommendation in the final report of the Commission High-Level Expert Group on sustainable finance. It was then included as an action in the 2018 Commission Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth. A legislative proposal is expected to be delivered later in 2021.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

91. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to remove the present €5,000 weekly cap on payments under the Covid restriction support scheme due to the reality that many larger hotels will only at the best case scenario do very limited trade in 2021 and therefore have sustained significant losses over 2019 and 2020 in view of the continuing lockdown of the economy and the effect Covid-19 is having on the tourist economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17887/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Covid Restrictions Support Scheme (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. The support is available to companies, self-employed individuals and partnerships who carry on a trade or trading activities, the profits from which are chargeable to tax under Case I of Schedule D, from a business premises located in a region subject to restrictions introduced in line with the Living with Covid-19 Plan. The details of the scheme are set out in Finance Act 2020 and guidelines on the operation of the scheme, including the eligibility criteria, are available on the Revenue website

The CRSS applies to businesses carrying on trading activities from a business premises located in a region subject to restrictions, which requires the business to prohibit or considerably restrict customers from accessing their business premises and as a result, is operating at less than 25% of turnover in 2019.

The €5,000 cap is designed to ensure that, while any size business may access the scheme, the main beneficiaries of CRSS are SMEs and high turnover/low fixed costs businesses do not

disproportionately benefit.

The CRSS has provided substantial support for over 21,600 eligible businesses. Up to 29 March, CRSS payments of €410m have been made to businesses since the inception of the Scheme, approximately €260m of which has been paid in the first quarter of 2021. The hospitality and tourism sector (bars, cafes, restaurants, hotels and other accommodation providers) has received approximately €240m in CRSS payments since last October and €105 million of these payments have been made by Revenue in the first quarter of 2021.

The CRSS is an additional measure for businesses in a region subject to significant Covid-19 restrictions, and supplements other Covid-related supports such as the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) and the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP).

There are no plans to change the eligibility criteria for the CRSS or the €5,000 cap. The purpose of the CRSS is to provide additional support to the businesses who have had to close temporarily or significantly restrict access to their premises as a direct result of public health Regulations.

The Government will continue to assess the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy and I will continue to work with Ministerial colleagues to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to mitigate these effects.

I have confirmed that the CRSS and EWSS will be extended until June 2021, and as I have outlined previously, consideration is being given to the fact that continued support could be necessary out to the end of 2021 to help maintain viable businesses and employment and to provide businesses with certainty to the maximum extent possible. Decisions on the form of such support will take account of emerging circumstances and economic conditions as they become clearer.

Departmental Staff

92. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17909/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that the table below details the gender breakdown by Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for the grades of Assistant Secretary, Director, Principal Officer, Assistant Principal Officer, Administrative Officer, and Higher Executive Officer in my Department at end-March 2021:

Summary Grade	Female	Male
Assistant Secretary	1.00	6.00
Director		1.00
Principal Officer	8.30	17.00
Assistant Principal Officer	34.00	47.80
Administrative Officer	37.30	49.00
Higher Executive Officer	9.23	13.00
Sub Total	89.83	133.80

Banking Sector

93. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have held meet-

ings with a bank (details supplied) in relation to the recent announcement of 88 branch closures; if so, when these meetings occurred; and if he asked for and received assurances from the bank that there is a viable post office within 500 metres of a branch the bank plans to close as mentioned in his response to the bank announcement. [17940/21]

96. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request the regulator of the Central Bank to defer the closure of bank branches (details supplied) for the duration of Covid-19; if he will request that the bank provide a financial and impact statement for the branches earmarked for closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18013/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 96 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, as Minister for Finance, I have no role in the commercial decisions made by any bank in the State. This includes banks in which the State has a shareholding.

Decisions in this regard, including the management of branch networks, 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 Bank of Ireland Relationship Framework can be found at the following link:

www.gov.ie/en/publication/fc36e6-bank-of-ireland-relationship-framework-march-2012/ .

Notwithstanding this, Bank of Ireland provided me with a briefing in advance which was consistent with its announcement on the matter on 1st March.

Some of the key points contained in the announcement were:

- The decision to close these branches is in response to changing customer behaviour with a significant acceleration in digital banking.

- The branches closing are predominately self-service locations which do not offer a counter service.

- To preserve local access to physical banking for those who want it, the bank has agreed a new partnership with An Post which will allow personal and business customers use their local post office for a range of banking services – including to withdraw cash and make cash and cheque lodgements – at no additional cost. The closing Bank of Ireland branches all have a post office within, on average, less than 500 meters.

- The bank confirmed that the new partnership with An Post will be available to all Bank of Ireland customers before any branch closes.

- Furthermore, the bank stated that there will be no closures for six months.

On staff, the bank commented that it will be working closely with all colleagues at these branches and will be setting out a range of options which include relocating to a different branch, moving to a new role in the bank, or voluntary redundancy for those who choose it.

The full Bank of Ireland announcement on the matter can be found at the following link:

www.bankofireland.com/about-bank-of-ireland/press-releases/2021/bank-of-ireland-announces-significant-changes-to-branch-network-and-local-banking-services/.

Departmental Data

94. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17972/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by my officials that the Department of Finance has shared the following datasets containing personal data with the Department of Health:

Data Shared	Data is shared with:	Reason for sharing of data
Names, email address and telephone numbers of Department of Finance staff based in the Miesian Plaza office premises	Directly with the Department of Health's Facilities Unit, who are the lead tenant of the office premises	Health and Safety – Department of Health are the lead tenant for Miesian Plaza – shared under Article 6 (1)(c) of the General Data Protection Regulation
Ministerial Representations	Where appropriate, Representations that relate to Department of Health policy areas are forwarded to the Department of Health Ministers Office	Shared under section 40 of the Data Protection Act 2018

With regard to data management and data processing, my Department has internal Records Management policies and electronic systems in place to ensure good governance in records management, and we are mindful of our obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018.

General Data Protection Regulation

95. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17990/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since 2018, my Department has not received any complaints from a member of the public with regard to GDPR and data information requests, neither directly to the Data Protection Officer or the Customer Services Officer.

All data information requests, also known as Subject Access Requests, have been accepted and fully processed as follows:

Year	Data Information Requests received(Subject Access Requests)
2018	0
2019	4
2020	2
2021 to date	0

My Department has published information on our website advising members of the public as to the process of making a 'Subject Access Request' under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as a privacy notice which includes information about data subject rights and access to personal data, as well as contact details for our Data Protection Officer.

Tax Reliefs

97. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the tax relief for working from home can be claimed when there are multiple persons in a household working from home but the bills are only in one person's name yet they all contribute as a family or in cases in which the person who is claiming the tax relief does not have the household bills in their name; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18018/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Where e-workers incur certain extra expenditure in the performance of their duties of employment remotely or from home, such as additional heating and electricity costs, there is a Revenue administrative practice in place that allows an employer to make payments up to €3.20 per day to such employees, subject to certain conditions, without deducting PAYE, PRSI, or USC. Revenue have confirmed that PAYE workers using their primary residence as a workplace during Covid-19 restrictions qualify as e-workers for the purposes of this practice.

In circumstances where an employer does not pay €3.20 per day to an e-worker, or indeed where an employee incurs costs in excess of the €3.20 per day paid by the employer, I am advised that the employees concerned retain their statutory right to claim a deduction under section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in respect of actual vouched expenses they have incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment. PAYE employees are entitled to claim costs such as additional electricity, heat and broadband in respect of the number of days spent working from home, apportioned on the basis of business and private use.

If an expense is shared between two or more people, the allowable cost being 10% of electricity and heat and 30% of broadband, can be apportioned based on the amount paid by each individual. To claim an allowable e-working expense, the employee must have incurred the cost and it is the responsibility of the employee to retain proof of payment.

PAYE workers can claim e-working expenses by completing an Income Tax return at year end. Revenue advise that the simplest way for taxpayers to claim their e-working expenses and any other tax credit entitlements is by logging into the myAccount facility on the Revenue website.

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

Departmental Data

98. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a list will be provided of approved travel agencies for all public servant trips that are booked abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17739/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): My colleague the Minister for Transport and the Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) have primary responsibility for regulation and licensing of the travel trade in Ireland.

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP), an office within my Department, engages

with CAR and ensures that appropriate licensing requirements are included in its central arrangements for travel agency services.

Having regard to the above, OGP established a Framework Contract for the Provision of Travel Management and Ancillary Services in August 2017. This was awarded to Club Travel HRG Ireland Ltd. The Framework Contract is available to all public sector bodies to use. It is Government policy that public bodies, where possible, should make use of central arrangements or provide a value for money justification for not doing so.

Departmental Correspondence

99. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a letter (details supplied) referred to the Office of Public Works for attention and reply will be replied to; the reason for the delay in this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17847/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan) : Due to restrictions on movement between units and buildings and the current regime of home working, delivery of physical post to units has not always been entirely reliable during lockdown. I regret to say that that the letter referred to has not been received by the appropriate staff at Dublin Castle. The Deputy may wish to inform his correspondent that the letter should be emailed to:

hugh.bonar@opw.ie

or posted to:

Hugh Bonar

National Historic Properties

Dublin Castle Dame Street Dublin 2.

D02 R866

State Claims Agency

100. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if dossiers similar to that exposed in a programme (details supplied) have been compiled and held by the State Claims Agency on any other person or groups of persons involved in legal actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17864/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): While I acknowledge the Deputy's question, I wish to advise that questions relating to the State Claims Agency (SCA) are a matter for the Minister for Finance to respond to it in the first instance.

The NTMA is a State body which provides asset and liability management services to Government and is designated as the State Claims Agency when performing the claims management, risk management and legal cost management functions delegated to it under the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2000 and the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2014. It operates under the aegis of the Minister for Finance. Accordingly, I would suggest that the Deputy refers questions related to the State Claims Agency

to the Minister for Finance in the first instance.

EU Regulations

101. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which the new EU environmental taxonomy will impact on future procurement policy; and if it will be applied as an element in the current review of the National Development Plan 2018-2027. [17866/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The new EU Environmental Taxonomy is a classification system providing appropriate definitions on economic activities which can be considered environmentally sustainable to help the private financial sector to navigate the transition and shift investments to a low-carbon, resilient, and resource-efficient economy.

The Taxonomy will not, therefore, directly impact on public procurement policy. However, public procurement will play an important role in addressing the same objectives as the EU Taxonomy i.e. climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, transition to a circular economy, pollution prevention and control, and protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems. In 2019, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform issued a Circular to public bodies to promote the use of environmental and social considerations in public procurement. As set out in the Programme for Government, we will develop and implement a sustainable procurement policy during the lifetime of this government, to minimise the environmental impact of products and services procured and will mandate the inclusion of green criteria in all procurements using public funds. Furthermore, the Office of Government Procurement will update its procurement frameworks in line with green procurement practice.

The National Development Plan sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework. The current review of the National Development Plan is considering the following fundamental elements:

Level: There will be an assessment of the economic and social case for the overall level of capital expenditure commitment into the future.

Share: This element will consider the share of capital expenditure across Departments or sectors and the need to adjust Sectoral allocations in order to successfully deliver on Government priorities.

Priorities: This will ensure alignment with the policy priorities in the Programme for Government, notably housing, health, climate action, transport and job creation and enterprise development.

Spatial Alignment: This will investigate whether the NDP aligns sufficiently with the spatial strategy set out in the National Planning Framework of compact growth as well as city and regional growth targets.

Governance: The final key area will assess whether the structures and rules for the management, governance and oversight of projects are in place to deliver on the ambitions of the revised NDP.

Climate was an important consideration in the development of the current National Development Plan and is also in the ongoing appraisal of projects and programmes. However,

in recognition of the need for systemic change, there will be an overarching focus on climate action throughout the new National Development Plan. It is intended that Departments will be required to assess their spending proposals/allocations against a range of environmental outcomes to ensure that their investment priorities are aligned with Ireland's climate and environmental objectives. To complement this sectoral assessment of the National Development Plan, my Department is proposing that the whole of the National Development Plan is assessed against a suitable climate/environmental methodology which is in line with international good practices.

It is important to note that the National Development Plan is not a vehicle through which investment proposals are approved. All project and programme proposals included in the Plan are subject to the detailed rigour of the Public Spending Code. The Public Spending Code is not static. It is updated regularly to reflect lessons learned and international good practice. My Department has an ongoing body of work to strengthen the Public Spending Code requirements and guidance to support public bodies in their evaluation, planning and management of capital projects. This includes strengthening the consideration of environmental and climate factors in project appraisal, planning and delivery. In particular, I anticipate altering the shadow cost of carbon that applies to all projects once the higher targets envisaged in the draft Climate Action Bill are adopted. This will ensure that the amount of emissions a project may give rise to is quantified and a value placed on those emissions that reflects the cost the society will have to bear to eliminate these emissions in the future. This in turn allows the appraisal to determine if this future burden outweighs any benefits the project may bring.

Public Procurement Contracts

102. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the ESRI, IPA and SEUPB have independent health and safety advisers at present; if so, if the procurement of such which was carried out in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17890/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): In the first instance, the Deputy may wish to note the nature of the bodies referenced in his question. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) are companies limited by guarantee who are in receipt of grant funding from my Department. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a cross-border North South Implementation Body, established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement and jointly sponsored by my Department and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. The SEUPB operates under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council, and is headquartered in Belfast, with smaller offices in Omagh and Monaghan.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below.

Body	Independent Health and Safety advisors present	Services procured in the last 3 years
Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI)	Yes – H&S Advice is currently provided as part of a facilities management service	The ESRI tendered for its facilities management services in 2020 and a number responses were received. In the light of the continuing Covid restrictions, a risk assessment was carried out on the feasibility of changing provider during this period. Following the assessment, it was decided to cancel the process and extend the current service providers contract. A new procurement process will be held as soon as practical.

Body	Independent Health and Safety advisors present	Services procured in the last 3 years
Institute of Public Administration (IPA)	No independent Health & Safety advisors present. The IPA has a Facilities Officer in place who is the nominated competent person under the HSA's legislation. This is supplemented by independent advice when deemed necessary.	A fire safety assessment of the IPA building complex was carried out in 2020. This service was procured through relevant procurement guidelines.
Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)	Yes	The SEUPB uses the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Framework to appoint external companies to provide Health and Safety Training such as First Aid and Fire Marshall Training. The SEUPB also has a contract with a workplace compliance company that provides online Health and Safety training to all SEUPB staff members.

Departmental Bodies

103. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the ESRI, the IPA and the SEUPB have implemented the public sector and human rights duty under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014; if they have reported in their annual reports each year since enactment on the developments and achievements with regard to human rights; if the bodies have at all times promoted equality of opportunity and treatment of staff and persons to which they provide services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17891/21]

104. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the ESRI, the IPA and the SEUPB have set out in their strategic plans an assessment of the human rights and equality issues they view to be relevant to the functions and purpose of the body with regard to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17892/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 104 together.

In the first instance, the Deputy may wish to note the nature of the bodies referenced in his question. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) are companies limited by guarantee who are in receipt of grant funding from my Department. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a cross-border North South Implementation Body, established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement and jointly sponsored by my Department and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. The SEUPB operates under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council, and is headquartered in Belfast, with smaller offices in Omagh and Monaghan.

I am advised that the position in respect of these bodies is as set out below.

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

Whilst not subject to the Act, the ESRI adheres to all relevant equality legislation and the Institute's policies are consistent with the Act. In addition, the ESRI has worked in partnership with IHREC and the NDA since 2018, utilising IHREC guides to create accessible ESRI publications, and implementing such guidelines for select publications on a trial basis. The Institute is currently working on a project, with research authors, external copyeditors and formatters, to implement a workable process/guide for creating accessible publications on a wider basis.

Institute of Public Administration (IPA)

In accordance with the requirements of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 (Section 42), the IPA is cognisant that in the performance of its duties that it has regard to the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity and the protection of the human rights of all staff and clients availing of its services. The IPA has a number of policies and codes in place to ensure this implementation. These include Code of Conduct, Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunity Policy. While the IPA has not formally reported on its obligations under the Act, the principles espoused in the Act underpin IPA corporate policy and values. The IPA is fully committed to eliminating discrimination, promoting equality and protecting human rights at all times.

Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)

The SEUPB is fully committed to carrying out all its functions with regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity as mandated in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). This includes equality between people of different religious beliefs, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; between men and women generally, between persons with a disability and persons without, between persons with dependants and persons without. The SEUPB has drawn up an Equality Scheme which sets out how the body proposes to fulfil its statutory obligations. The SEUPB commit the necessary resources in terms of people, time and money to make sure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that the Equality Scheme is implemented effectively and on time.

The SEUPB is committed to having effective internal arrangements in place to ensure its successful compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing its progress. The SEUPB undertakes audits of inequalities and prepares a Section 75 Action Plan to cover the period of the Body's corporate plan as a means of ensuring effective implementation of its duties through the internal reporting systems.

The SEUPB is committed to applying screening methods to all new and revised policies and where necessary and appropriate, it will subject new policies to further equality impact assessments. Screening reports include all policies recently screened and include the decisions reached. A full listing of the SEUPBs most recent outcome reports will be uploaded to its website, when available.

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006, the SEUPB is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need:

- to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- to encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Under Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the SEUPB is also required to submit to the Equality Commission, a Disability Action Plan showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions. A Disability Action Plan has been prepared for this purpose.

Equality Statistics for the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes are monitored by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and a summary of these are included in the Annual Implementation Reports for these Programmes.

The SEUPB is also fully committed to carrying out its employment duties and responsibilities as outlined in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998.

Protected Disclosures

105. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the ESRI, the IPA and the SEUPB have received protected disclosures since the enactment of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014; if all such disclosures were reported as per the Act in their annual reports; if there were disclosures deemed not to be protected disclosures under the Act and thus not reported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17893/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): In the first instance, the Deputy may wish to note the nature of the bodies referenced in his question. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) are companies limited by guarantee who are in receipt of grant funding from my Department. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a cross-border North South Implementation Body, established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement and jointly sponsored by my Department and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. The SEUPB operates under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council, and is headquartered in Belfast, with smaller offices in Omagh and Monaghan.

I am advised that of the above mentioned bodies, the Institute of Public Administration is the only one to have received a Protected Disclosure since the enactment of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. The details requested by the Deputy are set out in the table below.

Body	Protected Disclosures received	Protected Disclosures reported in Annual Report	Disclosures deemed to be not Protected Disclosures and not reported in Annual Report
Institute of Public Administration	Yes (one)	No – not deemed to be a Protected Disclosure	Yes (one)

Departmental Bodies

106. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if each of the bodies under his aegis and the ESRI, the IPA and the SEUPB hold membership with a confederation; if so, if he will provide the breakdown of payment to the confederation by each of the bodies in each of the years 2016 to 2020; if consideration of savings on this could be achieved on a shared service basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17894/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): In the first instance, the Deputy may wish to note the nature of three of the bodies specifically referenced in his question. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) are companies limited by guarantee who are in receipt of grant funding from my Department. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a cross-border North South Implementation Body, established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement and jointly sponsored by my Department and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. The SEUPB operates under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council, and is headquartered in Belfast, with smaller offices in Omagh and Monaghan.

Of the bodies in question, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) is the only one that has a membership of the confederation specified in the question and the details are set out in the table below.

	2020*	2019	2018	2017	2016
Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI)*	€5,296	€4,591	€4,479	€4,370	€4,263

* Prior to 2020, the ESRI paid a fee to access the confederation's Employee Related Services but were not members of the confederation. Membership of the confederation was required for 2020 to access these services

Departmental Bodies

107. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures he plans to take with regard to public bodies under his aegis and the ESRI, the IPA and the SE-UPB to have designated Irish language officers and be compliant with their obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003; if the bodies have had their services competently audited for compliance with the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17895/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): In the first instance, the Deputy may wish to note the nature of the three bodies specifically referenced in his question. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) are companies limited by guarantee who are in receipt of grant funding from my Department. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a cross-border North South Implementation Body, established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement and jointly sponsored by my Department and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. The SEUPB operates under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council, and is headquartered in Belfast, with smaller offices in Omagh and Monaghan.

I am advised of the following with regard to all of the bodies encompassed by the question:

Office of Public Works (OPW)

The OPW's Quality Customer Service (QCS) Network oversee the preparation of each new Language Scheme and monitor implementation of the scheme to ensure that the OPW is compliant with its obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003. The QCS Network comprises of members from each of the business areas within the OPW. Each business area is required to reflect the commitments of the Language Scheme in its business plan and monitor implementation, as appropriate. An updated Irish Language Scheme is due to be rolled out in the OPW shortly.

While the OPW does not have a designated Irish language officer, staff are reminded periodically of their responsibilities in respect of the Official Languages Act 2003 and the OPW Language Scheme. Detailed guidance and instructions have been made available to those who may need to implement Irish language measures.

An audit by An Coimisiúin Teanga was carried out in 2019 on the use of the official languages on signage at heritage sites of the Office of Public Works and its language scheme commitments in relation to the Gaeltacht

National Shared Services Office (NSSO)

The National Shared Services Office understands its obligations in relation to the use of Irish, has a designated Irish language officer and is compliant under the Official Languages Act 2003. The NSSO is fully committed to providing a bilingual service. The NSSO is dedicated to

ensuring customer service is available in both languages. The NSSO has agents available in all Shared Services Centres to take calls and respond to emails and letters in Irish. The customer service phone lines are also bilingual and stationary displays the names and addresses in both Irish and English, and all customer alerts are bilingual. Both the Payroll and HR portals (for customers and internal use) are fully bilingual, with all information and forms available in both languages. The NSSO was established as a statutory office in 2018 and has not yet had services audited for compliance with the Official Languages Act.

Public Appointments Service (PAS)

The PAS Irish Language Scheme 2017–2020 sets out the commitments which PAS has made in terms of the services which they will provide to candidates applying for competitions being run by PAS (and in compliance with the Official Languages Act). The scheme was confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and remains in effect until a new Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister. PAS have a full-time translator on staff and also an Irish Language Officer.

PAS have a number of staff that are competent in Irish and offer staff opportunities to take Irish courses to learn/improve (increasing general staff competency in Irish is part of the Scheme).

Responsibility has been assigned to specific staff for all elements of the Scheme and elements of this (those which are the most subject to change) are audited on a regular basis by a dedicated staff member.

Office of the Ombudsman

The Office of the Ombudsman, the Commission for Public Service Appointments, the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information operate a joint scheme, and have a designated Irish language officer in place. The Offices are in full compliance with the provisions of the Act and also have an Irish Language scheme in place. The Irish language Officer carries out a review of the adherence of the Offices to the Act and the Irish Language Scheme. A review was recently completed and covered the year 2020.

The Standards in Public Office Commission is in compliance with the provisions of the Official Languages Act 2003 and has an Irish language scheme in place. This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It commenced with effect from 1 October 2018. The Commission reports on its activities under the Official Languages Act in its annual reports.

The Office of the Ombudsman provides staff to the Commission. While there is no formal “Designated Irish Officer” role set out in the current scheme, the Commission has two members of staff designated to provide services in Irish. The Commission’s commitment to the provision of services is outlined in its Irish language scheme and includes provision of reception/telephone services in Irish on request; correspondence and email in the requested official language; publication of annual reports and most documents in both official languages (further detail as specified in the scheme); publication of the Commission’s websites (sipo.ie and lobbying.ie) in both official languages; and publication of press releases in both official languages

There is no explicit provision in the scheme for an audit, however, it is not a requirement of the Act. The Act provides that a review may be conducted at the request of the Minister; no such request has been received to date. The current scheme is in place for a three-year period (2018–2021) and must be reviewed at that time. It is intended that a new scheme will be devel-

oped this year and a review of the current scheme would accompany that.

State Laboratory

The State Laboratory is a scheduled office under the aegis of my Department which provides a comprehensive analytical and advisory service to Government departments and offices. It does not provide a service to the public. The State Laboratory is compliant with obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003. However, it does not have a designated Irish language officer and has not had services audited for compliance with the Act.

Office of the Regulator of the National Lottery

The Office of the Regulator of the National Lottery is compliant with its obligations under the Official Languages Act, 2003, but does not provide any services to the public and therefore this does not apply to the Office.

Institute of Public Administration

The IPA does not have a dedicated Irish language officer. It has a staff member who is an Irish speaker. The IPA is in the process of developing its third official language scheme. The IPA has not had its services audited for compliance with the Act

Economic & Social Research Institute

Whilst the ESRI does not have a designated Irish Language Officer, a member of staff who is a fluent Irish speaker fulfils this role when the need arises normally in relation to media interviews. The ESRI is currently reviewing its processes to ensure it is fully compliant with the Official Languages Act.

Special EU Programmes Body

The SEUPB adheres to the following mandatory requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003:

- All written communication are responded to in the Irish language when it is received in Irish;
- Headings of the SEUPB's letterhead stationery include the organisation's address in Irish;
- The SEUPB's Annual Report and Accounts are laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas in the Irish language, before being published; and
- In terms of signage the SEUPB's logo contains an Irish translation of the organisation's name.

The SEUPB retains the services of a language translation company with immediate access to accredited Irish language translators.

Departmental Bodies

108. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the bodies under his aegis and the ESRI, the IPA and the SEUPB energy policy are compliant with their obligations under the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy; the bodies that have failed to meet their 2020 energy targets; the measures that will be put in place for those organisations that have not met their 2020 targets to reach their 2030 targets; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [17896/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I wish to advise the Deputy that a deferred reply will be issued to him in respect of this Parliamentary Question, in line with Standing Order 51B.

Office of Public Works

109. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when two tour guides and one general operative will be appointed to Kennedy Park and Arboretum, New Ross, County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17899/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): It is OPWs intention to run a panel recruitment competition during 2021 for the above.

Departmental Staff

110. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17915/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The information requested by the Deputy for my Department and the Office of Government Procurement, which is also part of my Department, is set out in the tables below.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Grade	Number of Officers	Male	Female
Higher Executive Officer	105	49	56
Administrative Officer	75	41	34
Assistant Principal Officer	133	69	64
Principal Officer	41	23	18
Director	2	0	2
Assistant Secretary	4	4	0

Office of Government Procurement

Grade	Number of Officers	Male	Female
Higher Executive Officer & Equivalents	77	42	35
Administrative Officer	4	1	3
Assistant Principal Officer & Equivalents	57	32	25
Principal Officer & Equivalents	14	9	5
Director	1	1	0
Assistant Secretary	0	0	0

Local Authority Funding

111. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if additional funding will be provided to Cavan County Council in 2021 for flood alleviation measures in view of increasing problems with flooding due to heavy rainfall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17927/21]

112. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if additional funding will be provided to Monaghan County Council in 2021 for flood alleviation measures in view of increasing problems with flooding due to heavy rainfall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17928/21]

115. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the specific measures that will be undertaken by the Office of Public Works in 2021 to alleviate flooding caused by the River Erne in County Cavan due to the damage caused by such flooding over recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17947/21]

116. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the specific drainage projects to be undertaken by the Office of Public Works in County Cavan in 2021; the estimated cost of same; the drainage projects to be undertaken by Cavan County Council with financial assistance from the OPW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17948/21]

117. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the specific drainage projects to be undertaken by the Office of Public Works in County Monaghan in 2021; the estimated cost of same; the drainage projects to be undertaken by Monaghan County Council with financial assistance from the OPW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17949/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111, 112 and 115 to 117, inclusive, together.

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address. All Local Authorities, including Cavan County Council and Monaghan County Council, may carry out flood mitigation works, using either their own resources, or by applying for funding under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme which was introduced by my Office on an administrative, non-statutory basis in 2009.

The purpose of the scheme is to provide funding to local authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised fluvial flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. The scheme generally applies where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame. The works to be funded are carried out under local authority powers and ongoing maintenance of the completed works is the responsibility of the Council.

Under the scheme, applications are considered for projects that are estimated to cost not more than €750,000 in each instance. Funding of up to 90% of the cost is available for approved projects. Applications are assessed by the OPW having regard to the specific economic, social and environmental criteria of the scheme, including a cost benefit ratio and having regard to the availability of funding for flood risk management. Full details of this scheme are available on www.gov.ie/opw

In 2020, the OPW approved funding of €75,600 to Cavan County Council for projects at Aghadreenagh Redhills, Ballyhaise Pitch, Ballyhaise Cavan Rd, Drumliffe Ballyhaise Knockateery Cloverhill and Mullinavaránogue. The OPW has recently approved funding of €75,500 to Monaghan County Council for a project at Drumfalra, Ballybay.

The OPW's annual Arterial Drainage Maintenance Works Programme includes the following river catchments in the Cavan and Monaghan areas: Boyne, Inny, Blackwater and Glyde and Dee.

The OPW does not have Arterial Drainage Schemes on the River Erne system in County Cavan and is not responsible for channel maintenance in the area in accordance with its statutory requirements under the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945. However, parts of the Erne Catchment are a Drainage District for which the local authority is responsible for ongoing maintenance.

Cavan County Council confirmed in May 2019 that the Council would act as lead agency on the management and delivery of the proposed flood relief scheme in Cavan Town and a steering group, comprising of representatives from the Office of Public Works and Cavan County Council, is now in place to progress the Scheme. On 5th March 2021 Cavan County Council, in partnership with the OPW, issued the tender documentation for the procurement of Engineering Consultants to the OPW Framework of Consultants. Tenders are due for return on 6 May 2021.

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

While the three proposed schemes in County Monaghan, for Ballybay, Iniskeen and Monaghan town, are not in the first tranche of flood relief projects to be progressed, the OPW and Monaghan County Council will work closely to ensure that they will be commenced as soon as possible within the 10 Year timeframe for the programme of investment.

Departmental Funding

113. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the funding committed to date for the Interreg and Peace Plus Programmes post-2020; the level of funding to be provided by the Irish and UK Governments and the European Commission, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17929/21]

114. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the Interreg and Peace Plus Programmes post-Brexit with particular reference to cross-Border projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17930/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 114 together.

In 2018, as part of its proposals for the Multi-Annual Financial Framework and Cohesion policy for the 2021-27 period, the European Commission proposed a special new cross-border EU funding programme for the island of Ireland, PEACE PLUS. This is a proposal which demonstrates the importance placed by the Commission, EU Member States, the UK and Ireland on the strengthening of peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the Border counties of Ireland.

PEACE PLUS will continue and build upon the work of the PEACE and INTERREG programmes by combining these two funding strands into a single programme which covers an eligible area of Northern Ireland and Counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo. Provision for the new programme is included in the January 2020 Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the UK, and in the accompanying Political Declaration, as well as in the December 2020 EU-UK Joint Declaration on Participation in Union Programmes and Access

to Programme Services.

Programme development for PEACE PLUS is now well advanced. This process is being led by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), a North South Implementation body under the joint sponsorship of my Department and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. SEUPB is being assisted by a cross-sectoral Programme Development Steering Group, consisting of representatives of both governments as well as of local government, trade union, business, environment, community and voluntary sector, rural and equality sectors.

On foot of extensive public consultation and engagement with government departments North and South, SEUPB has prepared a draft programme which covers six thematic areas of cross-border activity:

- Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities;
- Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation;
- Empowering and Investing in Our Young People;
- Healthy and Inclusive Communities;
- Supporting a Sustainable Future;
- Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration.

The draft PEACE PLUS programme is now open to further public consultation for a two month period, which will conclude on 12 May 2021. I would encourage all stakeholders to make their views known during this consultation period. Following the public consultation and any necessary revisions arising from it, it is intended to bring the draft programme for approval by both the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, followed by submission to the European Commission for final approval.

Ireland has consistently advocated for as large and impactful a programme as possible in financial terms, especially in view of the twin challenges posed by Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. The final funding quantum for PEACE PLUS will be determined in the context of EU UK negotiations and a Financing Agreement between the EU, UK and Ireland. Funding will be provided by the European Union, the UK Government, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. However, the draft programme has been developed on the basis of a budget in the region of €1 billion.

Questions Nos. 115 to 117, inclusive, answered with Question No. 111.

Departmental Data

118. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17977/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I understand that the Deputy clarified to my Department that the information requested relates “to data that my Department has provided to the Department of Health, or information that my Department holds and may give access to the Department of Health that relates to private individuals and officials”. The position in this regard is set out in the table below.

Date	Data Format	From	To	Details	Purpose
2000 - Present	Correspondence ('Ministerial Representations')	D/PER	D/Health	Correspondence ('Ministerial Representations') that relate to Department of Health policy areas are forwarded to the Minister's Office of the Department of Health, when appropriate	To respond to matters raised in correspondence received by the Minister
2000 - Present	Correspondence	D/PER	D/Health	Correspondence with the Department of Health in areas where the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is required, e.g. for appointments	To convey the sanction of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform
Oct 2019 - Present	Access to One-Learning Learning Management System	D/PER	D/Health	Training records of Department of Health officials for courses administered on Learning Management System	HR Management, Training, Workforce Planning, Reporting, Audit & Compliance
Periodically (as required)	Information / extracts from LEADS (senior level performance management) central database	D/PER	D/Health	Performance management compliance data	Tracking of performance management process compliance and to facilitate payment of increments.

General Data Protection Regulation

119. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17996/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has answered all relevant GDPR requests, such as Subject Access Requests which is what my Department have taken data information requests to mean, from 2018 to 2021. The other information sought by the Deputy is set out below in the format requested.

Information sought	Number
Number of complaints received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests (assumed to be Subject Access Requests) since 2018 to date in 2021	0
Number of data information requests (assumed to be Subject Access Requests) since 2018 to date in 2021	25

Garda Headquarters

120. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which Military Road was first picked as a likely site for the build of a new headquarters for An Garda Síochána; the date on which this location was selected; the names of the persons that made the final decision to select Military Road; if a consolidated and complete schedule will be provided of other sites that were on the shortlist for same; and if the attention

of the OPW was drawn in advance of Military Road being picked that expansion capacity and future proofing were key requirements for An Garda Síochána in terms of the new building. [18002/21]

121. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which the OPW and An Garda Síochána became aware the new building at Military Road would be too small to accommodate the full cohort of personnel currently situated at Harcourt Square. [18003/21]

122. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW has identified the location which other personnel who cannot be accommodated in the new Military Road Garda building will be housed; and the annual cost associated with that overspill of accommodation needs. [18004/21]

123. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the completion date for the new headquarters of An Garda Síochána also encompass a full fitout of the building to turn-key standard in view of the fact that OPW has confirmed that the Military Road building will be completed on schedule for September 2022. [18005/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan) : I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 to 123, inclusive, together.

An evaluation panel, comprising of senior representatives from Department of Justice, An Garda Síochána and the Office of Public Works was set up in order to assess alternative sites. A very detailed assessment of six sites in Dublin, including Military Road, was undertaken by the evaluation panel. In November 2015, the evaluation panel concluded that, based on the evaluation assessment and the brief of requirements from An Garda Síochána, the site at Military Road was deemed the most suitable.

The numbers of staff being accommodated in the new Garda Security and Crime Operations Centre, Military Road meet the specifications and brief as requested of the OPW at the time the site was selected. However, a range of strategic modernisation initiatives undertaken by the Garda Commissioner in recent years has led to an increase in numbers in the specialist Bureaus and Units attached to Harcourt Square and staffing numbers have increased as a result of the expansion of the Garda workforce.

As part of An Garda Síochána's overall strategic planning, in addition to the new facility being built at Military Rd, is a relocation of its Command and Control Centre (presently in Harcourt Square) to a new facility at Heuston Station, being developed by the National Transport Authority and Irish Rail. This will support a more integrated 'blue light' response for the public, and includes Dublin City Council's blue light requirements.

The overall strategy to meet the requirements of Garda Síochána is constantly under review and include a major upgrade, restoration and refurbishment of its Headquarters in the Phoenix Park and the associated relocation of key Units to this site in order to optimise the accommodation of specialist Garda operations.

For example, Forensic Science Ireland will be vacating Garda HQ from mid-2022 and moving to their new laboratory building in Backweston and another building in Garda HQ is being restored. An existing OPW lease in a nearby building will be available for An Garda Síochána. This will release additional space for An Garda Síochána's use.

Both the OPW and An Garda Síochána are aware of the impact of a changing workforce on the property solutions currently being advanced. The OPW continues to assist An Garda Síochána in its task in mapping out what it envisages is likely to be its property requirements in the

coming years, in line with its workforce plans, insofar as it can anticipate those requirements.

The new Garda Security and Crime Operations Centre building at Military Rd will be fully completed by September 2022. The project is on time and on budget.

Grant Payments

124. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if financial supports are available to members of an association (details supplied); if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the business continuation scheme does not include many of its members given they do not meet the criteria of the minimum income threshold; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18019/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The July Stimulus and Budget 2021 provided a significant package of tax and fiscal measures to build the resilience of the economy and to help vulnerable but viable businesses across all sectors.

In 2020, the Covid-19 Adaptation Fund was open to tourism and hospitality businesses including cruise hire companies and boat tour operators. In February, 2021 Fáilte Ireland launched the first phase of the Tourism Business Continuity Scheme, which, subject to eligibility criteria, included cruise hire companies and tourism boat tour operators. This phase of the scheme closed for applications on 8th March.

The Tourism Business Continuity Scheme is administered by Fáilte Ireland and I have referred the Deputy's question to that agency for further reply including information on thresholds and other supports that may be available to Irish Charters Skippers Association members. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Departmental Funding

125. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if a list of all 2021 funding schemes will be provided relevant to the arts and culture; the amount allocated to each of these initiatives; the specific number of artists that received support from each of these initiatives; the number of persons in receipt of funding to date by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17662/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): My Department operates a number of funding schemes every year. These are announced by Press Release and social media and are published on my Department's website. Application forms, guidance on the application process and further information on these schemes are routinely published. My Department also arranges for publication of its funding decisions on its website including grant recipients, the amounts allocated. In many cases this includes locations by county. Details of the main funding schemes announced in 2021 to date by my Department are listed in the table hereunder.

Scheme type	Name of Schemes	Link on website where details are published
Cultural Schemes Unit	Regional Museum Exhibitions Scheme Co-operation with Northern Ireland Mobility of Collections Scheme Small Scale Local Festivals and Summer Schools	https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f2ed0-culture-grants-and-funding/
Culture Capital funding	Cultural Capital Schemes (2019-2022/ 2016 – 2018) Cultural Development Expenditure	https://wayback.archive-it.org/org-1444/20201009132504/https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/grants-and-funding/previous-schemes/ https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b61b2-stream-d-of-the-cultural-capital-scheme-2019-2022/
Creative Ireland Programme	Cruinniú na nÓg	https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/news/call-for-applications-strategic-partnerships-for-cruinniú-na-nog-2021/ .
Culture Ireland	Regular grants rounds See Here scheme, Delegate Scheme Showcase programmes	https://www.cultureireland.ie/funding
€50m Live Entertainment Sector supports	€25m new Live Performance Support Scheme €14m new support scheme for live entertainment businesses, €5m to local authorities for outdoor live performances €5m capital supports for live entertainment sector €1m to St. Patrick's Festival	https://www.gov.ie/en/service/ca5d7-live-performance-support-scheme-2021/ Application forms, guidance on the application process and further information on these schemes are routinely published on the Department's website. Details of recipients/events/ grant amounts will be published for these scheme in due as these schemes have not yet concluded.

Covid-19 Pandemic

126. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the analysis her Department has carried out into the financial impact of Covid-19 on lighting, sound and audio visual engineering companies working in the entertainment sector (details supplied); her plans to increase the grant funding levels provided under the music entertainment business assistance scheme in line with the levels offered to comparable businesses under the small business assistance scheme for Covid to take into account the high overheads faced by these companies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17732/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): I am acutely aware of the challenges facing those who rely on live performance to sustain their livelihoods on foot of necessary public health restrictions. The Government's response to the impact of the pandemic on the sector and the economy generally is comprised of a broad range of supports delivered across a range of Departments. The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme and the COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme form the principle elements of the Government's response. The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment recently announced the Small Business Assistance Scheme for Covid (SBASC) as a further horizontal support across all sectors of the economy. SMEs and Businesses in the non-funded live events sector are eligible to apply under this scheme.

I was pleased to recently announce a new €50 million suite of additional measures to further support those in the Live Entertainment Sector. As part of this suite, an allocation of €25 million is being made available under the Live Performance Support Scheme 2021. This scheme builds on the successful outcomes of the pilot Live Performance Support Scheme (LPSS) in 2020, which provided thousands of days of employment to hundreds of musicians, actors, crew and technicians in tandem with a pipeline of high quality on-line much needed entertainment

for Irish audiences.

The 2021 scheme is aimed at supporting employment and wellbeing opportunities across all genres and the continued production of high quality artistic output for the public.

As a further support measure for those in the live entertainment industry, an allocation of €14m will be made available for a new scheme to make a contribution to the overheads of businesses, specifically musicians and related crew, that have been significantly negatively affected by COVID-19 and that do not qualify for other business supports. The main features of this new Music Entertainment Business Assistance Scheme (MEBAS) will see support to assist with business overheads offered by way of two levels of flat payments:

- €2,500 for businesses with a VAT-exclusive turnover of €20,000 - €100,000;
- €5,000 for businesses with a VAT-exclusive turnover in excess of €100,000.

Under the scheme, musicians, singers, lighting and sound crew and audio equipment suppliers - whether sole traders, partnerships or incorporated entities - operating exclusively within the commercial live entertainment sector will be eligible to apply. This scheme has been developed following wide consultation with the sector and will be managed directly by my Department. The eligibility threshold of €20,000 aims to strike an appropriate balance having regard to other available supports and the need to reach as many professional musicians and crew as possible. The scheme will open when the necessary administrative and IT systems are in place.

An allocation of up to €5 million will also be made available to local authorities for live performances in summer 2021 to animate town centres and other locations, should public health considerations permit. This will allow for the procurement by local authorities of performances by local performers. Performances can be recorded or streamed if health restrictions prevent live events. Local authorities will be encouraged to engage events companies to develop and deliver a programme of performances.

Further information on the business and financial supports my colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment has in place to help businesses impacted by the COVID-19 crisis can be viewed at the following link <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/>.

Meath na Gaeltachta

127. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán an admhóidh sí go bhfuil géarchéim sochtheangeolaíochta ann sa Ghaeltacht. [17764/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): Is í an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010–2030 bunchloch pholasáí an Rialtais i leith na Gaeilge. Tá úinéireacht trasRannach ag an Straitéis agus baineann an fhreagracht as í a chur i bhfeidhm, dá réir, le raon Ranna Rialtais, forais agus eagraíochtaí Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta. Is í mo Roinn atá freagrach as cur chun feidhme na Straitéise a chomhordú.

Tá raon moltaí atá á gcur i bhfeidhm i láthair na huaire sa Straitéis a bhaineann leis na naoi réimse seo a leanas: Oideachas; an Ghaeltacht; an Teaghlach ag Cur na Teanga ar Aghaidh - Idirghabháil go Luath; Riarachán; Seirbhísí agus Pobal; na Meáin agus an Teicneolaíocht; Foclóirí; Reachtaíocht agus Stádas; Saol Eacnamaíochta agus Tionscnaimh Leathana.

Leagtar amach sa **Phlean Gníomhaíochta 5 bliana don Ghaeilge**, a thacaíonn le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise, os cionn 180 beart a chuirfidh tuairim is 60 páirtí leasmhar i bhfeidhm thar thréimhse cúig bliana, ar mhaithe le forfheidhmiú na Straitéise agus ar leas na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta dá réir. Is í mo Roinn atá freagrach as comhordú a dhéanamh ar fhorfheidhmiú agus monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar an bPlean. Tá an dara tuairisc bhliantúil maidir lena chur i bhfeidhm á ullmhú faoi láthair agus súil é a fhoilsiú go luath. Táim ag súil go mbeidh sé le sonrú sa tuairisc sin nuair atá sé foilsithe go bhfuil gníomhaíochtaí an Phlean ag tacú leis an nGaeilge sa Ghaeltacht agus lasmuigh de, in ainneoin tionchar na paindéime ar ghnóthaí Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta.

Is fiú dom a luadh gur tháinig ardú suntasach de €14.8m ar an leithdháileadh don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht atá san áireamh i mbuiséad 2021. Fágann sé seo go bhfuil breis is €78m san iomlán á gcur ar fáil ag mo Roinn sa bhliain reatha mar thacaíocht don Ghaeilge.

Ar ndóigh, tá obair shuntasach ar siúl ag mo Roinn i dtaca le caomhnú agus treisiú na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht agus go deimhin, lasmuigh de. Tá seo á dhéanamh trí raon beartais, scéimeanna agus tionscnaimh atá á mhaoiniú agus á gcur i bhfeidhm ag mo Roinn. Luafainn go sonrach roinnt bearta ábhartha:

An Próiseas Pleanála Teanga

Tá an próiseas pleanála teanga á chur i bhfeidhm faoi Acht na Gaeltachta, 2012. Faoin bpróiseas, tá deis á tabhairt do phobal na Gaeltachta, mar aon le pobail na mBailte Seirbhíse Gaeltachta agus na Líonraí Gaeilge, pleananna teanga a ullmhú agus a fheidhmiú ar bhonn áitiúil. Cuirtear tacaíocht leanúnach thar thréimhse 7 mbliana ar fáil d'aon phlean teanga a cheadaítear faoin bpróiseas. Tá borradh tagtha ar an bpleanáil teanga le roinnt blianta anuas agus 21 limistéar pleanála teanga ceadaithe agus i mbun oibre. Tá 22 Oifigeach Phleanála Teanga agus Oifigigh Cúnta Pleanála Teanga ceaptha chun a phleananna teanga a chur i bhfeidhm ina gceantair áitiúla. Ina theannta sin, tá dhá Bhaile Seirbhíse Gaeltachta a thacóidh leis an nGaeilge sa Ghaeltacht ceadaithe freisin.

Tá an Roinn ag tacú le Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta, Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta agus Ealaín na Gaeltachta chun tacaíocht ar leith a chur ar fáil don phróiseas pleanála teanga freisin. San iomlán, tá maoiniú suas le €5m ar fáil ó mo Roinn don phleanáil teanga sa bhliain reatha.

An Clár Tacaíochtaí Pobail agus Teanga

Tá suas le €10.2m le caitheamh ag mo Roinn faoin gClár Tacaíochtaí Pobail agus Teanga in 2021. Le maoiniú ón gelár seo cuirtear tacaíocht reatha agus chaipitil ar fáil do thionscadail agus d'eagraíochtaí Gaeltachta, i gcomhréir leis na bearta ábhartha atá sa Phlean Gníomhaíochta don Ghaeilge 2018-2022 agus le tacú ar an iomlán leis an Straitéis 20-Bliain agus an próiseas pleanála Teanga.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

Mar chuid de chaináisnéis 2021 tá cistíocht bhreise ar fiú beagnach €4.5m ceadaithe don Údarás sa bhliain reatha faoin gciste caipitil - rud a chiallaíonn go mbeidh soláthar caipitil de bheagnach €14.5m ar fáil don Údarás le tabhairt faoina chlár forbartha, fiontraíochta agus fostaíochta agus chun tacú le comhlachtaí Gaeltachta.

Lena chois sin tá soláthar méadaithe de €700,000 fógartha i dtreo buiséad maoinithe na gComharchumann agus Coistí Forbartha Pobail Gaeltachta atá faoina stiúir mar fhoras stáit - rud a chiallaíonn go bhfuil buiséad iomlán de €4.75m dó seo sa bhliain reatha.

Cuideoidh an t-ardú suntasach atá curtha ar bhuiséad Údarás na Gaeltachta don bhliain

1 April 2021

reatha leis an eagraíocht cur lena cuid gníomhaíochtaí ar mhaithe leis an nGaeilge sa Ghaeltacht.

Is cinnte go bhfuil dúshláin againn sa Ghaeltacht ach creidim gur ag obair i gcomhar lena chéile is fearr a bhainfidh muid torthaí fóna amach chun an oidhreacht bheo seo a thabhairt ar aghaidh don chéad ghlúin eile. Sa tréimhse amach romhainn, beidh an Rialtas seo, agus mo Roinnse ag obair go dícheallach leis na pairtnéirí go léir, ag leibhéal an stáit agus an phobail chun na spriocanna atá leagtha amach sa Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, an Plean Gníomhachta agus an phróiseas pleanála teanga araon a chur i gcrích.

Cé go n-aithním, mar atá ráite, go bhfuil an teanga faoi bhrú, tá gach rud á dhéanamh ag an Rialtas seo chun í a neartú agus a fheabhsú ar fud na tíre.

Covid-19 Pandemic

128. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the process for obtaining permission by persons (details supplied) for international travel for the purpose of participating in elite sport; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17900/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): The relevant legislative provisions are set out in the Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) (Restrictions upon Travel to the State from Certain States) (No. 5) Regulations 2021, introduced by my colleague the Minister for Health.

Sport Ireland has communicated its precise requirements in this regard to each of the recognised National Governing Bodies of Sport in Ireland. Any athlete seeking certification under these legislative provisions should in the first instance apply to their National Governing Body. Sport Ireland assesses each application in accordance with the provisions and criteria set out in the above-mentioned Regulations.

Departmental Staff

129. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in her Department by gender in tabular form. [17919/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The following table shows the breakdown of staff employed in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media at the grades HEO, AO, APO, PO and A/SEC broken down by Gender.

	Higher Executive Officer	Administrative Officer	Assistant Principal Officer	Principal Officer	Assistant Secretary
Female	45	14	35	10	1
Male	36	9	30	13	2

Tourism Funding

130. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will inform Fáilte Ireland of the need to reopen phase 1 of the tourism business continuity scheme to new applicants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17955/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin) : The administration of the Tourism Business Continuity Scheme is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's question to them for further details regarding the scheme. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Departmental Data

131. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types her Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17981/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): I am advised that, other than personnel files relating to staff transferring between the two departments, my department has not shared any data sets, databases or files with the Department of Health during the period specified by the Deputy.

General Data Protection Regulation

132. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the number of complaints her Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [18000/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin) : The information requested in respect Data Subject Access Requests under GDPR received by my Department during the period specified by the Deputy is set out in the table below.

YEAR	REQUESTS RECEIVED	REQUESTS REFUSED	REASON FOR REFUSAL (If Applicable)
2018	7	0	n/a
2019	4	2	In one case no identification was provided. In the second case the request was refused on the basis that no records exist.
2020	6	1	No records exist
2021	1	1	No records exist

Social and Affordable Housing

133. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the average cost for retrofitting a social housing unit as part of the national retrofitting scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17705/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The 2021 Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (EERP) is a newly revised programme devised around the Programme for Government with a set target of over 500,000 homes to be retrofit

by 2030, of which it is estimated approximately 36,000 will be local authority owned homes.

In early 2021, local authorities received an allocation along with a minimum target of homes they are required to retrofit under the programme, which has been devised in a way to give local authorities a level of flexibility when selecting properties to retrofit. The programme allows a mix of properties to be chosen, ranging from those requiring minor levels of works to properties needing the maximum level of retrofitting required to bring them to a B2/cost Optimum standard.

Under the new EERP programme costs on individual homes could vary from €13,000 to €45,000. The final cost on a home will depend on its pre-works building standard and energy performance. Targets set and funding allocated to local authorities under the new programme are based on an expected all in average cost of €30,000 per home.

Local Authority Housing

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if it will be necessary to invoke emergency housing procedures in order to assure the rapid delivery of direct build local authority houses on public lands in the shortest possible timescale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17654/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien) : The delivery of housing supports is a key priority of Government and this is reflected in the Programme for Government commitment to increase the social housing stock nationally by more than 50,000, with a key emphasis on delivering new build homes.

The Government investment for the delivery of all housing programmes this year alone, is €3.3 billion and given the major focus on new build social homes, I have taken a number of measures to facilitate expedited delivery by local authorities and the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). In particular, in September 2020 I increased from €2 million to €6 million, the threshold within which local authorities can advance their proposals for new social housing construction projects, for funding confirmation by my Department via a single approval process.

As Minister, I have established a High Level Housing Delivery Group which meets regularly and includes key stakeholders from the local authorities, the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), the Housing Agency and the Housing Delivery Coordination Office (HDCO). This Group meets regularly to monitor and coordinate delivery of social housing programmes and to identify and address any systemic issues that could block or delay progress.

I have also enhanced the role of the HDCO to work with all local authorities on accelerating their social housing construction programmes, including the activation of existing sites and the acquisition and development of new sites. The restrictions on construction activity from 8th January last - following on from the 2020 restrictions - will have an unavoidable impact on the completion timelines for all housing construction, including public housing. However this week's announcement of the phased easing of public health restrictions will now see all residential construction projects able to recommence from 12th April. I will be asking all local authorities to work with the construction sector to prioritise the earliest possible resumption of public housing projects, consistent with the public health guidelines.

The Government will be publishing a new housing strategy this year, which will set out details of social housing delivery out to 2025, including social housing targets for 2022 onwards. While local authorities already have social housing construction programmes in train, I am keen that they are proactive in adding to this pipeline and, working with the AHBs, in advancing their

existing projects as speedily as possible with the assurance of the funding being available from my Department.

To provide transparency on the new social housing projects being advanced, my Department publishes a Social Housing Construction Status Report each quarter. These reports provide details of the social housing construction schemes completed and those in the pipeline for all local authority areas. The report for 2020 is available at the following link: <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-obrien-publishes-2020-social-housing-statistics/>. The publication of this information can also give Councillors and public representatives the opportunity to work with the local authority officials to press the advancement of these social housing delivery projects, in line with the 2021 delivery targets already in place and the multi-annual targets that we will be publishing with this year's new housing strategy.

Social and Affordable Housing

135. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if a prospective tenant who qualifies for the homeless HAP support can rent a home from a landlord that is related to them; if so, the circumstances and rules regulating same; if each local authority is operating the system under the same guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17659/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme is deemed to be a social housing support under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. As a long term housing support, an assessment of housing need must be completed in order for a household to qualify for HAP. Any household with an identified housing need is eligible for HAP.

Under HAP, households at risk of homelessness may be eligible for additional supports. To qualify for specific additional supports available to homeless households, a household must have been determined by the relevant local authority to be homeless within the meaning of section 2 of the Housing Act 1988. The operation of local homeless services, including the Place Finder Service, is a matter for each local authority.

In order for housing assistance to be provided under the Act the housing authority must be satisfied that the tenancy concerned is or would be a tenancy in good faith. Where there is a family relationship between the tenant and the landlord, the housing authority may seek evidence of a previous landlord and tenant relationship between a landlord and the HAP applicant. This evidence may include:

- Proof of rent payments;
- A lease or tenancy agreement for the property; and
- Registration of the tenancy with the Residential Tenancies Board.

HAP support is available to tenants in rent a room scheme arrangements, however, the rental of a room to a civil partner, son or daughter is excluded from this scheme. HAP cannot be paid where the tenant is seeking to rent within the family home.

In order for a housing authority to be satisfied that a tenancy is or would be in good faith, the onus is on the applicant and landlord to prove that what is being proposed is a bona fide tenancy. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the housing authority to make a decision in each individual case.

European Convention on Human Rights

136. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the report issued by the European Committee on Social Rights in March 2021 which stated that the Government is still in breach of article 16 of the European Convention of Human Rights with respect to local authority tenants and Traveller accommodation; the additional actions he plans to take to address this breach of the international human rights obligations of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17669/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien) : My Department supports a number of local authority housing stock improvement programmes which have seen €457m of exchequer funding invested in local authority housing stock improvement works since 2014. For example:

- The Energy Efficiency Programme aims to improve energy performance and comfort levels in homes. Since 2014, 60,357 homes have benefited from some level of retrofitting works at a cost of €134m

- The Voids Programme funds local authorities to remediate vacant homes to ensure they meet minimum letting standards. Since 2014, 16,102 vacant local authority homes have been remediated and re-let at a cost of €229m

- The Disabled Persons Grant Scheme funds necessary adaptations to local authority housing stock to accommodate the needs of the elderly and disabled and to relieve overcrowding. Since 2014, thousands of households have had their living conditions improved at a cost of €94m.

Moving forward, my Department is working with the local authority sector, through the City and County Management Association to transition the sector to a new planned maintenance approach based on stock condition surveys. Budget 2021 saw a significant uplift in Energy Efficiency funding and the Programme for Government commits to further funding being made available to local authorities going forward for planned maintenance works; insulation, windows and doors and heating systems.

With regards to Traveller Accommodation, a Programme Board has now been established to drive the implementation of recommendations contained within the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review Report. The Board had its first meeting on the 24 March 2021. Progress has already been made on a number of the recommendations set out in the report including the method of allocation of funding to local authorities which was modified in 2020 and improvements to data capture on the characteristics of the Traveller community as part of the Census.

A revised and affordable Caravan Loan Scheme for Traveller families is being introduced on a 6-month pilot basis across four local authorities from May 2021 with the objective of rolling it out nationally if the pilot proves successful. This scheme has the potential to make an immediate and hugely significant improvement to living conditions for many Traveller families. For the first time in six years the full capital and current budget allocations for Traveller accommodation were expended in 2020.

In 2020 just over 250 halting sites, both authorised and unauthorised, were audited for Covid preparedness and a list of deficiencies and checklist of works was prepared for each site. This resulted in over €4m of investment in improvements to site conditions.

Social and Affordable Housing

137. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide a breakdown of the 29,720 households that have had their social housing needs met since 2016; the percentage that were housed through private rental accommodation and housing assistance payments; the percentage that were allocated permanent housing through local authority housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17719/21]

138. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide a breakdown of the 6,813 households that have had their social housing needs met since 2019; the percentage that were housed through private rental accommodation and housing assistance payments; the percentage that were allocated permanent housing through local authority housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17720/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137, 138 and 141 together.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority administrative area are provided in the annual statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA).

The most recent summary, conducted in November 2020, shows that 61,880 households were assessed as qualified for and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 6,813 households or 9.9% on the last assessment in June 2019. Since 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 61,880, a reduction of 32.4%.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists. As such, the numbers of housing solutions provided do not equate to changes in the annual SSHA. The table below includes data on the number of housing solutions provided in each year from 2016-2020, which are provided by new social housing delivery through build acquisition and leasing, in addition to housing solutions supported by HAP and RAS.

Year	Number of Housing Solutions Provided
2016	19,045
2017	25,901
2018	27,103
2019	28,075
2020	24,625

The allocation of dwellings to qualified households is a matter for the local authority concerned, in accordance with their allocation scheme made under section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations. This legislation requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

Social and Affordable Housing

139. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide a breakdown of the 61,880 households assessed as being qualified for social

housing supports as of 2 November 2020 by household size; if any of these households are currently in receipt of the housing assistance payment; the percentage that are in homeless accommodation; the percentage that are on transfer lists in the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17721/21]

140. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if there are other households assessed as being qualified for social housing supports that are not included in the 61,880 households assessed as being qualified for social housing supports as of 2 November 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17722/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 140 together.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority administrative area are provided in the annual statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA).

The most recent summary, conducted in November 2020, shows that 61,880 households were assessed as qualified for and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 6,813 households or 9.9% on the last assessment in June 2019.

Below is the link to the summary report for 2020 which includes breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories.

Tables 2.4 and A1.4 of the report provide details on household size. It should be noted that the category “Household Composition” in the previous reports, was replaced in the 2019 report by the “Household Size” profile category which provides more granular level of detail regarding the number of persons in each household type.

Tables 2.7 and A1.7 provide details on the breakdown of the current tenure, including those in emergency accommodation/none.

The key figure reported in the SSHA is referred to as ‘net need’. Net need is the total number of households qualified for social housing support whose need for support is not being met. This total excludes the following households:

- **Duplicate applications** – Where a household has applied to more than one authority for social housing support, only their first application was included in the count.

- **Those in receipt of social housing support** —for example, households currently living in local authority rented accommodation, approved housing body accommodation, accommodation provided under the HAP scheme, accommodation provided under the RAS, or accommodation provided under the SHCEP schemes.

- **Households on a transfer list** —any household that has applied for a transfer from an existing form of social housing support including HAP.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists.

2020 Report

www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/#:~:text=The%20Summary%20of%20Social%20Housing,is%20not%20currently%20being%20met.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 137.

Housing Data

142. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the current wait time for approval of Rebuilding Ireland home loans by county; the number of applicants awaiting approval by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17752/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme remains open for business. All local authorities are receiving and processing RIHL applications and are incorporating increased flexibility to accommodate applicants during the COVID 19 Pandemic.

It is anticipated that processing of a complete and valid application will take approximately 6-8 weeks. This period may vary during the current COVID-19 pandemic and depending on the local authority and the details of individual applications.

My Department does not collect information on the current wait times for approval or the number of applications awaiting approval.

Local Authority Housing

143. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will introduce a policy to allow both parties in a relationship breakdown who are local authority housing applicants to separately retain their years served together on the housing list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17753/21]

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.

If a household meets the eligibility and need criteria, it qualifies for the suite of social housing supports, including HAP, and is placed on the housing list to be considered for the allocation of suitable tenancies in accordance with the authority's allocation scheme.

Under the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, a local authority may review a household's qualification for social housing support in order to ensure that a household continues to qualify for social housing support and thus can remain on a housing list. Such a review may be carried out by a local authority whenever it becomes aware of changes in household circumstances or whenever a review is considered appropriate.

The oversight and practical management of housing lists is a matter for the relevant local authority, in accordance with the 2009 Act and associated regulations. Specifically, section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions.

Housing Policy

144. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he plans to review the income thresholds for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; his views on the case of a person (details supplied); his further views on whether the scheme should be amended to accommodate cases such as this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17800/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Single applicants for the loan must not be earning greater than €50,000 gross per annum. These income limits are unchanged from the previous local authority loan offerings.

Loan applicants who are dissatisfied with a loan application decision of a local authority Credit Committee can usually appeal the decision to the local authority. However if someone does not meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme they cannot appeal the decision.

The new Programme for Government "Our Shared Future" contains a commitment to expand the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. Officials in my Department are currently reviewing the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on this basis.

Land Development Agency

145. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if all paid positions of employment at the Land Development Agency are hired through a public process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17820/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke) : The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on an interim basis in September 2018, by way of an Establishment Order made under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971, pending the enactment of primary legislation when it will be established as a commercial State agency.

The day to day management of the LDA is matter for the LDA Chief Executive and his management team reporting to the LDA Interim Board. Under its Establishment Order, the LDA may appoint such and so many persons to be employees as it may determine.

As with all State bodies operating under the aegis of my Department, arrangements have been put in place by the LDA through which Oireachtas members can request information directly from the Agency in relation to operational matters - in this regard, the LDA may be contacted directly at oireachtas@lda.ie.

In order to assist the Deputy, enquiries were made with the LDA who confirmed it is standard practice that roles within the LDA are filled following a competitive and public hiring process. However, one fixed-term temporary post was previously recruited without public advertisement as an interim measure. Posts are generally advertised across multiple platforms, including the LDA's own website, the Public Appointment Service website and other websites relevant to the post.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

146. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when the National Parks and Wildlife Service will produce proposals for deer management in relation to land it has responsibility for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17824/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan) : The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department is committed to the active management of the deer species within State owned National Parks and Nature Reserves and, as part of its regular on-going management operations, NPWS carry out regular surveys, censuses and reports on deer in our sites. Where appropriate, and depending on the annual count and instances of damage caused by deer to habitats, especially woodland, culls may need to be carried out to ensure that deer populations do not reach levels that would have negative ecological consequences.

However, it should be noted that while the NPWS does licence hunting of deer, my Department does not own the deer population and is not responsible for the management of deer populations generally. Deer, albeit larger, are like other wild animals in this country and it is not part of the remit of my Department, nor indeed would it be generally possible, to cordon them onto specific areas of land. In the case of deer on private property, management is a matter for the relevant landowner.

With regard to the management of deer within State owned National Parks and Nature Reserves, culling is a regular and on-going management operation and is undertaken periodically when resources, weather and timing allows. This allows my Department work towards sustainable herd management, and as such there is and will continue to be, a need to remove a certain percentage of animals from the herd encompassing both age and gender on an on-going basis.

Departmental Staff

147. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17913/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below, and reflects the position at 28 February 2021.

Grade	Female	Male	Total
ASSISTANT SECRETARY	4	4	8
PRINCIPAL	14	31	45
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL	80	55	135
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER	16	11	27
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER	78	66	144
Total	192	167	359

Vacant Properties

148. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the details of the €7,746,404 payment (details supplied) made by Dublin City Council to the receivers with regard to the vacant 58 units at Prospect Hill, Finglas in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17924/21]

149. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the payments totalling €7,746,404 made by Dublin City Council to the receiver for the 58 vacant units at Prospect Hill, Finglas includes the potential or projected costs of the refurbishment

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of any or all of the individual units; if the figure does not include such costs, the projected costs to Dublin City Council of refurbishing any or all of the units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17925/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 and 149 together.

The details of payments made by Dublin City Council (DCC) to the receivers with regard to the vacant 58 units at Prospect Hill are a matter for DCC.

DCC has advised my Department that a scope of works exercise is currently underway to refurbish these apartments with a view to going to tender in Q2 2021. DCC has advised that the payments made to the receiver to date do not include costs associated with the refurbishment. The cost of this work will be established once the tender process is complete.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 646 of 24 March 2021 for further details on this matter.

Departmental Policy Functions

150. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the advice he can provide in relation to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17933/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Government announced that additional public health restrictions would apply under Level 5 of the Plan for Living with COVID-19 on 6 January 2021. The additional restrictions required all construction activity to cease from 6pm on Friday 8 January, with a number of exceptions. These measures are set out in The Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) (No. 10) Regulations 2020 (as amended). The decision on restrictions was taken by the Government following advice from NPHET.

With regard to private housing development, the Regulations provide that housing and construction works ongoing on 8 January could continue where the works required to render the property capable of occupation were scheduled for completion by 31 January 2021. The Regulations also provide for the supply and delivery of essential or emergency maintenance and repair services to businesses and homes (including electrical, gas, oil, plumbing, glazing and roofing services) on an emergency call-out basis. No other private housing construction activity is allowed under the Regulations.

On 30 March, the Government announced that all residential construction can resume from 12 April 2021.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

151. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans to amend the tenant purchase scheme to enable persons that are in receipt of a pension and have the financial resources to buy out their council home avail of this scheme; when it is proposed to make such necessary amendments to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17935/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme

is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the scheme is determined by the relevant local authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, local authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In determining reckonable income, the income of all tenants of the house, including adult children that are joint tenants, is included, as is the income of the spouse, civil partner or other partner / co-habitant of a tenant who lives in the house with them, thus ensuring the appropriate level of discount is applied to the purchase price.

The minimum income criterion was introduced in order to ensuring the sustainability of the scheme. Applicants must demonstrate that they have an income that is long-term and sustainable in nature. This ensures that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

The financing of any house sold under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is a separate matter from the eligibility criteria for the scheme. If the tenant is deemed eligible under the scheme, he or she may fund the purchase of a house from one, or a combination, of his / her own resources or a mortgage provided by a financial institution or a local authority house purchase loan.

A review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation has been undertaken. In addition, the Programme for Government commits to maintaining the right of social housing tenants to purchase their own home with some changes to eligibility. The review and the commitments in the Programme for Government are being examined as part of the work on the broader social housing reform agenda. I expect to be in a position to publish the review and finalise changes to the Scheme once the work on these reform measures is complete.

Social and Affordable Housing

152. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will improve income eligibility limits for social housing in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan in which the existing limits are much too low at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17936/21]

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 accord-

ing 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 Additional Superannuation Contribution. 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.

A table setting out the details of the three bands and the limits currently applicable in each local authority area is available on the Department's website at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fcb86-social-housing-support-table-of-income-limits-2-june-2016/>

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 in 2011 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 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.

Waterways Ireland

153. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the capital funding for Waterways Ireland will be increased in 2021 to enable an improved level of maintenance and improvement works to be carried out on the navigable waterways in view of the low level of such work over recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17937/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): Waterways Ireland's work programmes are critical to providing a safe and high quality recreational environment for the public, whilst also preserving the industrial and environmental heritage of the waterways for future generations. These challenges must be balanced with its objective of increasing recreational activity across all of our waterways.

As regards 2021 funding, a provision of €28,918,000 has been provided in the Revised Estimates Volume as part of Budget 2021. This is an overall increase of just over €3,000,000 on

the original 2020 allocation. Any proposed works to be carried out in 2021 are an operational matter for Waterways Ireland, which will take into account its strategic business objectives for the waterways network.

As Minister, I have many competing and compelling requests for funding in 2021. I am acutely aware of the value of our inland waterways' amenity and the excellent work that Waterways Ireland carries out.

Going forward, my priority is to secure the level of current and capital resources that will allow maximum progress to be achieved across the entire range of programmes for which my Department is responsible, including Waterways Ireland and the Heritage area. Details of specific allocations towards individual programmes will be finalised as part of the annual Estimates processes.

Departmental Data

154. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17975/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The scope of the question is very broad and compilation of the information sought would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work, as it would require all areas of my Department's extensive range of activities to be checked in respect of a 20 year period.

Based on the information that is readily accessible to my Department in the time available, no specific flows of personal data from my Department to the Department of Health have been identified.

I am aware that, as part of the Housing First National Implementation Group, the Department of Health is provided with an update on the number of individuals currently in a Housing First tenancy and the number of new tenancies created in the previous month. The Group meets every 2-3 months and these updates are provided to the Department prior to each meeting. These figures are tabulated by my Department from returns provided by lead local authorities. They are provided in Word document format with tables outlining the national total and the figures by local authority. Although these constitute data provided to the Department of Health, no details are provided that relate to private individuals or officials. Aggregated figures are given. No private individual or official is identified and there is no personal information in relation to any identifiable individual.

Data Protection

155. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17994/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department has received no complaints under the heading of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In terms of data information requests, Article 15 of the GDPR provides for the right of access to personal data and certain information, by data subjects. Details of the requests received are supplied in the table below.

All requests were accepted but in some instances the request was not relevant to this Department or the data subject withdrew their request or did not proceed with the request when asked to provide identification.

[Table]

Housing Provision

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which he has considered additional measures to address the housing crisis with particular reference to the rapidly escalating house prices, the increasing number of persons seeking to purchase an affordable house and the number of applicants on local authority housing waiting list; his plans to introduce radical measures to address the situation which is now for many persons an emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18006/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In terms of the number of households on social housing waiting lists, details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority administrative area are provided in the annual statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA).

The most recent summary, conducted in November 2020, shows that 61,880 households were assessed as qualified for, and being in need of, social housing support. This represents a decrease of 6,813 households or 9.9% on the last assessment in June 2019. Since 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 61,880, a reduction of 32.4%.

In line with the commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system in the Programme for Government, 'Our Shared Future', Government approved the priority drafting of the Affordable Housing Bill 2020 on 22 December 2020, and I published the General Scheme on 20 January last.

The Bill includes provisions to underpin three schemes delivering on the Programme for Government commitment to prioritise the increased supply of affordable homes through (1) affordable homes for purchase delivered by local authorities (2) a new affordable purchase shared equity scheme for private homes, and (3) the introduction of a new form of tenure in Cost Rental. The provision of affordable housing to purchase is covered by two of the three elements of the Bill. The drafting of the Bill is progressing well.

The Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) supports affordable homes being delivered by local authorities, funding infrastructure on local authority lands to enable the delivery of affordable homes to purchase or rent. Funding of almost €188 million has been approved in principle in support of 38 infrastructure projects in 14 local authority areas, which will assist in the delivery of almost 4,000 more affordable homes. In addition to these projects, approval in principle has also been given to three further applications for SSF funding, namely, Dublin City Council's projects in Emmet Road and Oscar Traynor Road, and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council's project in Shanganagh. Affordable homes for purchase provided by local authorities via the SSF will come with an initial purchase price of between 10% and 40% below market prices.

Another element of the Bill, the Affordable Purchase Shared Equity scheme, is designed to

help bridge the gap, by means of an equity stake, between the mortgage people have and the price of the new home they wish to buy. This affordability measure will increase housing supply and will enable First Time Buyers to buy a new home at a price they can afford.

In addition to the measures in the Affordable Housing Bill 2020, the Land Development Agency is tasked to work with Government Departments, local authorities, state agencies and other stakeholders to assemble strategic sites in urban areas and ensure the sustainable development of social and affordable homes for rent and purchase. On establishment, the LDA had access to an initial tranche of 8 sites that have near term delivery potential for approximately 3,400 new homes. The LDA will have regard to Government policy, and all appropriate legislation, on the appropriate tenure mix for developments on public land, as well as the criteria for the operation of cost rental and affordable housing schemes.

Additional affordability measures which promote housing supply, such as the Help to buy scheme and the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, are already available to eligible applicants.

The Help to Buy Scheme has had 23,545 approvals by the end of February 2021, with the estimated total value of approved Help to Buy claims to date in the order of €389.2 million.

At the end of February 2021, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan had 3,817 approvals. Budget 2021 confirmed that €210 million has been sanctioned for RIHL lending in 2021.

Traveller Accommodation

157. Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he has engaged with Clare County Council on the need for a Traveller project in the county; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 50% of homelessness in County Clare is from the Traveller community and that there are 15 vacant Traveller accommodation units in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18020/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke) : In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist local authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. It is a matter for each local authority to set targets for the provision of Traveller accommodation, which they outline in their Traveller accommodation programmes.

In 2020, funding of €14.5 million was provided for the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation for new building and improvement works. For 2021 this funding has increased to €15.5 million. In addition, in 2020, my Department provided €56.4 million on the repair and re-let of 3,067 vacant local authority homes.

Addressing homelessness is a significant priority for this Government with €218m in Exchequer funding allocated to support the provision of homeless accommodation services in 2021. My Department's role involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at a local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services rests with individual housing authorities and Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 sets out the purposes for which costs may be incurred by housing authorities in respect of the provision of homeless accommodation services.

While responsibility for the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, the administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis, with nine administrative regions in place. In the Mid West region, Limerick City and County Council is the lead authority for the region along with Clare. A homelessness consultative forum has been established in each region in accordance with Chapter 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009. It is a matter for the management group of the consultative forum, in the first instance, to determine the need for services and the funding required to address homelessness at a regional level. My Department contributed some €9.2m in Exchequer funding to the Mid West region in support of homeless accommodation services in 2020.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

158. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the criteria required under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund for the construction of roads as part of the developments; and if this applies equally to all types of roads. [18056/21]

159. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the level of expenditure incurred in the construction of major roads under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund by county in tabular form. [18057/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 together.

The Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) was designed to support housing supply by relieving critical infrastructure blockages. 30 projects were approved with an overall budget of €195.7m, €146.8m Exchequer funded and the remainder funded by local authorities. Full details of the approvals are available online at www.rebuildingireland.ie/LIHAF.

All proposals for funding under LIHAF were evaluated and assessed in line with the criteria set out in Appendix 1 to the original Call for Proposals. These criteria included the link to housing delivery; the level of innovation and collaboration, the strategic fit of the proposal, the financial package and the delivery outcomes. The detailed criteria are available at the same link www.rebuildingireland.ie/lihaf/.

Of the 30 projects, 2 projects will not proceed. Kildare County Council has confirmed that the Naas Inner Relief Road will not progress and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has confirmed that the Clay Farm project will now not proceed. One further project, Clonburris in South Dublin County Council, will not avail of LIHAF funding but will proceed in conjunction with funding from the Urban Renewal Development Fund.

In terms of LIHAF funding drawdown, thus far, most infrastructure projects have been at the design, planning and procurement stages, and the bulk of expenditure will arise during the construction phase. This is reflected in the level of expenditure to end Q1 2021, with approximately €61.248m in Exchequer funds drawn down (matched by a further 25% local authority funding bringing the total expenditure to €81.664m). The table below details the exchequer funding drawn down up to end of Q1 2021.

[Table]

160. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of outstanding applications with his Department (details supplied); the number applied for over the past five years; the outcomes; his plans for streamlining the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18059/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke) : In the past five years for County Mayo my Department has received thirteen applications for a foreshore consent that come within my remit under the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended, for proposed works and activities on the foreshore. Of the thirteen applications received, eight have been determined, four are currently under consideration and one was recently withdrawn. Further details of these applications can be found in the attached spreadsheet and on my Department's website.

My Department has also received three additional pre-applications for proposed works or activities on the foreshore which are currently the subject of a standard technical review. In the event that these proposals are cleared to proceed to full application status, details of these applications will appear on my Department's website.

It is intended that the Maritime Area Planning Bill will replace the existing State consenting regime under the Foreshore Act and streamline arrangements on the basis of a single consent principle i.e. one state consent called a Maritime Area Consent or MAC to enable occupation of the Maritime Area and one development consent (planning permission), with a single environmental assessment to take place at the planning stage.

The final legal text of the Marine Area Planning Bill (previously titled, Marine Planning and Development Management Bill) is due to be published in the near future.

[Table]

Fire Service

161. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of times calls were placed to the fire service in cases in which the closest retained fire service was unavailable to attend due to unavailability of personnel in which alternative tenders had to attend instead by county over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18063/21]

162. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of fire service callouts that have been responded to by the retained fire service nationwide by county; the number that have been responded to by the permanent fire service by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18064/21]

163. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of retained firefighters in the fire service; the number of permanent firefighters in the service; the age breakdown of both groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18065/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 to 163, inclusive, together.

The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station

premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. My Department supports fire authorities through setting general policy, providing the legislative framework, running a central training programme and issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects. Fire services issues are managed in my Department by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM).

Fire services are provided in Ireland by local authorities in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. Under this legislation, there are 31 fire authorities which provide fire prevention and fire protection services for communities through 27 service delivery structures. Local authority fire services are delivered by approximately 3,300 local authority staff engaged at 217 fire stations nationwide, with 16 of these stations being staffed by full-time firefighters, a further 4 are mixed full-time and retained, and 197 are staff by retained firefighters.

My Department collects statistics from local authorities, on an annual basis, regarding fire service attendance at incidents and the types of incident involved. Fire statistics for the past five years are available at the link below:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/f01ff-fire-statistics/>

The information requested by the Deputy in regard to mobilisation of fire service responses is not available in my Department. However, it should be noted that the arrangements for mobilising a response to a 999/112 call from the public for fire service assistance are handled at three Regional Communications Centres, where call-takers establish the location and nature of the emergency and then mobilise the nearest available fire brigade resource (or resources) to the scene. Individual fire stations (or an appliance in the station in the case of multi-appliance stations) may not be available to respond (they may already be attending another call) or may be 'off the run' at different times for a number of reasons, including the non-availability of personnel. Where a crew are already dealing with an incident or are unavailable for any reason, the next resources on the pre-determined attendance list for that kind of emergency are mobilised by the Regional Communications Centre. I am aware that a small number of situations occurred over the last twelve months where crews were not available due to covid cases or close contacts with covid cases. However, an appropriate fire service response was made to all calls for assistance from the public.

While my Department does not routinely collect the data in the format requested by the Deputy, a breakdown of the number of firefighters in each fire service as of March 2021, based on data supplied by local authorities, is set out in the table below.

Fire service	Total no. of operational staff in stations
Carlow	45
Cavan	93
Clare	76
Cork City	152
Cork County	204
Donegal	154
Dublin	963
Galway	138
Kerry	104
Kildare	63
Kilkenny	67
Laois	73

Fire service	Total no. of operational staff in stations
Leitrim	43
Limerick	140
Longford	45
Louth	100
Mayo	119
Meath	72
Monaghan	51
Offaly	51
Roscommon	45
Sligo	47
Tipperary	127
Waterford	124
Westmeath	46
Wexford	64
Wicklow	95
Total	3301

Fire Service

164. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he has reviewed the recommendations of a report (details supplied); his plans to implement the recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18066/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. My Department supports fire authorities through setting general policy, providing the legislative framework, running a central training programme and issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects. Fire services issues are managed in my Department by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM).

The Farrell Grant Sparks (FGS) Report referred to by the Deputy was published in January 2002 and it represented a comprehensive review of fire services and fire safety in Ireland at that time.

It identified a number of areas where fire services and the overall approach to fire safety could be improved and was an important landmark in the development of fire services in Ireland. Implementation of its recommendations contributed towards a re-orientation and re-shaping of local authority fire services, with a systemic approach to fire risk management, including a much greater emphasis on Community Fire Safety, together with the focus on incident response.

As the recommendations of the FGS Report were implemented through the Fire Services Change Programme (2005 - 2007) there has been significant development of fire services in Ireland across a wide spectrum of areas. The National Incident Command System was established and Standard Operating Guidance to support safe and effective operations were developed and introduced across all fire services.

The most significant outcome, which is attributed generally to the Community Fire Safety

approach, is the decline in the rate of fire-related fatalities which, averaged over three years, now stands at four deaths per million of population, placing Ireland in the league of most fire safe countries. We cannot be complacent, however, and there are significant ongoing fire safety programmes as well as investment in and development of infrastructure including fire stations, the appliance fleet, equipment and training.

After the successful Fire Services Change Programme, the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM) was established in my Department in 2009 to give effect to the recommendations in the FGS Report relating to the role of national government in supporting local authority fire services.

This NDFEM structure has proved to be very effective, and the close collaboration between my Department and local authority fire services has been central to the development of effective emergency management response to a range of severe weather and flooding emergencies since 2009. Likewise national fire safety campaigns have been carried out successfully in the aftermath of tragic fires.

The NDFEM carried out a further significant review of fire services and fire safety in Ireland in 2012 and published the policy document “Keeping Communities Safe” in 2013. This sets out an approach to fire safety across a number of areas, including risk management; fire safety; service response; dealing with large scale incidents; inter-agency work; major emergency management; quality assurance; performance reporting and implementation. The Review is available on my Department’s website at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ec22c-fire-services-policy/>

In 2016, an external validation exercise on the implementation by local authorities of “Keeping Communities Safe”, concluded that the public are served well by fire services in Ireland. There has been a welcome downward trend in fires and other emergencies requiring fire service assistance over a number of years and a reduction in the incidence of loss of life in fire as noted above.

In conclusion, the FGS Report was a point of major change in the approach to fire safety and fire services in Ireland and the developments arising from the implementation of its recommendations have made Ireland a safer country.

Fire Service

165. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the measures in place to ensure retention, upskilling and promotion of retained fire-fighters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18067/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. My Department supports fire authorities through setting general policy, providing the legislative framework, running a central training programme and issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects. Fire services issues are managed in my Department by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM).

Under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 there are 31 fire authorities which provide fire

prevention and fire protection services for communities through 27 service delivery structures. Local authorities employ 3,300 staff who work at 218 fire stations nationwide. Fire services are provided by combinations of full-time and retained firefighters, professional, competent and highly committed personnel who work to protect their communities.

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) provides support to individual fire services in the areas of Human Resources and Industrial Relations. The LGMA works with the NDFEM to monitor issues associated with recruitment and retention and on developing strategies to address issues which arise. It is clear that in some areas societal changes are impacting on the availability of personnel for the retained fire service and the number of candidates applying for retained fire service positions is limited in some cases. However, local authorities across the country continue to maintain their fire services throughout.

In relation to upskilling, on initially joining the fire service, retained firefighters are trained in accordance with a national syllabus. Fire-fighters are given further specialist training as required in the early stages of their careers. They continue to practice their skills through-out their careers with weekly on-station training. However, this ongoing local training has been disrupted by covid-related restrictions, as has much of fire service training provided at national level.

Promotional opportunities in the retained fire services are limited of necessity to vacancies which arise in the fire fighters' own station. The LGMA is currently engaged with staff representative bodies in relation to changing one aspect of promotion arrangements, as part of the overall terms of employment.

In summary, the issues of recruitment, retention, upskilling and promotion of retained firefighter are continuously monitored by the LGMA in association with the Management Board of the NDFEM. The aim is to ensure that the entire country continues to be served effectively into the coming decades by fire services that are equipped to face and meet the challenges of our ever-changing society.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

166. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the amount of expenditure incurred by county and site by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the provision of car parking in tabular form. [18078/21]

167. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of current plans by county and site by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the provision of car parking and other mechanisms for safe access to each NPWS site in tabular form. [18079/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan) : I propose to take Questions Nos. 166 and 167 together.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department manages a natural heritage network of some 87,000 hectares across over 80 individual sites. Many of these sites have parking facilities which are upgraded and maintained on an ongoing basis as part of the regular operation activities of the NPWS, subject to both resourcing and consideration of the conservation requirements of these sites.

The pandemic has exposed significant challenges on all National Parks, nature reserves and scenic areas and I am of the view that alternative measures to reduce pressures on habitats and natural amenities must be prioritised over and above extending or providing car parks.

1 April 2021

I am keen that sustainable mobility options be explored in the longer term to reduce traffic pressures. Such measures do not necessarily need to be state-provided and I would be hopeful of the private sector providing, for example shuttle services to locations where there is clearly a demand.

At present, there is no charge for car parking at any of our sites, so no current expenditure is explicitly incurred in security or revenue collection thereon. I attach below a table of capital expenditure on car parks at our sites in 2020. Funding is provided when appropriate on a case by case basis.

County	Location	Project	Amount spent
Kerry	Tomies Wood, Killarney National Park	Tomies Wood car park and public access	€687,919.19
Kerry	Killarney National Park	Dinis Loop	€147,673.48
Clare	Coole Park	Kerbing at the Coole Bus Park	€25,501
Donegal	Glenveagh National Park	Barrier at Gate in Visitor Centre Public Car Park	€6,844.05
Mayo	Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park	Altnabrocky Road Repairs	€10,000.00

Vacant Properties

168. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of empty or unoccupied domestic dwellings in County Longford by local electoral area. [18080/21]

169. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of empty or unoccupied domestic dwellings in County Westmeath by local electoral area. [18081/21]

170. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of vacant properties in County Longford as per a website (details supplied). [18082/21]

171. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of vacant properties in County Westmeath as per a website (details supplied). [18083/21]

172. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the action that has been taken to date in relation to the number of domestic properties logged on the vacant homes portal in County Longford. [18084/21]

173. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the action that has been taken to date in relation to the number of domestic properties logged on the vacant homes portal in County Westmeath. [18085/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 to 173, inclusive, together.

My Department does not hold the data on the amount of empty or unoccupied domestic dwellings in the State, nor does it hold data on the number of vacant properties in local electoral areas.

The innovative website vacanthomes.ie was developed by Mayo County Council in July

2017 on behalf of the local government sector to serve as a central portal for individuals to anonymously log possible vacant homes and to alert local authorities so that they can then follow up with the registered owners.

It is a key tool in the effort to identify and bring long-term vacant homes back into use, and this source of locally generated information is proving useful in supplementing the country-wide analysis on vacancy and in mobilising communities to assist local authorities in developing and implementing a targeted approach. The website provides useful information for property owners on how to bring their vacant properties back into use and on available financial supports.

The latest statistics from vacanthomes.ie indicate that **106** properties in County Westmeath and **39** properties in County Longford have been logged on the website.

My Department is focused on ensuring that existing housing stock is utilised to its fullest extent including a targeted, effective and co-ordinated approach to identifying and tackling vacancy across Ireland. In that regard, my Department and local authorities are being proactive in dealing with vacant properties and there are a number of schemes available to incentivise reactivating suitable dwellings into the liveable housing stock.

The National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy was published in July 2018, it provides a targeted, effective and coordinated approach to identifying and tackling vacancy across Ireland. The range of objectives and actions it specifies have been pursued in partnership with stakeholders and agencies across the housing sector to address vacancy in our housing stock.

The key drivers of these actions are: local authorities, the Housing Agency, and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), supported by schemes available within my Department specifically designed to tackle vacancy, such as the Repair and Lease Scheme, the Buy and Renew Scheme and the Long Term Leasing Scheme.

- **The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS)** is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental properties. The scheme provides upfront funding to carry out the works and, in return, the property owner agrees to lease the dwelling to the local authority to be used as social housing for a period up to 25 years. The maximum loan for property repair available under the Repair and Lease scheme has been increased by my Department from €40,000 to €60,000.

- **The Buy and Renew** initiative allows local authorities to purchase private vacant properties for use as social housing.

- **The Housing Acquisitions Fund** is a €70 million revolving that was established in January 2017 with the objective of enabling the Housing Agency to acquire vacant units from banks and investment companies for social housing use. The fund is replenished by the Housing Agency through the sale of units primarily to the AHB sector and the funds received are then recycled back into the fund for future acquisitions.

The table below gives a breakdown of the number of properties delivered under each of the schemes in Counties Westmeath and Longford.

Local Authority	Repair and Lease Dwellings Delivered Q2 2017 to Q4 2020	Buy and Renew Dwellings Delivered Q2 2017 to Q4 2020	Housing Agency Acquisitions Dwellings Delivered Q2 2017 to Q4 2020	Total
Longford	6	11	7	24
Westmeath	1	4	13	18

Local Authority	Repair and Lease Dwellings Delivered Q2 2017 to Q4 2020	Buy and Renew Dwellings Delivered Q2 2017 to Q4 2020	Housing Agency Acquisitions Dwellings Delivered Q2 2017 to Q4 2020	Total
Total	7	15	20	42

Housing Inspections

174. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of requests that were made for private rented accommodation inspections to Longford County Council in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18086/21]

175. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of requests that were made for private rented accommodation inspections to Westmeath County Council in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18087/21]

176. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of inspections of private rented accommodation that were carried by Longford County Council in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18089/21]

177. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of inspections of private rented accommodation that were carried by Westmeath County Council in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18090/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 to 177, inclusive, together.

In relation to the number of requests made to Longford County Council and Westmeath County Council for private rented accommodation inspections in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021, the information requested is not reported by local authorities to my Department and is not available.

Information in relation to the number of inspections undertaken in 2020 is currently being collated by my Department and will be available on my Department's website shortly. Inspection data in respect of 2021 is not yet available.

The number of private rental inspections undertaken by the two local authorities in 2019 is set out in the table below:

Local Authority	Total Inspections Undertaken in 2019
Longford County Council	428
Westmeath County Council	723

Annual data in respect of the level of inspections carried out by each local authority is available on my Department's website at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/da3fe-private-housing-market-statistics/>

Rental Accommodation Standards

178. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of complaints from tenants in private rented accommodation in County Long-

ford that were made to the tenancy board in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18091/21]

179. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of complaints from tenants in private rented accommodation in County Westmeath that were made to the tenancy board in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021. [18092/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 and 179 together.

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2021, to operate a national tenancy registration system and to facilitate the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants.

The Clerk of the Dáil requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB set up a dedicated email address for this purpose. The RTB may be contacted at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie to establish the extent to which it may hold the information sought.

Emergency Accommodation

180. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of emergency accommodation units suitable for families in County Longford. [18095/21]

181. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of emergency accommodation units suitable for families in County Westmeath. [18096/21]

182. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of emergency accommodation beds available for homeless men in County Longford in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021, by local electoral area in tabular form. [18097/21]

183. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of emergency accommodation beds available for homeless men in County Westmeath in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021, by local electoral area in tabular form. [18098/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 to 183, inclusive, together.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at a local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services rests with individual housing authorities. Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 sets out the purposes for which costs may be incurred by housing authorities in respect of the provision of homeless accommodation and related services.

While responsibility for the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, the administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis, with nine administrative regions in place. In the Midlands region, Westmeath County Council is the lead authority for the region along with Laois, Longford and Offaly County Councils. A homelessness consultative forum has been established in each region in accordance with Chapter 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009. It is a matter for

the management group of the consultative forum, in the first instance, to determine the services and the funding required to address homelessness in each region.

My Department publishes a detailed monthly report on homelessness, based on data provided by housing authorities. The Report outlines details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. Data relating to homeless adults are presented at a county level. The most recent report, for February 2021, records that there were 10 adults utilising emergency accommodation in county Longford and 26 in Westmeath. Data on families and dependants are represented on a regional level. The February report records that there were 17 families in emergency accommodation in the Midlands Region, which combines counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

These Reports are available to access on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/80ea8-homelessness-data/>

Rental Accommodation Standards

184. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of prosecutions instigated against landlords regarding non-compliant housing standards in tabular form. [18099/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019 specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, ventilation, natural light and the safety of gas, oil and electrical supply. All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply. Responsibility for enforcement of the regulations rests with the relevant local authority.

Local authorities have a strong legislative framework available to them which provides for the issuing of Improvement Notices and Prohibition Notices where landlords are in breach of their obligations. Under Section 34 of that Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992, any person who fails to comply with an improvement notice or re-lets a house in breach of a prohibition notice, will be guilty of an offence and will be liable, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding €5,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or both.

Data in respect of the number of Inspections of private rental properties, Improvement Letters issued, Improvement and Prohibition Notices issued, and the legal actions initiated by local authorities in the period 2005 to 2019 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/da3fe-private-housing-market-statistics/>

Information in relation to the number of inspections and enforcement actions undertaken in 2020 is currently being collated by my Department and will be available on the website shortly.

Domestic Violence

185. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he has communicated with the Turkish Ambassador following the recent withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17754/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I issued a statement on 21 March

making clear that Ireland deeply regrets the decision of the President of Turkey to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. The Convention is essential in protecting women and girls from violence. The decision to withdraw is a serious backwards step for the protection of women's rights in Turkey, and it sends a disturbing message across Europe and beyond.

The decision is particularly incomprehensible as it comes on the eve of the tenth birthday of the Convention, and at a time of a pandemic when gender-based violence has spiked all over the world.

Ireland, and other like-minded States, as well as High Representative Borrell on behalf of the EU, have made clear our deep disappointment at the decision of the Turkish Government and have strongly urged them to reverse this decision.

This move is unfortunately one of a number of recent backward steps by Turkey on the rule of law and human rights. The recent move to ban the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), and to therefore potentially deny representation to millions of Turkish voters, is another troubling step, as are the recent actions against students and LGBT groups.

These actions run counter to Turkey's stated commitment of pursuing a closer relationship with the EU. The EU is built on adherence to fundamental values, including defence of human rights, freedom of expression, and strict respect for the rule of law. For any meaningful progress on Turkey's relationship with the EU to occur, Turkey will need to begin to address its internal human rights situation through a series of positive concrete actions, rather than plans and strategies.

Foreign Policy

186. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the treatment of Christians, Baha'i and other religious minorities in Iran and in particular the recent summons to prison in Tehran of Christians for the crime of belonging to a house church; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17832/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The human rights situation in Iran has long formed an important part of Ireland's engagement and dialogue with Iran.

Reports on the treatment of Christians, Baha'i, and other religious minorities in Iran are deeply concerning. It is unacceptable to discriminate against individuals on the basis of their religion.

Ireland has consistently raised concerns around the treatment of religious minorities in Iran in appropriate international fora. At the most recent session of the UN General Assembly, Ireland supported a Resolution which raised concerns over "increasing restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief" in Iran, including for Christians, Baha'i and other religious minorities. The Resolution called on Iran "to eliminate, in law and in practice, all forms of discrimination on the basis of thought, conscience, religion or belief."

Ireland has also raised concerns about discrimination against religious minorities on a bilateral basis with Iran, as well as a Member of the EU.

Ireland, along with the EU, will continue to encourage progress in relation to religious minorities in Iran, and to make clear our concerns to the Iranian authorities. During my visit to Iran on 7 March, I raised concerns over the human rights situation in Iran with Foreign Minister Zarif, and agreed on the need for increased dialogue on human rights issues.

Passport Services

187. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when he expects the passport service to resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17901/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): In line with Government guidance that, at Level 5 of the National Framework on Living with COVID-19 only essential work should take place, the Passport Service continues to provide a high-quality essential service in line with Government measures to reduce social contact and combat the spread of COVID-19.

This essential service is available for those who are required to travel due to the death or serious illness of a family member or meet the criteria for a reasonable excuse for non-essential travel as defined in the recent amendment to the Health Act 1947, which came into effect on 1 February 2021. Supporting documentation will be required in such cases.

Applicants who require a passport for emergency purposes, or for non-essential travel with a reasonable excuse, should contact the Passport Service via our Customer Service Hub Webchat function on our website.

Irish citizens who are resident overseas should make contact through the local Irish Embassy or Consulate General.

While normal processing of passports has been paused, the staff of the Passport Service continue to produce emergency and urgent applications, to offer customer service through WebChat, to assist with consular assistance for Irish citizens overseas and temporary reassignment of staff to the Department of Health. The Passport Service has issued approximately 2,000 urgent applications, approximately 170 emergency applications and approximately 20,000 simple adult renewals since the beginning of the year. Our Webchat team have answered more 30,000 queries.

The Passport Service has continued to make excellent progress with the Passport Reform Programme. This will deliver a modern passport processing system to replace the current software designed nearly 20 years ago.

The Passport Service has a comprehensive plan in place to resume all services, in line with the National Framework for Living with COVID-19. When operations resume at Level 4, all applications received via Passport Online will be processed. The Passport Service is confident, taking into account measures to ensure a safe workplace, that any Passport Online backlog can be cleared in six to eight weeks.

The Passport Service plans to resume processing of routine paper based applications such as Passport Express, Northern Ireland Passport Express and applications for Foreign Birth Registrations at Level 3 of the framework.

Departmental Staff

188. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17910/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the Department of Foreign Affairs, there are three distinct streams at Headquarters - Diplomatic, General Service and Spe-

cialist. For sake of completeness, the figures listed below include equivalent grades to those referenced in the Deputy's question.

Grade Group	Female	Male	Total
ASEC and equivalent	6	15	21
PO & equivalent	50	80	130
AP & equivalent	150	161	311
AO & equivalent	94	75	169
HEO & equivalent	68	50	118
Total	368	381	749

Passport Services

189. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if consideration is being given to setting up a new office (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17952/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service of my Department is one unified service composed of three constituent offices located in Lower Mount Street and Balbriggan in Dublin and South Mall in Cork. It operates three passport printing machines, two of which are located in the main production facility in Balbriggan and the third in the Passport Office in Lower Mount Street, Dublin.

Passport applications from citizens residing in Ireland or elsewhere in the world are distributed for processing across the three Passport Offices. All passport applications are processed through the centralised automated passport service system which operates on the basis of application type and date of receipt of an application to ensure all applicants, regardless of where in the world they reside, receive the same service. All production facilities can print a passport, irrespective of the channel through which the application is processed.

I am satisfied that the printing capacity of production equipment currently employed by the Passport Service is sufficient to meet the current and anticipated future demand for passports and therefore the establishment of a new office in the location mentioned is not contemplated at this time.

I would like to draw attention to the well-advanced Passport Reform Programme. It continues to deliver major upgrades to the Passport Service technology platforms and business processes as well as significant customer service improvements.

The Passport Service has continued to make excellent progress with the Passport Reform Programme. This will deliver a modern passport processing system to replace the current software designed nearly 20 years ago.

Data Retention

190. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17973/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): In relation to the sharing of personal data, my Department does not share personal data with other Data Controllers, including other Departments, unless it has a legal basis for doing so under Article 6 and, where appropri-

ate, Article 9 of the GDPR. Data sharing with other Data Controllers is detailed in the Department's Article 30 GDPR, Record of Processing Activities. There are no records of data sets, databases or file types shared with the Department of Health.

My Department has received data from and transferred data to the Department of Health and other lead Departments, in the context of the representation of the State as agent before international courts and tribunals (including the European Court of Human Rights, the European Committee of Social Rights, and various UN complaints bodies).

Without a comprehensive and detailed review of files across the Department since 2000, it is not possible to compile a schedule where non-personal data is shared. My Department corresponds with the Department of Health on a number of matters, including most recently the Covid-19 pandemic. My Department provides consular assistance to all Irish citizens in distress overseas, and their families in Ireland, where requested. This can include advice and support across a range of areas, some of which fall under the remit of other Government Departments. Consular officials therefore engage frequently with other Departments, including the Department of Health, to ensure that accurate and appropriate information is provided to our citizens abroad. My Department has worked closely with the Department of Health in the context of Covid-19, including in relation to repatriations and public health guidelines around international travel. Since 2020, my Department has provided 86 Digests of Mission Reporting on Covid-19 and 30 Reports on Aspects of the International Response to the COVID crisis to the Department of Health.

General Data Protection Regulation

191. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17991/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The table below lists the Data Subject Access Requests (DSARs) which my Department has received under Article 15 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) since 25 May 2018.

Year - Status	Number of DSAR
2018	15
Granted	13
Withdrawn	2
2019	31
Granted	30
Refused	1
2020	32
Granted	18
Refused	6
Resolved outside GDPR	2
Withdrawn	6

All the requests above which were refused, were deemed by the Department to be 'manifestly unfounded or excessive' as provided for under Article 12(5) of the GDPR.

For 2021, my Department has received seven DSARs to date. These are all being processed and will be answered within the statutory timelines as provided for under Article 12(3) GDPR.

Human Rights

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the extent to which he and his EU and UN colleagues can alert and activate the international community to the alarming abuses of human rights across the globe affecting women and children and entire communities in which persons and groups are detained against their will and appalling atrocities are committed on a daily basis; if the perpetrators will face charges in the international criminal courts in the Hague thereby clearly indicating that such atrocities cannot go without punishment; if Ireland can use its position as a member of the UN Security Council to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18012/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is a strong contributor to global efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, prevent atrocities, and eliminate human rights violations including against women, children and vulnerable groups. Central to this is our strong and enduring commitment to effective multilateralism, particularly through our membership of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

Ireland is committed to actively promoting respect for human rights across our engagement on the UN Security Council and indeed, accountability is one of the three key themes of our membership.

We are actively promoting accountability and compliance with international law in our work on the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies, including the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, which Ireland is co-chairing, and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

We are also promoting respect for international law in our work on the broad range of country situations on the Security Council agenda.

As an example, on 3 February and 4 March, Ireland initiated Council discussions on the deeply concerning humanitarian situation and the ongoing lack of humanitarian access in Tigray, Ethiopia.

Myanmar has also been a particular focus of the Security Council since the coup in February. The Council agreed a Presidential Statement on 10 March, condemning the use of violence against peaceful protesters and expressing its continued support for the democratic transition in Myanmar.

Ireland also continues to engage actively at the UN Human Rights Council. At the recently concluded 46th session of the Council, Ireland delivered over 20 National Statements on a number of country-specific human rights situations including Myanmar, Syria, Iran, Yemen, South Sudan, DPRK, Eritrea, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Ireland also supported a number of Joint Statements on Egypt, Ethiopia, Russia and Venezuela.

At EU level, Ireland is an active participant and contributor to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy which works globally to support the preservation of peace, the prevention of conflicts and the strengthening of international security.

Accountability is important not only as a means of pursuing justice for victims, but also as a crucial component to create stability and peace in post-conflict situations.

Ireland regards the International Criminal Court as the cornerstone of the international criminal justice system. Ireland, together with its EU partners is a consistent and strong supporter of the Court and we will continue to support and defend the Court throughout our term on the UN Security Council.

Northern Ireland

193. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the progress to date in implementing New Decade, New Approach; if he has had any recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to outstanding issues pertaining to the agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18049/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement was a significant shared achievement by the parties in Northern Ireland together with the two Governments, and its full implementation is a key priority for the Irish Government.

The important work of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) has resumed, to develop cooperation on an all-island basis. Two successful NSMC plenary meetings have now taken place, as well as the full range of Sectoral meetings at Ministerial level, and progress continues across the breadth of North-South areas of cooperation.

The Irish Government commitments that were made at the time of the NDNA are focused on working with the Executive through the North South Ministerial Council to deliver projects that benefit people across the island, including greater connectivity between North and South; investing in the North West region and in border communities; supporting the Irish language in Northern Ireland; and supporting reconciliation as an integral part of the Peace Process.

As part of the NDNA, it was also agreed that there would be regular review meetings involving the two Governments at Ministerial level and the parties to monitor progress on its implementation, and the delivery of commitments by each Government. On Monday 11 January, I participated by video-conference in the first Implementation Review Meeting alongside the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and party leaders in Northern Ireland.

During that meeting, we discussed the progress that has been made over the past year on the implementation of our respective commitments, and the shared challenges we face in the context of both the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. We reaffirmed our collective commitment to the ongoing implementation of the NDNA. It is hoped that we can arrange a second implementation review meeting in the period ahead.

I will continue to engage closely with the Secretary of State, and the Executive, as we work in support of the full implementation of the New Decade, New Approach agreement.

Human Rights

194. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the current situation in Bahrain; and if he plans to use Ireland's position to work with the international community to push for the human rights violations there to be addressed. [18052/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): Respect for human rights is an integral part of Ireland's foreign policy and we consistently seek to raise our concerns on human rights issues through the most appropriate and effective channels.

The human rights situation in Bahrain remains a matter of serious concern. Although Bahrain has repeatedly stated its commitment to improving its human rights record and safeguarding human rights as enshrined in the Bahraini Constitution, we are concerned by ongoing instances of violations of fundamental freedoms, including violations of freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the targeting of human rights defenders.

Ireland has raised concerns on human rights in Bahrain in both bilateral contacts, as well as in relevant international fora, notably the UN Human Rights Council.

Ireland also engages on the issue of human rights in Bahrain through the European Union, including through the EU Delegation in Riyadh which is accredited to Bahrain. The most recent EU-Bahrain Human Rights Dialogue took place on 22 February and was chaired by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore. A number of issues of concern were raised with Bahrain at the forum, including rule of law, prison conditions, right to a fair trial, freedom of expression, freedom of association, death penalty, torture, and the impact of Covid-19 on the human rights situation.

Ireland will continue to monitor developments in Bahrain, and to call on the Bahraini Government to deliver on its stated commitment to make progress in relation to human rights.

Passport Applications

195. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a family who has applied for a passport for their child (details supplied) can expect to receive the passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18055/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): In line with Government guidance that at Level 5 of the National Framework on Living with COVID-19 only essential work should take place, the Passport Service continues to provide a high-quality essential service in line with Government measures to reduce social contact and combat the spread of COVID-19.

This essential service is available for those who are required to travel due to the death or serious illness of a family member or meet the criteria for a reasonable excuse for travel as defined in the recent amendment to the Health Act 1947, which came into effect on 1 February 2021. Supporting documentation will be required for such cases.

In order to facilitate the return of travel documents which may have been submitted in support of a passport application, all documents will be registered so that they can be returned for emergency travel or for travel with a reasonable excuse.

Applicants who require a passport for emergency purposes, or for non-essential travel with a reasonable excuse, should contact the Passport Service via our Customer Service Hub Webchat function on our website.

Irish citizens who are resident overseas should make contact through the local Irish Embassy or Consulate General.

With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has inquired, an official from the Passport Service was in contact with the applicant's father on 30 March to provide an update on the status of the passport application.

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Northern Ireland

196. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he has had any recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the Ireland Northern Ireland Protocol concerning the need to resolve outstanding issues and ensure no disruption to trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18075/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is an international agreement concluded by the UK and the EU. It is the agreed and only solution to address the challenges caused by Brexit on the island of Ireland.

Our shared goal must be its full implementation. We welcome that the Specialised Committee met on Friday, 26 March. This was an important signal that the only sustainable and legal way forward on implementation is a joint one. The meeting, co-chaired by the EU and the UK, included officials from Ireland and 24 other EU Member States, as well as the Northern Ireland Executive. I hope that there can now be rapid progress towards returning to a cooperative approach that respects commitments made.

I have regular contact with representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive and political leaders. I also maintain ongoing contacts with British Government counterparts, including with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, on these and other matters of common interest.

I am aware of the practical challenges which some businesses and people in Northern Ireland face arising from the UK's decision to leave the Single Market and Customs Union. I, and officials in my Department, continue to engage closely with stakeholders in Northern Ireland, including with business and civil society. We are listening carefully to concerns they have and acting to mitigate the negative impacts of Brexit where possible.

We want the Protocol to work for Northern Ireland, and for the island as a whole, in as smooth a manner as possible. Ireland has consistently advocated a pragmatic approach to implementation within the existing framework of the Protocol. This is only possible in a spirit of cooperation, through the agreed mechanisms.

It is important, too, that Northern Ireland is able to benefit from the positive opportunities created by the Protocol with free access to both the EU market of 450 million people, and the UK internal market. This access is unique, vital for operation of all-island supply chains, and offers opportunities for trade, jobs and investment.

I welcome also Vice President Šefcovic's recent engagements with stakeholders in Northern Ireland and his commitment to regular contact, clearly demonstrating that the EU is listening to voices across Northern Ireland.

Defence Forces Investigations

197. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will establish a commission of enquiry into allegations of systemic sexual abuse in the Defence Forces given the number of persons who have come forward over the past few weeks to support these allegations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17747/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): All members of the Defence Forces, Permanent and Reserve, have a right to be treated with respect, equality and dignity and to carry out their duties free from any form of sexual harassment, harassment or bullying. These unac-

ceptable forms of behaviour are not tolerated in the Defence Forces.

I urge anyone who has any complaint which they think constitutes a criminal offence to report their concerns to an Garda Síochána. A serving member of the Defence Forces could report such matters via the chain of command or the military police.

In the intervening years, there have been positive and welcome developments within the Permanent Defence Force to address inappropriate behaviour. There is now a robust system in place including a regulatory framework for dealing with such matters for serving members of the Defence Forces in both a formal and informal way. Administrative Instruction A7, Chapter 1 sets out the Defence Forces policy and procedures regarding interpersonal relationships in the Defence Forces including sexual harassment, harassment and bullying.

From time to time matters pertaining to allegations of sexual abuse are brought to my attention and I treat these with the utmost importance from the point of view of both the complainant and of those accused of wrongdoing who must have their right to fair procedures protected. The Gardaí have the power, expertise and skills to treat all of those in this process with dignity and respect and especially those who come forward with traumatic detail.

I have asked the Chief of Staff to provide a report to help inform me regarding matters raised recently in the print and broadcast media.

Defence Forces

198. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Defence the rationale offered by the independent review group set up to review and make recommendations on the Battle of Jadotville in order to seek an extension to the original reporting date of 31 March 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17765/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The issue of awarding of Military Medals for Gallantry (MMG) and Distinguished Service Medals (DSMs) to personnel who served in Jadotville in September 1961 has been considered on a number of occasions over the years and a number of actions have taken place to give due recognition to the courage and bravery of all the members of “A” Company, 35th Infantry Battalion who were stationed in Jadotville in 1961.

Notwithstanding the actions that have been undertaken to date, the Minister asked the Chief of Staff to consider whether it is possible, as an exceptional measure, to have a retrospective examination of the events at Jadotville in September 1961 in the context of the award of medals and the possible implications for the integrity of the award of medals system. In response the Chief of Staff proposed the establishment of an independent group of external experts to consider the entire case and evidence, including new evidence, if any, available.

The Independent Review Group has now been established by the Chief of Staff and consists of the following members:

Brigadier-General Paul Pakenham (Retired) (Group Chairperson).

Dr Michael Kennedy, Royal Irish Academy.

Commandant Billy Campbell (Retired).

RSM Michael Dillon (Retired).

Ms Linda Hickey, Military Archives.

Their Terms of Reference are as follows:-

(a) The Review Group will consider ONUC's operational environment in Katanga, and in particular in Elizabethville and Jadotville

(b) The Review Group will consider the historical evidence and processes in relation to all recommendations for military medals received with respect to the events at Jadotville or encompassing Jadotville.

(c) The Review Group will engage with national and international stakeholders (including Jadotville veterans) as appropriate, with a view to uncovering any additional or new evidence in this case.

(d) The Review Group may consider the actions of individuals not already the subject of a recommendation for a medal in respect of Jadotville

(e) The Review Group will report its findings to the Chief of Staff. The Review Group may make recommendations in relation to possible awards in respect of Jadotville.

In line with the Terms of Reference, the Independent Review Group will examine, report and make recommendations in relation to the 'Battle of Jadotville' from 13 to 17 September 1961 and will report its findings to the Chief of Staff.

The work of the Independent Review Group is well underway with over 50 interviews completed and thousands of pages of documents reviewed. The review group was due to conclude by 31st March 2021, however, given the sheer volume of meetings and the comprehensive nature of the research process, which is still producing a vast amount of material, an extension to the reporting date has been approved by the Chief of Staff, as the Convening Authority. The review group will now produce an interim report by 31st March 2021 with the date for the final report to be agreed after that.

Once this work has been concluded, the Chief of Staff will make recommendations as appropriate to the Minister.

Departmental Staff

199. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17905/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The table below provides a breakdown of the number of civil servants employed in my Department in the grades of Assistant Secretary, Director, Principal, Assistant Principal Officer, Administrative Officer and Higher Executive Officer, detailed by gender.

Grade	Male	Female	Total
Assistant Secretary	3	0	3
Director	0	1	1

Grade	Male	Female	Total
Principal	13	8	21
Assistant Principal	26	26	52
Administrative Officer	4	3	7
Higher Executive Officer	27	55	82
Total	73	93	166

Departmental Properties

200. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Defence the status of a property (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17951/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney) : I am pleased to advise the Deputy that my Department has recently signed the contract with Mayo County Council for the transfer of these premises and, subject to the usual legal procedures, it is intended that this contract will be closed in the coming weeks.

Departmental Data

201. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17968/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney) : Neither the Department of Defence nor the Defence Forces share databases with the Department of Health. The Department of Defence would, on occasion, share information with the Department of Health in relation to the administration of individual retirement pensions for reasons such as the transfer of service to that Department or the application of abatement of pension. Such sharing of information would be specific to an individual scheme member, solely for the purposes of administering individual pension entitlements and would be permissible under the rules of the relevant pension schemes.

A small number of staff members who transferred over the years to the Department of Health would have had their personnel file transferred with them.

As requested, this information is portrayed in the following schedule.

Data sets	Data bases	File types
None	None	Records relating to pension issues affecting individual personnel and HR records on transfer of individual personnel

General Data Protection Regulation

202. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17986/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Neither my Department nor the Defence

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Forces have received any complaints from members of the public in relation to subject access requests since 2018 to date. The Defence Forces received one complaint in 2020 regarding a data subject rights request.

The table below sets out the number of subject access requests accepted by my Department and the Defence Forces for the aforementioned period.

Year	Number of Subject Access Requests Accepted
2018	
Department of Defence	2
Defence Forces	57
2019	
Department of Defence	4
Defence Forces	91
2020	
Department of Defence	2
Defence Forces	75
01/01/2021 to 30/03/2021	
Department of Defence	4
Defence Forces	4

My Department and the Defence Forces have not refused any data subject rights requests in the period 2018 to date.

School Accommodation

203. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education the status of an application for temporary accommodation for a school (details supplied); if the school it will be in place by September 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17661/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I am please to inform the Deputy that my Department has approved in principle interim accommodation for the school in question. My Department is currently liasing with the patron of the school in relation to the delivery of the interim accommodation and is awaiting further contact from the patron in this regard.

Schools Building Projects

204. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education the status of the new building for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17677/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The project to which you refer has been devolved for delivery to Cavan & Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB).

The ETB is currently in the process of procuring a design team for the project, to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions, and move the project onward to tender and construction in due course.

While at this early stage it is not possible to provide a timeline for completion of the project, CMETB will be engaging directly with the school authority to keep it informed of progress.

Health Promotion

205. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education the funding available for food dudes and incredible edibles; the funding that has been available for these schemes in each year since they commenced; the number of schools and students that have availed of the schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17687/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department supports Agri Aware's Incredible Edibles programme, a healthy eating initiative for Primary School pupils. The programme is also supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Health. It encourages schools across the country to grow carrots, lettuce, potatoes, strawberries, turnips and herbs. Schools are supplied with grow packs, activity sheets and videos containing everything needed to grow these foods. Funding provided by my Department for this programme is as follows:

Year	Initiative	Amount	2016 Incredible Edibles	€5,000	2017 Incredible Edibles	€7,500
2018	Incredible Edibles	€11,500	2019 Incredible Edibles	€11,500	2020 Incredible Edibles	€11,500

With the project now in its 13th year, over 42,000 pupils from 1,600 schools in 29 different counties around Ireland, are set to undertake the programme.

The Food Dudes Programme is a healthy eating programme developed to encourage children to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables. It is implemented in primary schools and is based on repeated tastings of fruit and vegetables supported by positive role modelling and rewards. The Food Dudes Programme is currently being implemented in Ireland under an EU six-year strategy framework covering the period 1 August 2017-July 2023.

The Food Industry Development Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has specific responsibility for the implementation of the EU School Scheme which provides funding for the Food Dudes Programme and the School Milk Scheme in Ireland.

National Educational Psychological Service

206. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education the current situation with regard to emotional counselling and therapeutic supports in primary and post-primary schools with reference to children who are suffering from trauma, anxiety and adverse childhood experiences. [17728/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): While the provision of child and adolescent mental health services lies within the remit of the Department of Health, and the HSE specifically, the Department of Education has an important role to play in supporting the wellbeing and mental health of our young people. The Department's Wellbeing Policy and Framework for practice has given recognition to the importance of promoting wellbeing in education. It outlines a comprehensive, whole-school approach to the promotion of wellbeing and positive mental health. It focuses on the whole school community, as well as groups and individual young people with identified needs. The policy can be accessed at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/wellbeingineducation/wellbeing-in-education.html>

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) of the Department provides a comprehensive, school-based psychological service to all primary and post primary schools through the application of psychological theory and practice to support the wellbeing, academic, social

and emotional development of all learners. NEPS provides its service to schools through casework and through support and development work for schools. Individual casework service involves a high level of psychologist collaboration with teachers and parents, often also working directly with the child/young person. NEPS may become involved with supporting individual students where the school's Special Education Teaching team or Student Support Team feels that the involvement of the psychologist is needed. Psychologists may provide consultation in relation to appropriate therapeutic interventions to be delivered in the school setting and engage in direct work with an individual student as appropriate.

At post primary level, counselling is a key part of the role of the Guidance Counsellor, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process, at moments of personal crisis but also at key transition points. Each post primary school currently receives an allocation in respect of guidance provision, calculated by reference to the approved enrolment. Guidance allocations for all schools were increased in the 2020/21 school year in response to Covid 19. The Guidance Counsellor also identifies and supports the referral of students to external counselling agencies and professionals, as required. The Guidance Counsellor is key in developing and implementing innovative approaches to wellbeing promotion on a whole schools basis though the school's Guidance Plan.

In the event that the need for a more specialised intervention or counselling is identified by the NEPS psychologist, a referral is made to an outside agency for evaluation and ongoing support. The NEPS psychologist can in consultation with the Guidance Counsellor identify the most appropriate referral pathway and support schools with the onward referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (CAMHS), HSE Primary Care/Community Psychology teams, or an identified local community based specialist mental health service.

In addition to casework NEPS psychologists work with teachers to build their capacity/capability to promote the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people in schools. NEPS teams offer training and guidance for teachers in the provision of universal and targeted evidence-informed approaches and early intervention to promote children's wellbeing, social, emotional and academic development. Initiatives such as the Incredible Years Social Emotional learning Programmes and the FRIENDS Resilience Programmes. These programmes have been welcomed by schools and their impact positively evaluated.

NEPS is currently developing a range of workshops on the promotion of wellbeing and resilience in schools which includes trauma informed approaches. The approaches outlined in the workshops are based on research findings, on the experience of experts in their fields and on the experience of practicing psychologists working in schools. The workshops will be available to build the capability of school staff in both primary and post-primary settings, including for school leaders, teachers and SNAs. Work is underway to identify schools for inclusion in a pilot of the workshops. In selecting schools, a mix of DEIS, non DEIS and urban and rural schools will be included. Following the pilot a national roll-out is planned during the next academic year.

National Educational Psychological Service

207. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education the current level of service from NEPS at primary and post-primary level; and her plans to increase the NEPS support to schools. [17729/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): NEPS' sanctioned psychologist numbers have grown from a base of 173 whole-time equivalent psychologists (w.t.e.) in 2016, through

the intervening Budget increases in 2017-2019 to 204 w.t.e. psychologist posts. This Government remains firmly committed to the maintenance of a robust and effective educational psychological service. In this connection, as part of a package of measures to support the reopening of our schools the provision of an additional seventeen psychologist posts to NEPS was announced bringing overall sanctioned numbers to 221 w.t.e. psychologist posts.

Currently NEPS has 206 w.t.e. psychologist. NEPS is actively recruiting to achieve sanctioned numbers in NEPS. The Department has engaged with the Public Appointments Service who are planning a recruitment competition for NEPS in Q2 of 2021.

School Equipment

208. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education if a replacement flag will be provided to a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17733/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Department of Arts Heritage & the Gaeltacht and the Defence Forces arranged the delivery of the National Flag by the Defence Forces to schools, as part of the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme. While my Department assisted the Defence Forces in scheduling dates for the delivery of flags to schools the provision of flags was not provided by my Department.

Schools Building Projects

209. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Education the target date for opening of the new secondary school under construction at Moore Abbey, Monasterevin; the plans for the current site of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17751/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The project for the school referred to by the Deputy commenced on site in October 2020 it is progressing satisfactorily with a contract duration of approximately 20 months.

The current property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership. Any queries in relation to the property should be directed to the property owner in the first instance.

School Staff

210. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Education if she will sanction the retention of a second teacher in a school (details supplied) in County Clare given that this school is just one pupil short of the required quota and assuming common sense would prevail here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17759/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

For the 2021/22 school year, an improvement of one point in the appointment threshold in primary schools has been introduced and schools will be provided with class teachers on the

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basis of 1 teacher for every 25 pupils. A three point reduction in the retention scale has also been introduced for September 2021. These measures will help to ensure that less pupils are required to recruit or retain a teacher.

The staffing process contains an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria, including a specific appeal measure for small schools, to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department.

The staffing schedule for the 2021/22 school year, including the appeals process, is available on the Department website.

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

211. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais cathain a fhoilseofar an polasaí cuimsitheach don Ghaeilge ón oideachas réamhscolaíochta go dtí oiliúint na múinteoirí do gach scoil, mar atá geallta sa Chlár Rialtais; cén dul chun cinn atá déanta ar an bpolasaí seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [17761/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Tá obair leanúnach ar siúl ag mo Roinn le réamhphleanáil ar na céimeanna atá ag teastáil chun polasaí don oideachas lán-Ghaeilge a fhorbairt. Táim ag súil leis an obair thábhachtach seo a thabhairt chun cinn chun tógáil ar na torthaí dearfacha atá bainte amach cheana féin i gcur i bhfeidhm an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta chun an t-oideachas lán-Ghaeilge a láidriú. Táim ag súil le bheith ag obair leis na páirtithe leasmhara ábhartha éagsúla chun an obair thábhachtach seo a chur chun cinn.

Curaclam Scoile

212. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais an mbeadh sí sásta an tréimhse ama don phróiseas comhairliúcháin faoin gcuraclam nua a mholtar do Ghaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta a leathnú ionas go mbeidh múinteoirí, scoileanna agus príomhoidí in ann páirt a ghlacadh i gceart sa phróiseas gan cur leis an mbrú faoina bhfuil siad ag obair faoi láthair agus srianta Covid-19, buairt sláinte agus coinníollacha nua múinteoireachta ag cur ualach breise ar a gcuid oibre; agus an aontaíonn sí nach féidir an chomhairle chuí a fháil ó mhúinteoirí, scoileanna agus príomhoidí agus iad faoin mbrú ollmhór seo. [17762/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): D'oscail an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (NCCA) an comhairliúchán ar dhréacht-shonraíochtaí do Ghaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta ar an 23 Feabhra 2021. Agus an próiseas comhairliúcháin á phleanáil agus á dhearadh, chuimhnigh an NCCA ar na cúinsí an-dúshlánacha a chur san áireamh atá roimh mhúinteoirí, scoláirí, cheannairí scoile agus a bpobail mar gheall ar Covid-19. D'fhonn an oiread deiseanna agus is féidir a chur ar fáil dóibh siúd go léir ar spéis leo dul i mbun an phróisis, tá sé beartaithe an comhairliúchán seo a choinneáil ar oscailt ar feadh tréimhse sé mhí. De ghnáth, déantar comhairliúcháin ar dhréacht-shonraíochtaí ábhair thar tréimhse idir sé agus ocht seachtaine.

Tá an NCCA ag úsáid réimse teicnící comhairliúcháin lena n-áirítear suirbhé ar líne, grúpa fócais agus cruinnithe déthaobhacha, chomh maith le haighneachtaí i scríbhinn chun eispéiris agus peirspictíochtaí na rannpháirtithe ar gach gné de na dréacht-shonraíochtaí a bhailiú agus a thairseadadh. Áirítear orthu seo na cineálacha eispéiris foghlama, teagaisc agus measúnaithe atá leagtha amach do scoláirí.

Chun feasacht a mhúscailt níos mó faoin deis seo chun cur leis na forbairtí curaclaim seo agus chun rannpháirtíocht chomh leathan agus is féidir a chumasú, tá an NCCA ag obair as láimh a chéile le comhghleacaithe i roinnt eagraíochtaí laistigh den earnáil oideachais lán-Ghaeilge chomh maith. Mar shampla, d'óstáil an NCCA, i gcomhar le Gaeloideachas, seisiún faisnéise agus ansin reáchtáladh grúpaí fócais comhairliúcháin do mhúinteoirí i suíomhanna T1/L1 go luath i mí an Mhárta.

Tá tuilleadh cruinnithe grúpa fócais le múinteoirí i gcomhthéacsanna T1 agus T2 beartaithe i gcomhar le COGG (An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta).

Tá a fhios agam gur chuir roinnt eagraíochtaí Gaeilge in iúl go bhfuil inní orthu maidir leis an tréimhse chun an próiseas comhairliúcháin atá ar siúl a chríochnú. Tuigim go mbeidh an NCCA ag bualadh le cuid de na heagraíochtaí seo an mhí seo chugainn. Beidh deis ann ansin na saincheisteanna sin a phlé.

Is maith a thuigeann an NCCA an tábhacht agus an luach a bhaineann le haiseolas láidir ó gheallsealbhóirí ar dhréacht-shonraíochtaí curaclaim chun bonn eolais a chur faoi dhoiciméad dá leithéid agus iad á gcur i gcrích. I bhfianaise na paindéime atá ann faoi láthair tá athbhreithniú leanúnach á dhéanamh ag an NCCA ar an bpróiseas comhairliúcháin atá ar siúl.

Curaclam Scoile

213. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais cén fáth a ndéanadh dalta scoile nó scoil cúrsa T1 a roghnú in ionad T2 mar atá molta don Ghaeilge san Ardeist nuair nach bhfuil buntáiste ar bith ag gabháil leis, agus go mbeadh sé níos deacra marcanna arda a bhaint amach toisc an scrúdú a bheith níos deacra agus an caighdeán iomaíochta a bheith níos airde. [17763/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Sna dréacht-sonraíochtaí T1 agus T2 le haghaidh na hArdeistiméireachta don Ghaeilge a d'fhoilsigh an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnaithe tá roinnt seachtainí ó shin i gcomhair comhairliúcháin, tógtar ar na forbairtí suntasacha i soláthar curaclaim na Gaeilge ar leibhéal na bunscolaíochta agus na Sraithe Sóisearaí. Mar fhreagra d'aiseolas ó na páirtithe leasmhara, tugadh isteach sonraíochtaí idirdhealaithe T1 agus T2 don tSraith Shóisearach den chéaduaire in 2017. Ina dhiaidh sin tugadh isteach Curaclam Theanga na Bunscoile nua (don Ghaeilge agus don Bhéarla) i leith na gcéimeanna uile ar leibhéal na bunscolaíochta in 2019, atá idirdhealaithe freisin do chomhthéacsanna T1 agus T2.

Is é cuspóir mo Roinne feabhas a chur ar chaighdeán oideachais agus ar cháilíocht na n-eispéireas foghlama do na daltaí go léir, lena n-áirítear a ndeiseanna chun dul i ngleic le staidéar na Gaeilge de réir a gcumas sa Ghaeilge thar an gcontanam. I soláthar na sonraíochtaí T1 agus T2 faoi choinne na Gaeilge le haghaidh na hArdeistiméireachta, tógtar ar an soláthar idirdhealaithe atá ann don Ghaeilge ar leibhéal na bunscolaíochta agus na sraithe sóisearaí, trína gceadaítear do dhaltaí a gcuid scileanna agus a n-inniúlachtaí sa Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn, a dhaingniú agus a fheabhsú. Faoi mar a dúradh i sonraíocht na Sraithe Sóisearaí, tá tábhacht ar leith ag baint le soláthar na sonraíochta T1 i leith na Gaeilge sna scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge chun tacú le rochtain na ndaltaí ar an bhfoghlaim agus ar choincheapa in ábhair eile agus ar éispéiris foghlama thar an gcuraclam ar fad, agus chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar a n-inniúlacht maidir le láimhsiú na gcoincheap sin agus lena bhfoghlaim a léiriú agus le go mbeidís mar chumarsáidithe as Gaeilge trí leas a bhaint as réimse scileanna teanga ar mhaithe leis an oideachas agus mar shaoránaigh ghníomhacha ina bpobail teanga.

Tuigtear dom go bhfuil na páirtithe leasmhara tar éis tuairimí a chur in iúl maidir leis an tslí chun sonraíocht T1 na hArdteistiméireachta a ghríosú. Tá sé tábhachtach a thabhairt faoi deara go bhfuil na sonraíochtaí T1 agus T2 ar chéim an chomhairliúcháin san am i láthair agus dá réir sin d'fhéadfaidís athrú, ag brath ar aiseolas na bpáirtithe leasmhara. Féadaim a dheimhniú, áfach, go bhfuil oifigigh mo Roinne ag déanamh bearta iomchuí a mheas a d'fhéadfaí iad a chur i bhfeidhm le go spreagfaí roghnú na sonraíochta T1. Déanfar a leithéid de bhearta a mheas i gcomhchomhairle leis an Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán (RTCEGSM), ós í ár gcomhpháirtí Roinne í le go mbainfear amach réimse beart a bhaineann leis an oideachas faoi mar atá leagtha amach sa Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030. Sa dóigh sin, tá ról tábhachtach ag baint le soláthar curaclaim na Gaeilge inár scoileanna chun cur le cuspóir soiléir an Rialtais maidir le líon na n-úsáideoirí laethúla Gaeilge a ardú taobh amuigh den chóras oideachais agus maidir leis an aidhm foriomlán a bhaint amach lena mbeidh Gaeilge ag 20% d'earcaigh nua sa tseirbhís phoiblí faoin mbliain 2030 i gcomhréir le Bille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.

Public Procurement Contracts

214. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education if she will address a proposal raised in correspondence (details supplied); if she will forward same to the relevant procurement officials if appropriate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17783/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I would like to thank the Deputy for bringing this information to my attention and my officials will contact the company in question directly.

As the Deputy is aware all funding allocated by my Department to allow school management authorities carry out building or improvement works to their schools, must be offered to the market in accordance with EU and National procurement guidelines.

Early School Leavers

215. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied); the way in which she plans to address the anticipated increase in early school leavers in the area; if there are plans to provide more NEET supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17787/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools is the main policy initiative of my Department of Education to address educational disadvantage at school level.

In the 2020/21 academic year there are 887 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 185,000 pupils - 689 Primary and 198 Post Primary.

My Department's spend on DEIS in 2021 is over €150million, which includes over €26 million for the School Completion Programme (SCP). The desired impact of the SCP is the retention of a young person to Leaving Certificate, equivalent qualification or suitable level of educational attainment which enables them to transition into further education, training or employment.

My Department's investment in 2021 includes providing for;

- 419 Home School Community Liaison Coordinators serving 539 schools, catering for ap-

proximately 156,000 pupils.

- Additional posts for DEIS Band 1 primary schools to allow for a reduced pupil teacher ratio.

- Curriculum supports

- Priority access to continuing professional development

- School Excellence Fund - DEIS

- DEIS grants and enhanced book grants.

As part of the Budget 2021 I announced the following additional measures to tackle educational disadvantage;

- An extension of the School Completion Programme to include 14 urban primary and 14 post-primary schools newly included in DEIS in 2017, costing €600,000 in 2021 and €1 million over a full year

- A 5% increase in funding for the School Completion Programme to support the attendance and participation of vulnerable learners and those at risk of education disadvantage, costing €780,000 in 2021 and €1.3 million over a full year

- A reduction of the enrolment threshold for the allocation of an additional Deputy Principal in DEIS post-primary schools, from 700 to 600 pupils allowing for an additional Deputy Principal allocation to 13 DEIS post-primary schools.

In addition, work is underway in detailing proposals for the provision of a summer programme in 2021 to include DEIS schools.

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), which includes Home School Community Liaison Coordinators, Educational Welfare Officers and School Completion Programme staff play a key role in supporting pupils at risk of educational disadvantage and on supporting the return to school of all students. TESS staff will continue to engage with students and families identified by schools as needing additional support, and will remain in ongoing contact with school principals to identify students who may need support.

The Deputy will be aware that responsibility for further and higher education falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. I am advised that student supports are in place across further and higher education to make the transition back into education as easy as possible for the individual. Further education and training currently offers opportunities to many young people, through bespoke provision such as Youthreach which is aimed at early school leavers. Most learners on these courses meet the Youth Guarantee criteria. In addition, a young person from the age of 16 can apply to begin an apprenticeship.

There has been a significant increase in the numbers of people who now find themselves not in employment, education or training as a result of Covid-19, and who are in need of upskilling. A range of measures were introduced as a response to upskilling and reskilling needs of individuals and businesses through the July Jobs Stimulus and Budget 2021. These measures are providing 35,000 education and training places at a cost of €100 million to help those who were displaced by the effects of Covid-19. A further 15,000 places were announced as part of the skills package in Budget 2021. Combined these measures include places on the Skills to Complete initiative, Springboard+, the Human Capital Initiative, additional places through Skillnet

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supported programmes, funding of the Apprenticeship Incentivisation scheme, the roll-out of retrofit training across the country and the expansion of the range of short-duration, part-time and online upskilling and reskilling offerings available for recipients of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

Further information can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/f205a-the-right-course/>. The Right Course is a one stop shop for businesses, employees or unemployed persons and outlines the further and higher education options and supports available to them. The Right Course website draws together information on the wide range of services available from a variety of state- sponsored agencies and service providers into one central resource. The pages provide signposting to providers and contact details for those seeking further information.’

School Staff

216. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to a DEIS band 1 school (details supplied) which is set to lose a teacher despite increased enrolment for the 2021-2022 academic year; the way in which she plans to address this matter in view of the educational, social and economic disadvantage in the area; if she will review the threshold; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17790/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

Budget 2021 provided for a one point improvement to the staffing schedule and introduced new retention levels for all schools. On the 1st March 2021, I announced a further package of measures to tackle educational disadvantage, which extended the one point improvement to all DEIS schools.

The staffing process contains an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria, to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department.

The staffing schedule for the 2021/22 school year, including the appeals process, is available on the Department website.

National Council for Special Education

217. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education if the National Council for Special Education has completed and submitted its policy advice on education provision in special classes and special schools first commissioned in September 2018; the advice provided on the provision of reading schools for children with dyslexia; and when she will publish the policy advice. [17793/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in special schools, in accordance with the policies of my Department.

Special school staffing allocations are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE and

special schools are staffed on the basis of each year's current school enrolments.

Staffing arrangements for special schools are in line with policy advice provided by the NCSE in 2013, which did not recommend alteration to staffing ratios established under the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) Report in 1993.

Enhanced pupil teacher and SNA ratios are provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupils' educational and care needs. These schools are staffed on the basis of individual pupil profile and the disability categorisations of those pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on school designation, in accordance with my Department's Circular 0032/2019 - Appointment of Administrative Deputy Principal and Staffing in Special Schools.

My Department also provides an extensive range of supports for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD). This includes provision for the establishment of special classes for pupils with SSLD in primary schools. A total of 63 SSLD special classes in mainstream primary schools have been provided for the 2020/2021 school year.

NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including applications to establish special classes for SSLD. Applications meeting the criteria for establishment are approved by the NCSE.

The opening and retention of SSLD special classes is, however, contingent on the Health Service Executive (HSE) being in a position to provide speech and language therapy to the students in the class. The availability and provision of speech and language therapy is the responsibility of the HSE.

The enrolment of pupils in SSLD special classes is managed locally by an Admissions & Discharges Committee, comprising the Speech and Language Therapy Manager, Speech and Language Therapist, Class Teacher and Principal.

As outlined in Circular 0038/2007, eligible pupils may spend up to two years in SSLD classes.

Students who are not enrolled in a special class for SSLD and who meet the SSLD criteria, as outlined in Circular 0038/2007, may qualify for additional Special Education Teaching (SET) support; as may students with mild speech and language difficulties. The school referred to by the Deputy has an allocation of 136 SET hours per week. It is a matter for individual schools to use their professional judgement to identify pupils who will receive this support and to use the resources available to the school to intervene at the appropriate level with such students. My Department is not directly involved in these decisions.

The NCSE is currently developing Policy Advice on Special Classes and Special Schools. My Department, in conjunction with the NCSE is also considering the existing definition of Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD).

There will be no change to the criteria for enrolment in special classes for pupils with speech and language difficulties, pending the outcome of these considerations and the finalisation of the Policy Advice.

School Funding

218. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education when a school (details sup-

plied) will receive feedback and approval from her Department in respect of its pre-state 1 report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17807/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): In June 2019 the school in question was approved grant funding for three General Classrooms, two Standard WCs, a WC for assisted users, four SET rooms and a Science Lab with Prep area under the Additional Accommodation scheme for 2019. The delivery of this project is devolved to the school authority.

The school originally submitted a Stage 1 (preliminary design) report to my Department for review in April 2020, but a number of issues were identified with the report, and Department officials requested a revised design. The school submitted this in December 2020, and this report is currently being reviewed by Department officials. Feedback will issue to the school following completion of this review.

Departmental Correspondence

219. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education if the case of a company (details supplied) will be reviewed; the status of payment from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17816/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education, was a significantly expanded programme for children with complex special educational needs which aimed to re-establish the child's relationships and connection with school and their peers as a basis for learning and participation and to help the child to re-engage in learning and social activities and help them adapt to new routines and changes.

The programme aimed to ensure, in so far as possible, that the child would reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers. In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs helped to prevent regression among children with special needs.

All completed payment claims were processed and paid within the agreed timeframe.

The case referred to by the Deputy involved ongoing delays in submitting completed payment claim forms. I understand the applicant recently submitted completed forms and my Department has issued payment.

Public Procurement Contracts

220. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education when the available spaces on the panel for the provision of hand sanitiser to her Department for schools will go out to tender; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17825/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Department's multi supplier agreement for the provision of PPE including hand sanitiser has a term of one year, with four possible six month extension. The Department is considering the most appropriate procurement approach to meet the sectors' future needs including the possible solutions that may be available from the Office of Government Procurement for the whole of the Public Sector.

Schools Building Projects

221. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Education the status of a school (details supplied); the status of the planning application by the school; the projected timeline for the tendering and construction process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17869/21]

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

The planning application for the project was submitted on 26th March 2021.

Until such time as planning permission has been secured, it will not be possible to provide a timeline for the progression of the project to tender and construction stages.

Covid-19 Pandemic

222. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education the advice that has been given to all schools ahead of their return on 12 April 2021 and in particular secondary schools in relation to the wearing of masks by students outdoors while on break and outdoors during physical education (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17888/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department received advice from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) on the use of face coverings in educational settings. Face coverings do not have to be worn outdoors.

Further information for parents and students on the wearing of face coverings including the proper use, removal and washing of cloth face coverings is available via the link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a04fc-advice-for-students-and-their-families/>. Information is also set out in the Covid-19 response plans for primary, special and post-primary schools available at www.gov.ie/backtoschool.

Departmental Staff

223. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Education if she will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in her Department by gender in tabular form. [17906/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The attached tabular statement sets out a breakdown of the administrative grades of higher executive officer, administrative officer, assistant principal officer, principal officer and assistant secretary in my Department by gender.

Grade	Male	Female	Headcount	Total (FTE)
Assistant Secretary	3	4	7	7
Principal Officer	22	18	40	39.8
Assistant Principal Officer	36	52	88	84.83
Higher Executive Officer	65	99	164	157.68
Administrative Officer	4	9	13	13

School Enrolments

224. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education if consideration will be given to the creation of a database of open school places to assist both parents and schools that cannot accurately predict their waiting lists due to parents applying to multiple schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17922/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): It is the responsibility of the school authorities of schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018.

My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, it may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in their school of first choice. In this regard, school authorities may find it necessary to prioritise enrolment of children from particular areas or on the basis of some other criterion.

All schools must publish an admissions notice annually, prior to the commencement of the schools admissions process. Where a school was oversubscribed for the previous academic year, the admissions notice must provide details setting out the number of applications received and the number and order of offers made in that school year in respect of each of the school's selection criteria.

Schools can share certain data in order to facilitate the efficient admission of students. Should they wish to do so, a board may provide a patron or another board of management with a list of the students in relation to whom an application for admission to the school has been received, or where an offer has been made to or accepted by a student.

National Council for Special Education

225. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education if the NCSE will approve the opening of a new class in a school (details supplied) to meet local pupil needs in view of the fact that pupils were turned away in 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17944/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Enabling children with special educational needs to receive an education appropriate to their needs is a priority for this Government. The Department of Education will spend approximately €2 Billion or over 20% of its total educational budget in 2021 on making additional provision for children with special educational needs this year.

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

The NCSE, through its local network of SENOs (Special Educational Needs Organisers), is available to provide advice and support to parents of students on the possible placement options available to their child, including mainstream placement with appropriate support, special

class placement and special school placement. Post-primary placements are supported with additional resources where required.

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

Notwithstanding the extent of this investment, I am acutely aware that there are some parts of the country where increases in population and other issues have led to concerns regarding a shortage of school places.

Through better planning at both national and local level, it is my objective that specialist education places should come on stream to meet emerging demand on a timely basis. However, the active collaboration of school communities is essential in this regard.

NCSE is aware of those parents whose children are seeking placement for the 2021/22 academic year, including mainstream placement with appropriate support, special class and special school placement. The NCSE continues to work to identify any and all relevant suitable placements.

In circumstances, where no placement is available for a child with special educational needs, the Department can provide Home Tuition grant funding towards the provision of 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until the NCSE confirms that a placement is available.

Special schools do not apply to the NCSE to open additional classes. Since 2012 special schools have been staffed on the basis of their profile, including numbers of students and the disability category of each student. The Class teachers allocated to Special Schools are allocated in accordance with Department of Education Circular 0042/2011. School staffing schedules are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE who collect up to date details of pupils attending special schools. Accordingly the staffing levels and pupil/teacher ratios reflect the profile of need that exists within an individual school.

In respect of the school in question I understand that an application for additional accommodation for September 2021 has been submitted to my Department's School Building Unit and is currently being reviewed.

The NCSE's local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) remains available to parents and may be contacted directly using the contact details available at: <https://ncse.ie/regional-services-contact-list>.

Special Educational Needs

226. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education if she will approve an assistive technology grant application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17950/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. SENOs also make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support, which is set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013.

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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.

I can advise the Deputy that an application for assistive technology support for the child referred to in his question has been received by my Department on 29th March and a response issued to the school on 30th March confirming the level of grant support available.

Departmental Data

227. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types her Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17969/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): At the outset, I wish to acknowledge the seriousness of the issues raised in the recent RTE Investigates programme.

I also want to assure the House and the families of children with special educational needs that my Department has never unlawfully collected or passed on the sensitive educational information of children involved in court cases.

My Department is currently reviewing case files in this matter with a view to establishing the facts of how these cases were managed. The outcome of this review will inform further action.

General Data Protection Regulation

228. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education the number of complaints her Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17987/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The statistical information requested by the Deputy concerning subject access requests and complaints under the General Data Protection Regulation EU 2016/679 (GDPR) concerning my Department is provided on the attached table.

[SSHA]

Covid-19 Pandemic

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education if a full return to school is now effective for all children at primary and post-primary level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18007/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department has developed a plan with the relevant education stakeholders for the phased return to in-school learning for children in primary, post-primary and special schools. During March all primary level, fifth year post primary students and final year Leaving Certificate students returned to school. This phase also saw a return to full attendance for children in special schools.

The full re-opening of our schools for all students in line with public health advice remains a top priority for Government and my Department is focussing on the safe return of the last group of post primary students set to return to school after the Easter Break.

School Staff

230. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education further to Parliamentary Question No. 109 of 25 March 2021, the number of substitutable days that have gone uncovered in this school year; the number of such days that have been subsequently claimed against via the new mechanism for banking such days according to the online claims system; the number of days a supply panel teacher was left unbooked separating days school buildings were open to days they were closed; the number of days that have been covered using the five-day rule for unqualified personnel; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18053/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Based on the reports received from schools for the first term of the 2020/21 school year, the Substitute Teacher Supply Panels were running at an average of 94% efficiency. The relevant schools are currently forwarding the reports in respect of the second term, therefore the information requested by the Deputy is not currently available.

A separate report shall issue to the Deputy directly providing the other information. This information has to be extracted from the payroll databases, checked and validated before issuing.

School Staff

231. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the way in which the supply panel will be expanded for the 2021-2022 school year to meet demand; and the way in which SET provision will be expanded to make up for the loss of learning during the academic year 2020-2021. [18054/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Among the COVID-19 supports provided for the 2020/21 school year was the extension of the Substitute Teacher Supply Panel. Currently, there are 115 Substitute Teacher Supply Panels nationwide, with almost 330 newly appointed Supply Panel teachers employed, providing substitute cover to almost 2,300 schools across the country. The proficiencies of the Substitute Teacher Supply Panels is being monitored throughout the school year and will be reviewed by my Department at the end of the current academic year.

There are currently over 13,600 Special Education Teachers allocated to mainstream primary and post primary schools. This represents an increase of 40% in the total number of special education teachers allocated to schools since 2011, at which time 9740 teachers were allocated. The allocations are based on the profiled needs of schools and are designed to be updated, based on new school profile data, every 2-3 years. In the interim, additional allocations are made for new schools, or schools which have significantly developing enrolments.

In order to minimise disruption for schools, and to provide for continuity of allocations, the existing Special Education Teacher Allocations for schools will be maintained for the 2021/22 school year, with re profiled allocations now due to be made from September 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic and associated schools closures has hugely adverse consequences for many children and their families. The effect on children with complex special educational needs can be even greater.

Accordingly, my Department has taken a number of measures to support children with special educational needs during the school closure period. These measures include

- Providing additional guidance and supports aimed to improve remote learning for children with Special Education Needs in 2020/21 school year

- Prioritising the return of pupils with special education to school, during the phased reopening of schools

- Making provision for a supplementary education programme for pupils with special educational needs. The supplementary programme is intended to supplement the teaching and learning provided by the student's school and alleviate the impact of this period of school closure through the provision of one to one in-person teaching or care support to be delivered in homes.

- My Department is also planning to provide for an enhanced summer programmes this year for children with complex special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage.

A number of measures have therefore been taken to support children with special educational during the school closure period, and to support their return to school. There are no plans at this time to increase the number of Special Education Teachers which are allocated to schools. However, as schools reopen, and the effect of school closures on pupils can be assessed, further measures may be introduced, if necessary.

Teaching Qualifications

232. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Education the date when she will next approve the numbers of students which the four State-funded providers can take in to both the bachelor of education and professional masters of education programmes of primary initial teacher education; the rationale for the existing cap; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18077/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): In November 2020, as Minister for Education, I approved the annual intake figure for the academic year 2021/22 on the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) initial teacher education programmes provided in the four State-funded HEI providers. I also approved the continuation of the Professional Masters of Education (PME) programmes and the intake figure for the PME programmes provided in the four State-funded HEI providers. The annual intake figures approved for the B.Ed and PME primary ITE programmes are 1,000 and 200 respectively for the coming academic year.

Historically, the Department has endeavoured to manage the supply of trained primary teachers in an effort to achieve equilibrium between the supply of and the demand for trained teachers. In 2019, my Department published a technical report, Teacher Demand and Supply in Ireland 2020-2036, which projects teacher demand and supply to 2036. The potential impact of policy levers is not examined in the report. The report was published as a working document and was the subject of intensive consultation with stakeholders after its publication. Ultimately,

the intention is to establish a robust data based model for the effective projection of future teacher demand and supply across the school system.

Registration of Births

233. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans for the inclusion of babies who are stillborn before 24 weeks and or under 500g in weight to be included on the still birth register; her plans for those babies to receive a certificate of life (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18070/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The relevant legislation in this area is the Stillbirths Registration Act 1994 which applies to a child born weighing 500 grammes or more or having a gestational age of 24 weeks or more who shows no sign of life. Such thresholds are a feature of such registrations internationally and are in line with World Health Organisation guidelines in this area.

I understand that these thresholds are currently under review in the Department of Health. Any future proposals for change in this area will be considered in the context of the outcome of that review.

I trust this clarifies the position for you at this time.

Fuel Allowance

234. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the fuel allowance; the number of applications for the fuel allowance; the number of refusals for the fuel allowance over the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17707/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Fuel Allowance is a means tested payment to assist pensioners and other long-term social welfare dependent householders with their winter heating costs. The payment is a contribution towards heating costs. It is not intended to meet these costs in full. The payment is made at the weekly rate of €28.00 or, if preferred, by way of two lump sum payments and is paid over the winter season (28 weeks in the 2020/2021 fuel allowance season). Only one Fuel Allowance is payable per household.

Current figures indicate that approximately 372,000 households are in receipt of Fuel Allowance. Those who qualified for Fuel Allowance last year automatically receive the payment again this year provided they continue to fulfil the eligibility requirements. They do not therefore need to re-apply.

Due to the payment of Fuel Allowance across different IT platforms, accurate numbers of claims received and disallowed are not readily obtainable. However, based on the information available, approximately 16,400 applications have been received in 2021 to date, with 4,700 disallowed. Approximately 17,200 were disallowed in 2020, 21,600 in 2019 and 22,000 in 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance

1 April 2021

235. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the price substitute between bituminous smoky coal and smokeless coal; if the fuel allowance will be increased to take into account any prohibition of the sale of bituminous smoky coal, wet wood and sod turf; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17708/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Fuel Allowance is a payment of €28.00 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €784 each year) from October to April, to over 372,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €300 million in 2021. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

Matters relating to the sale of fuels are relevant to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications.

I am informed by the Minister that his Department (i.e., the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications) is currently holding a public consultation on the development of new solid fuel regulations which is due to close on Friday 2nd of April. The development of new regulations will involve a thorough analysis of all submissions, engagement with all relevant stakeholders and consideration of all associated matters including fuel poverty.

I am also informed that, according to the most recent SEAI Fuel cost comparison (available at <https://www.seai.ie/publications/Domestic-Fuel-Cost-Comparison.pdf>), the difference between the cost of bituminous coal and smokeless coal is approximately €1.40 per 40kg bag, with the cost of smokeless coal having decreased by 2.7% in the last year.

Finally, I am further informed that, in order to improve our air quality, we must reduce our reliance upon the burning of solid fossil fuels, and that this is being supported by an allocation of €221 million for home and community retrofitting provided for in Budget 2021. This 82% increase on the 2020 budget is being funded through carbon tax revenue and includes €109 million in additional supports for low income homes. Social welfare recipients may also be entitled to a free energy upgrade. Further information on all SEAI grants and schemes is available at www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants .

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance

236. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 988 of 24 March 2021, if a request for an appeal of a decision in respect of a person (details supplied) has been received by her Department to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17725/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered with that office on 19 March 2021. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing. Hearings are currently being conducted online or by telephone. Due to the current level of Covid-19 restrictions in-person oral appeal hearings have been suspended.

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 trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

237. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a school (details supplied) has not been selected for the school meals scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17780/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 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.

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.

In Budget 2021, I announced that an additional €5.5m would be provided to extend the provision of hot school meals to an additional 35,000 primary school children, currently receiving the cold lunch option. Officials from the department issued invitations for expressions of interest to some 700 primary schools in November 2020. A total of 281 expressions of interest were received in respect of 52,148 children.

The 35,000 places were allocated to each local authority area based on the number of children applied by local authority as a percentage of the total number. A minimum of one School for each Local Authority area was selected. Thereafter, a process of random selection was used for each area.

As a result of this process, 189 of the 281 schools that submitted an expression of interest were selected, including 4 schools in County Clare, and the 596 children attending these schools will be entitled to receive hot school meals.

Unfortunately, Scoil Chríost Rí, Ennis was not selected and I appreciate that this is disappointing for the school. Please be assured of my Department's support and that the current cold lunch option remains available to the school.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Food Poverty

238. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied); the steps her Department is taking to address food poverty in the area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17788/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have read the report pro-

vided by the Deputy which documents the challenges posed in the Finglas area by COVID-19 and related restrictions.

I can confirm that the Department of Social Protection is helping communities to address food poverty in the Finglas and wider Dublin 11 community through the School Meals programme and Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). FEAD supports EU Member States' actions to provide food and material assistance to the most deprived.

Last year following the closure of the schools as a result of the pandemic restrictions, concern was raised that children from disadvantaged backgrounds might not receive nutritious meals outside of school. The Government decided that funding under the School Meals Programme could be used to support schools which identify pupils who were unlikely to receive nutritious food during the current COVID-19 pandemic and were willing to set up a system to provide children with nutritious food while the schools are closed. This funding was provided during the summer months and throughout the period of school closures following the move to Level 5 restrictions in late December. Funding is also available during the current Easter break from 29 March – 9 April.

Under the School Meals programme, the Department of Social Protection has committed nearly €1.8 million to 28 schools and organisations in Dublin 11, during the 2020/21 school year. This benefits over 5,800 children. More recently last week, Minister Humphreys launched the Hot School Meals Programme 2021, which will benefit some 35,000 pupils in 189 primary schools, a number of which are in the Finglas area.

FoodCloud is the primary Partner Organisation to deliver the food element of the FEAD Programme and they are responsible for the procurement and storage of the FEAD products, and coordinating collection of the FEAD products by the other Partner Organisations (mainly community-based charities). There are a number of Local Partner Organisations with access to FEAD products in the North Dublin/Finglas area, including the St Vincent De Paul, Barnardos Finglas and the Finglas Addiction Support Team (FAST). The Department and FoodCloud have been monitoring the supply and demand for food closely since the outbreak of COVID-19. If the existing need increases, local partner organisations can apply for an increase in the food/credit allocation by contacting the FEAD Unit (FEAD@welfare.ie) providing an outline of the increased level of demand.

Looking at food poverty on a broader scale, the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 was published in 2020 and is the national strategy aimed at reducing poverty and increasing social inclusion in Ireland. The Social Inclusion Roadmap Steering Group is an inter-departmental group which monitors the implementation and progress of Roadmap commitments. I chair the Steering Group which met for the second time on 30 March 2021.

The Roadmap includes a specific commitment for the development of a programme of work to further explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions. With this in mind, I intend to establish a Working Group to tackle the issue of food poverty. It is my intention that the group will comprise senior officials from various Government Departments and representatives from relevant NGOs. I believe that this approach will harness the collective efforts of all Departments and tackle the issue of food poverty in a coherent and holistic manner.

I thank the Deputy for her question and hope this clarifies the matter.

Living Alone Allowance

239. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a living alone in-

crease will be backdated in the case of a person (details supplied). [17791/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): According to the records of my Department, the person concerned was awarded State Pension (contributory) from 22/08/2012, when they reached 66 years of age. At that time they were also awarded an Increase for Living Alone allowance, at the rate of €7.70.

Their pension award along with additional allowances was confirmed in writing on 23 July 2012.

They continue to be in receipt of this allowance at the now current rate of €19.00. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

240. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exception will be made in the case of a person (details supplied). [17805/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien) : The Community Employment Scheme (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

The programme is delivered through independent CE sponsoring authorities that operate in the community and voluntary sector. The annual contract agreement between my Department and the CE sponsoring authorities establishes their role as an independent contractor, responsible for all purposes and all persons recruited by them.

My Department provides funding towards training and material costs in addition to CE participant and CE supervisor wages on a per capita basis. CE sponsoring authorities receive this funding in line with their annual contract with my Department.

CE supervisors are employed by CE sponsoring authorities, they are not employees of the Department. As the employer, CE sponsoring authorities provide fixed-term contracts to both new and existing CE supervisors in line with their annual contractual agreement with the Department.

Prior to being made redundant by the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland CE Scheme, the person concerned had been employed as an Assistant Supervisor during the period 07/05/2012 to 05/07/2013 and as a Supervisor from 08/07/2013 to 04/10/2020.

Following an interview process the person concerned was offered a temporary Supervisor position by the sponsoring authority of the Ballyfermot Centre for Children, Young People & Families CE Scheme also known as FamiliBase for an initial 3 month period with effect from 22/02/2021, commencing on Point 1 of the CE Supervisor payscale.

In 2019 the definition of a new CE supervisor was clarified as being a person who is not currently employed as a CE supervisor. Where a new CE supervisor has a new employment contract with a new CE sponsoring authority, there is no obligation on the new employer to continue on from any previous remuneration that the employee may have received, either from a former CE employer or any similar position that a new employee may have held.

All new CE supervisors commence on Point 1 of the appropriate payscale and move by annual increments on the anniversary of their commencement date thereafter, subject to satisfac-

tory performance.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Social Welfare Benefits

241. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for basic supplementary welfare will be re-examined in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17809/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme is the safety net within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependents. Supports provided under the SWA scheme can consist of a basic weekly payment, a weekly or monthly supplement in respect of certain expenses, as well as single exceptional needs payments (ENPs) and urgent needs payments (UNPs).

The basic supplementary welfare allowance provides immediate assistance for those in need who are awaiting the outcome of a claim or an appeal for a primary social welfare payment or do not qualify for payment under other State schemes. This assistance is subject to the person having the right to reside and satisfying the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC).

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The ENP scheme is demand-led and payments are made at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme, taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance. ENPs are not subject to the HRC.

The person concerned made an application for SWA on 22/2/2021 and was paid an ENP pending a decision on this application.

As stated above, in order to qualify for SWA, a person must, inter alia, satisfy the requirement to be habitually resident in the State. The person concerned failed to produce documentation requested by the Designated Officer, including any evidence of the right to reside in the State. As a result, a letter was issued on 18/3/2021 to inform the person concerned that the application was disallowed, and of the right to seek a review or appeal of this decision.

It has since been confirmed that the person concerned does not hold a valid permission in the State, is the subject of a valid deportation order issued by the Minister for Justice, failed to present to the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), and is now classed as an evader. The person concerned has apparently requested the revocation of the deportation order on ill health grounds but a decision has not been reached. If this is the case, the person concerned can apply to the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) to be accommodated pending the outcome of his appeal application. This can be done by sending an email to ipasinbox@equality.gov.ie confirming Name, Date of Birth and ID number. The person will then be required to submit a declaration of means and his request will be assessed regarding his eligibility.

My Department will consider whether a further ENP on a once off basis may be appropriate in the circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobsPlus Scheme

242. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if flexibility will be introduced in the eligibility criteria for the JobsPlus scheme to assist persons who have been out of work in getting back into employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17821/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): JobsPlus is a subsidy paid to employers who recruit long-term unemployed people for new positions in their workplace. Employers can avail of JobsPlus when filling new positions or positions that arise as a consequence of natural turnover and receive a subsidy of €7,500 or €10,000 per employee. The value of the grant is dependent on the age of the new employee and their duration of unemployment, over a two-year period of employment.

JobsPlus is an effective scheme in responding to unemployment. An evaluation of the scheme, undertaken jointly by the EU Commission’s Joint Research Centre and the Department of Social Protection published in 2020, found a positive impact equivalent to a 57% reduction in the likelihood of unemployment for people who benefited from JobsPlus.

Dealing with Covid-19 presents a particular challenge to economic activity and, consequently, to employment levels. In last year’s July Jobs Stimulus, the capacity of JobsPlus was increased to 8,000 places. The qualification criteria for those under 30 years was amended, meaning they can now avail of the support after 4 months, having previously been 12 months. Time spent in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment can be counted for the purposes of eligibility for all unemployed individuals.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobsPlus Scheme

243. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an appeals process will be introduced for unsuccessful applicants for the JobsPlus scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17822/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): JobsPlus is a subsidy paid to employers who recruit long-term unemployed people for new positions in their workplace. Employers can avail of JobsPlus when filling new positions or positions that arise as a consequence of natural turnover and receive a subsidy of €7,500 or €10,000 per employee. The value of the grant is dependent on the age of the new employee and their duration of unemployment, over a two-year period of employment.

With regards the right of appeal, the JobsPlus scheme is administrative (non-statutory) and therefore decisions on claims cannot be appealed to a Social Welfare Appeals Officer. However, if an applicant is dissatisfied with a decision not to award support, they may request a review of their application by a different Officer. It is open to applicants to supply any additional facts of information in support of their application.

If there is a particular case that the Deputy has a concern about, my officials would be happy to review it.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

244. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and the reason changes were made in 2019 to the operational rules of community employment supervisor pay scales; the reason community employment supervisors on a higher pay point who have their employment interrupted or contract ended are subsequently being rehired as supervisors on a lower pay point; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17831/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien): The Community Employment Scheme (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

The programme is delivered through independent CE sponsoring authorities that operate in the community and voluntary sector. They are responsible for persons recruited and employed by them.

My Department provides funding for CE schemes for training and material costs, in addition to CE participant and CE supervisor wages. CE sponsoring authorities receive this funding in line with their annual contract with my Department.

CE supervisors are employed by CE sponsoring authorities, they are not employees of the Department. As the employer, CE sponsoring authorities provide fixed-term contracts to both new and existing CE supervisors in line with their annual contractual agreement with the Department. It is important to note that each CE sponsoring authority is an independent employer in their own right.

In 2019 the definition of a new CE supervisor was clarified as being a person hired by a CE sponsoring authority who is not currently employed as a CE supervisor. All new CE supervisors commence on Point 1 of the appropriate payscale and move by annual increments on the anniversary of their commencement date thereafter, subject to satisfactory performance. The change to a CE supervisor's salary referred to in the Deputy's question relates to a situation where a CE supervisor starts with a new employer. It does not relate to an interruption in their employment with their existing employer.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Free Travel Scheme

245. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the entitlement to the free travel scheme at 66 years of age is dependent on a person being in receipt of the State pension; the reason this is a requirement given the scheme clearly states that it is an entitlement at 66 years of age; the reason a person must apply for the free travel scheme at 66 years of age when not in receipt of a State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17839/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Free Travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 990,000 customers with direct eligibility. The estimated expenditure on free travel in 2021 is €95 million.

Everyone aged 66 and over will qualify for Free Travel, if s/he is legally resident and living permanently in the State (i.e. on an all-year-round basis).

My Department is able to automatically issue a Free Travel Pass to those who are aged 66 or over and in receipt of a social welfare pension because it has the information required to process the pass.

For a person aged 66 and over who does not fall into the category for the automatic issuing of a Free Travel Pass, it is necessary for them to complete an application form. This is to ensure that the Department has the correct and most up to date information for the applicant, thus ensuring that the Free Travel Pass is issued to the right person at the correct address and the applicant also receives the correct type of Travel pass i.e. Single Pass, Spouse/Partner/Civil or Companion pass.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance

246. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if entitlement to the disability allowance will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); if allowance will be made for the funds being set aside and managed by their parents for their future care; and if the matter will be expedited. [17844/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Social welfare legislation provides that, for social assistance schemes, all income and capital (such as savings, investments and property other than the family home) belonging to the claimant and his or her spouse/partner, where applicable, are assessable for means assessment purposes. Disability allowance (DA) is a statutory means-tested payment and the provisions governing the assessment of means are set out in legislation. When deciding on entitlement of DA, a deciding officer has no discretion regarding the application of this legislation.

A review of this lady's disability allowance (DA) was carried out and it was established that the person concerned had means from capital. DA is a means tested scheme and the way means are assessed is laid down in social welfare legislation. The person concerned was notified of this decision on 15 November 2019.

The person concerned has been requested to furnish up to date details regarding their means and circumstances. On receipt of this information a review will be carried out and she will be notified of the outcome directly in writing.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

247. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to previous parliamentary questions, the reason for the delay in accommodating an association (details supplied) relative to its interest in being included in an existing community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17845/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien): Officials of my Department have written to representatives of the association concerned in January 2021, informing them of the next and required steps necessary to apply for additional places on

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an existing project, and confirming that the Department was available to support and advise on any matters relating to the successful outcome of an application.

The documentation required and details of the process to be followed in order to apply for additional places on Community Employment were sent to the sponsor organisation (St. Canice's) who were to recruit the additional participants in respect of the association concerned.

I confirm that, to date, no contact has been received from the organisation since January 2021.

My officials are available to engage with any or all of the parties involved regarding the matter of additional places. In order to progress this query, however, the active participation in the process of the association concerned is required. I would encourage them to make contact with my officials at their earliest convenience.

Departmental Data

248. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in her Department by gender in tabular form. [17917/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The below tables provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in my Department by gender. These figures are as at the end of February and are full time equivalents. The figure for full time equivalents takes account of staff that avail of work-share options.

	Female	Male
Assistant Secretary	4.00	7.00
Principal Officer	26.00	37.80
Medical Assessor	21.30	7.00
Assistant Principal	135.33	153.00
Higher Executive Officer	957.64	486.34
Administrative Officer	12.95	18.00
Grand Total	1157.22	709.14

Departmental Data

249. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types her Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17979/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department shares data with the Department of Health, primarily for the purpose of assisting with the delivery of services to their customers. However, it is not possible to provide an inventory to cover all such data sharing over the extended period covered in the question, especially in view of the short time frame available.

As an indication of the type of data sharing that is undertaken between the two Departments, we cite the following examples;

- Means data is shared on a case by case basis to support the processing of medical card applications.

- Client identity data is shared to facilitate the allocation of unique health identifier (IHI), and

- data has been provided at times to support national health screening initiatives.

If the Deputy has a specific area of interest or concern, she is welcome to communicate directly with the Office of the Deputy Secretary at DSGoffice@welfare.ie and every effort will be made to facilitate the request.

i trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

General Data Protection Regulation

250. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of complaints her Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17998/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below:

	Total	Reason for refusal
Complaints	52	N/A
Subject Access Requests*	1518	
Accepted	1510	
Refused	8	6 were refused under Article 15(4) GDPR – Third party data was refused under Article 12(5)(b) GDPR – unfounded or excessive 1 was refused under Section 60(3)(a)(ii) and 60(3)(a)(iv) of the Data Protection Act 2018 – ongoing investigation
Right to Erasure	54	
Granted	7	
Part-granted	4	These requests were part-granted as some of the data could not be erased under Article 17(3) GDPR
Refused	27	These requests were refused under Article 17(3) GDPR.
Withdrawn	5	
Pending	5	
Referred	3	
Not verified	2	
No records exist	1	

* Subject Access Requests from members of the public who are former members of the Department's staff are not included in these figures.

Maternity Leave

251. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on making maternity leave available for persons who have a miscarriage before the 24th week of pregnancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18034/21]

252. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on providing parent's leave to parents who have a miscarriage or stillbirth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18035/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): I propose to take Questions Nos. 251 and 252 together.

I recognise that miscarriage and stillbirth are very tragic for parents. The Maternity Protection Acts 1994-2004 provide for up to 26 weeks paid maternity leave, and a further 16 weeks unpaid leave for women whose pregnancy has been confirmed by a doctor/medical practitioner after the 24th week of pregnancy. In the event of a stillbirth or miscarriage occurring after the 24th week of pregnancy, the mother is entitled to take her full maternity leave. Paternity leave is also available to the relevant parent in the event of a stillbirth or miscarriage occurring any time after the 24th week of pregnancy.

Childcare Services

253. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if his attention has been drawn to the lack of provision of childcare services for babies aged 6 to 12 months in the Dublin 1, 3, 7 and 9 areas, respectively that have developed since Pobal published its Early Years Sector Profile report in November 2019; his plans to conduct updated research into the capacity of existing childcare provision in the same areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17674/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): Supply of, and demand for, early learning and care and school-age childcare places is monitored annually through the Early Years Sector Profile report. This survey is conducted by Pobal on behalf of the Department.

Published data from the 2018/2019 programme year indicates that existing childcare provision, in general, meets current needs nationwide in terms of capacity whilst recognising that small pockets of under supply may exist within this.

Nationally, capacity and vacant places increased year on year from 2017/2018 (5%) to 2018/2019 (6%). A breakdown of data is available at a local authority level in Dublin, including Dublin City and Fingal. Dublin city had a vacancy rate of 4% in 2018/2019, no change from 4% in 2017/2018. Fingal had a vacancy rate of 5% in 2018/2019, up from 4% in 2017/2018. My Department continues to monitor this data closely.

My Department also funds 30 City and County Childcare Committees across the country. Part of their role is to advise my Department on capacity issues.

A key policy objective of my Department is to improve affordability, accessibility and quality of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC). A 141% increase in investment over the last number of years has led to a doubling in the number of children receiving free or subsidised early learning and care and school-age childcare. It has also supported the sector to increase the number of places available.

First 5, the ten-year whole-of-Government strategy for babies, young children and their families pledges to build on this progress. Among key strategic actions in First 5 is a commitment to 'maintain and extend the supply of high-quality publicly subsidised ELC and SAC to best serve the developmental needs of babies and young children, ensuring that it also reflects the needs and preferences of parents and families'.

To deliver on this strategic action, a range of actions are under way, including an update of the National Planning Guidelines for the development of early learning and care and school-age childcare settings, the extension of regulation to all paid, non-relative childminders on a phased basis and the development of a strategic capital investment plan to deliver large-scale capital investment under Project 2040. The development of a new funding model for EELC and SAC also seeks to address issues of accessibility. First 5 also commits to strengthen capacity to accurately forecast supply and demand for early learning and care and school-age childcare.

Owing to COVID-19, the publication of Pobal's Annual Early Years Sector Profile 2019/2020 has been delayed. It is expected that the report will be published in mid 2021.

Planning for the 2020/2021 survey administration is underway, and these data will continue to provide a key input into the Department's work in this area.

Maternity Leave

254. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the status of efforts to provide access to paid maternity leave for parents of children born via surrogacy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17727/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): Policy on surrogacy rests with the Minister for Health while policy on parentage rests with the Minister for Justice. Legislation on family leaves must be developed in the context of the legal situation concerning parentage, including in relation to surrogacy. Any changes in the legal situation with regard to parentage and surrogacy are matters for the Minister for Justice and Minister for Health.

Some forms of family leaves may be available to commissioning surrogate parents. These include parental leave and parent's leave and benefit.

Child and Family Agency

255. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of habeas corpus applications made in circumstances in which Tusla was a respondent in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17757/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): The Deputy is referring to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct response be provided to the Deputy.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

256. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he will provide the details and copies of all correspondence between him and his Department and the Commission of Investigation on Mother and Baby Homes in relation to the Sixth interim report of the Commission both in advance of the receipt of that report on 14 February 2020 and subsequent to its receipt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17776/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes submitted a Sixth Interim Report to the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on 2 January 2020. The Sixth Interim Report was published in full on 12 January 2021 in line with the commitment I gave to publish this Report in tandem with the Commission’s Final Report. I have requested my Department to provide the Deputy with copies of the correspondence between my Department and the Commission in relation to this Report.

In its Sixth Interim Report, the Commission provided a brief update on its work for the purposes of grounding a request for revision of the timeframe of the final report. Although it was a short report it nonetheless raised complex issues related to the completion of the Commission’s programme of work. Notably, the Commission proposed a revised reporting arrangement to facilitate a phased completion of its report. On the basis of legal advices available to the then Minister, the Government agreed to a limited extension until 26 June 2020 in order to allow the Commission to complete all its work and submit a final report.

The Report identified challenges relating to the redaction, transfer and potential for future use of the Commission’s records in the context of its obligations under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004. The Sixth Interim Report was not immediately published to facilitate further deliberation and engagement with the Commission in relation to these important matters. As the Deputy will be aware, I subsequently brought forward the Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) Records, and another Matter, Bill 2020 to resolve these matters. This bespoke legislation was enacted in October 2020 to protect all the Commission’s records and ensure legal clarity on their transfer and future use.

The Sixth Interim Report also enclosed a detailed technical archaeological report relating to burials at Sean Ross Abbey, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. At the time, the then Minister was advised by the Office of the Attorney General that this technical report had to be returned as it constituted evidence to the Commission. This was done and all copies of the technical report were destroyed by the Department. The technical report was included in the Commission’s final report.

Joint Labour Committees

257. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the position regarding the establishment of a joint labour committee in relation to the childcare sector and the development of an employment regulation order; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17803/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Programme for Government commits to supporting the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) for the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector and the drawing up of an Employment Regulation Order. In December 2020, I began a short process to examine the possibility of regulating the pay and conditions of employment of practitioners in early learning and care and school-age childcare, and to examine the suitability of establishing a JLC. In agreement with IBEC/CSI and SIPTU, I appointed Dr Kevin Duffy, former Chair of the Labour Court, to be the independent chair of this process.

Following a series of meetings that concluded in early February, Dr Duffy has now submitted his report on the process. The report concludes that all parties agreed that the establishment of a JLC is the most appropriate means by which pay and conditions of employment in the sector can be addressed.

On foot of this, I have written to the Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail, recommending the establishment of a JLC for the sector. If established, a JLC would provide an opportunity for relevant parties to engage in negotiations on an Employment Regulation Order which could ultimately establish binding rates of pay and conditions for the sector.

Under the Industrial Relations Act 1946, the Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail has the power to apply to the Labour Court for the establishment of a JLC, and it is the statutory role of the Labour Court to determine the appropriateness of establishing a JLC in a given sector.

Departmental Bodies Data

258. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if a list of section 56 and 59 organisations will be provided; the number of employees in each which have not received pay restoration in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17818/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I can inform the Deputy that Tusla publishes considerable information on its funding of bodies under section 56 of the Child and Family Agency Acts 2013. For example, Appendix 1 of the Tusla’s Annual Financial Statements for 2019 provides a list of organisations that received payments equal to or greater than €50,000 in that year. These are published <https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla-Annual-Report-2019-eng-web.pdf> and were laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in June 2020.

It is important to note that Tusla is not the employer of persons in such organisations.

As the Deputy’s question refers to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, I have asked Tusla to respond to the Deputy directly.

Child and Family Agency

259. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on the fact that the Tusla prevention, partnership and family support programme does not have a community-based team in south County Tipperary; his further views on the way funding is given to a local resource centre instead; his views on the appropriateness of not having a specific Tusla prevention, partnership and family support community-based team in south County Tipperary; the other health areas in which there is no community-based prevention, partnership and family support team run by Tusla; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17833/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The purpose of the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) is to support children, young people, parents and families in accessing preventative and support services while enabling their participation in decisions which affect their lives. It aims to prevent risks to children and young people arising or escalating through building sustainable services within Tusla and partner organisations to perform preventative and early intervention work. The programme addresses Tusla’s statutory requirement under the Child and Family Agency Act to provide ‘preventative family support services aimed at promoting the welfare of children’. PPFS works to build connectivity by engaging with Tusla and external services across the continuum of care.

Tusla has established 118 Child & Family Support Networks (CFSNs) across Ireland, which help to support integrated and co-ordinated supports for children, young people and families at local community level. CFSNs are a frontline operational structure set up by Tusla to support integrated service delivery. Members of CFSNs come from a variety of agencies or local voluntary and community services such as the Community and Voluntary Sector, HSE Primary Care Social Work, Early Years Services, Sports Clubs, Speech & Language Therapy, An Garda Síochána, Youth Probation Services, Primary and Secondary Schools etc. There are three CFSN networks in South Tipperary, and South Tipperary PPFS continues to develop as do other PPFS services across the country in line with available resources.

In practical terms, if a family presents to one service within the Child & Family Support Network and that service is not equipped to meet their needs, that network member can effectively re-direct the family to the most appropriate network member(s) or service. To be able to do this, CFSNs develop a good understanding and become familiar with one another's work. The CFSNs also facilitate the coordination of the use of Meitheal, the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model that identifies a child's and their families' needs and strengths, and brings together a team around the child to deliver preventative support.

South Tipperary follows this model and has a Senior CFSN Coordinator in place. Tusla commissions services from its community and voluntary sector funded partners, including the Family Resource Centres, based on identified need. The Senior Manager for PPFS would have a key role in identifying the need for these community based services and oversees related service level agreements.

Departmental Funding

260. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if his attention has been drawn to the funding difficulties in an organisation (details supplied) and the potential impact on its network across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17836/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): The current funding difficulties in the organisation referred to by the Deputy has been brought to my attention at a meeting with the organisation's Board. The ongoing management of the organisation referred to by the Deputy is a matter for their Board, including the challenges being presented due to the recent Covid-19 restrictions.

My Department provides substantial funding to this organisation, which plays an important role in providing young people with opportunities for developmental experiences and informal learning. All of the youth funding provided by my Department has been maintained fully throughout the ongoing period of restrictions. In addition, I secured an increase in 2021 for youth services, including an increase for the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

My officials are in regular contact with youth sector representatives in relation to the impact of the pandemic and associated health restrictions. It is of importance that Exchequer funding to youth services nationally is protected and I am satisfied that Government has been able to continue to support them. My officials will continue to work closely with youth organisations and will actively monitor the situation.

Departmental Staff

261. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17904/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The table below shows a breakdown of staff employed in my Department in the requested grades by gender as of 30 March 2021.

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Higher Executive Officer	40	29	69
Administrative Officer	21	14	35
Assistant Principal	58	35	93
Principal Officer	23	17	40
Assistant Secretary	4	2	6

Domestic Violence Refuges Provision

262. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if a refuge centre for victims of domestic abuse will be established in counties Cavan and Monaghan in 2021; the progress to date in reviewing emergency accommodation nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17931/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The response to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) is a cross Departmental and multi-agency issue. Policy is coordinated by the Department of Justice. Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of DSGBV. Capital funding for approved housing bodies, including services that provide refuge accommodation for victims of DSGBV, is provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for Government sets out a number of commitments regarding DSGBV, including an audit on segmentation of DSGBV responsibilities across government departments and agencies, and a Third National Strategy on DSGBV, which will inform future investments in this area.

Tusla is also undertaking a review of emergency accommodation nationwide. This will assess the current and requisite distribution of safe emergency accommodation. The review’s initial findings will be discussed with the Monitoring Committee of the Second National Strategy on DSGBV on the 31st March. The report, due for publication in Q2 2021, will examine where the underlying need for services is most concentrated, with regard to the current geographical location of existing services and the demographic profile of service users. The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to anticipate what the report may contain, in advance of its publication.

The Tusla review, recommendations of the Monitoring Committee for the Second National Strategy on DSGBV, and the audit of responsibility for DSGBV will all inform Tusla’s future decisions on priority areas for investment and development of services.

It is of the utmost importance that the needs of those who experience domestic violence are met in the most appropriate way possible. I, along with my colleagues in government, am committed to ensuring future service provision is evidence based and designed to meet the holistic needs of individuals who experience domestic violence.

Departmental Data

263. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17967/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): This Department does not provide the type of data this PQ references to the Department of Health.

General Data Protection Regulation

264. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17985/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Complaints / Requests	Total number (2018 to date)	
Complaints.	2 (one from a member of the public)	
Requests for access to personal data.	102	99 accepted.3 refused (adverse effect on third party).
Requests for rectification.	1	1 Accepted.
Requests for erasure.	2	2 Accepted.

Apprenticeship Programmes

265. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated overall apprenticeship population if the target of 10,000 new apprenticeship registrations is reached taking into account the variation in apprenticeship durations and dropout rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17665/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The standing apprentice population is estimated to reach between 31,000 and 33,000 apprentices by 2025. This represents an expected increase of over 50% on the existing population of 19,969 at the end of February 2021.

There are currently 60 apprenticeship programmes of which 28 are four years in duration, 8 are three years and 24 are two years in duration. The actual population will be dependent on the range of takeup across the available apprenticeships, and those in development.

Freedom of Information

266. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if his attention has been drawn to the data provided on foot

of a recent freedom of information request (details supplied); the analysis his Department has carried out across third-level institutions which fall under the responsibility of his Department into the fining of students for the late payment of registration fees; if this issue will be examined as part of the ongoing review of Higher Education Authority legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17678/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are governed by the Universities Act 1997, the Institutes of Technologies Acts 1992 to 2006 and the Technological Universities Act 2018. Within the meaning of these Acts, HEIs are autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own day-to-day management and operational affairs including dealing with policy and procedure in relation to fee collection. My Department therefore has no role in relation to such matters.

It is not intended that the reform of the HEA legislation will include any provisions which will amend the autonomy of institutions to determine such policies.

However, I am very aware of the difficulties facing students during this pandemic. I would encourage all higher education institutions to have a responsive approach to student needs wherever possible and it is important to acknowledge that most HEIs have to date shown enormous willingness to be responsive in numerous ways. I would encourage all institutions to engage with students in relation to any issues, including fees.

From my Department's perspective, students who avail of the SUSI grant have received a €250 top-up in their grant and students who do not avail of the grant but attend publicly funded Higher Education Institutions in the state can reduce by €250 any outstanding student contribution fee payments or receive a €250 credit note for their institution.

Additionally Budget 2021 provides further funding to enhance SUSI grant supports for post-grads and increase support for the PATH access initiative. In July I announced a range of additional student supports including a doubling of the Student Assistance Fund, and a €15 million technology fund for devices for students.

Students experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Office of the institution attended. The fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Student Support Schemes

267. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the options available to a student to further their education (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17726/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): The Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) was introduced as part of a series of reforms to the student immigration system for international education in line with the Government decision of 19 May 2015. These reforms have been designed to:

- tackle abuse of the immigration regime,
- tackle abuse of the labour market,

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- improve the overall quality of offering to international students,
- improve protection for learners,
- safeguard the strong international reputation of high-quality Irish education providers in line with the goals of Ireland's international education strategy.

As part of these reforms, further education programmes are no longer eligible for student immigration purposes. All Higher Education Institutions and English language education providers who wish to recruit non-EEA students must meet with relevant criteria and be listed on the ILEP in order to do so. The ILEP details the education programmes considered to justify the granting of permission to non-EEA students to live and work in Ireland.

The ILEP was introduced in January 2016 and is administered by the Department of Justice in association with my Department. Further information on the ILEP including the Government decision leading to its establishment are available online here: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/inis/pages/interim%20list%20of%20eligible%20programmes%20-%20ilep>.

Third Level Admissions

268. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of social care students enrolled in each year of their course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17731/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy is available in the attached spreadsheet. The data given is from the 2019/20 academic year, the latest available.

The data on the year of study is taken as given by the Higher Education Institutions in their statistical returns to the HEA. In some instances HEIs categorise postgraduate students as being in their fifth or sixth year of study, while in other cases these students may be categorised as being first or second year students. I have met with Tusla in recent months about how we can increase the number of social care places in our higher education institutions.

[Social Care Students]

Third Level Admissions

269. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will provide a full list of all publicly-funded higher education institutions and courses which are restricted or limited to independently determining the number of students they enrol for undergraduate and or postgraduate courses, such as teacher training; the limit set for each course or subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17775/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy is not held by my Department and therefore cannot be provided.

There are a number of external constraints which may place limits on the number of students that a HEI can enroll in a given course. In a course where a clinical or other work placement

forms a necessary part of the learning experience, the capacity to provide such placements may limit the number of students that can be enrolled. Other constraints include the need for specialised environments such as laboratories or workshops and the need to maintain student-staff ratios.

Third Level Staff

270. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science when a review (details supplied) will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17799/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is aware of the issue referred to by the Deputy. The matter is currently under consideration by my officials with a view to addressing the issues involved.

Separately, my Department has committed to a review of the decision-making process in relation to the examination of previous complaints on governance issues at the institution. The process of compiling the records in order to inform the review continues, however the process is significantly constrained in light of current restrictions on access to paper records held within the line section. However, it is hoped that the Department will be in a position to progress the matter as soon as possible in accordance with the recommended public health guidelines.

Departmental Staff

271. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17911/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): As, the Deputy is aware, my Department was established in June 2020. I have attached a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in my Department by gender, please see the attached table. However, we are continuing to engage with colleagues in Government regarding an additional Assistant Secretary and additional staff.

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Grade	Male	Female	Headcount	Total (FTE)
Assistant Secretary	3	0	3	3
Principal Officer	5	8	13	13
Assistant Principal Officer	12	21	33	32.33
Higher Executive Officer	8	21	29	27.4
Administrative Officer	5	2	7	6.8

Departmental Data

272. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file

types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17974/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): In October 2020, my Department provided the Department of Health with a list of Further Education and Training, Higher Education public and HECA member institutions, addresses and contact numbers.

Data in respect of the number of students in full time higher education institution-owned accommodation, with a breakdown of figures by institution was also provided in October 2020.

No other data sets, databases or file types have been shared with the Department of Health since the establishment of my department in 2020.

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General Data Protection Regulation

273. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17992/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): As you are aware, my Department was established in June 2020. I have attached a spreadsheet which shows details of the number of complaints that were received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021, the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively and the number of GDPR requests refused. The 2018 and 2019 predate my Department's establishment.

[GDPR and Data Information Requests]

Direct Provision System

274. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Justice if the necessary steps have been made to ensure that EU Directive 2014/92 has been respected by the end of the first quarter of 2021 as outlined in the White Paper on Direct Provision; if asylum seekers continue to face difficulties opening bank accounts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18032/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I have established a Programme Board in my Department to oversee the implementation of the relevant recommendations of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process, including the recommendation related to access to basic bank accounts for International Protection applicants. The Programme Board is supported by an Implementation Working Group, comprising senior officials from the relevant areas of my department, to support progress in implementing recommendations, and reports into the Board.

In relation to recommendation 5.6 of the Advisory Group - that the State take the necessary steps to ensure that EU Directive 2014/92 is respected and that all banks operating in the State respect the rights of applicants for international protection to open and hold banks accounts - my officials have been engaging with the relevant stakeholders, including the Banking and Payments Federation of Ireland (BPMI), with a view to supporting a resolution to any issues and enabling a consistent approach in implementing the Directive as appropriate. I also met with the BPMI recently in this regard concerning its role and my officials will engage with stakeholders further to establish the actions that can be advanced by them to achieve a more consistent approach by all banks in line with the terms of the EU Directive and the EU (Payment Accounts) Regulations 2016.

Asylum Seekers

275. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Justice if her attention has been drawn to the fact that asylum seekers are facing difficulties ascertaining employment due to suspicions surrounding the legitimacy of their work permits; if she plans to introduce work permits in a new format as per recommendations by an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18033/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): As recommended by the Catherine Day Expert Advisory Group, my Department is currently at an early investigative stage in the process of changing the labour market access permission letter to a card format. I expect to bring this change into effect before the end of the year.

Employers have a duty under the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018, to inform the Minister for Justice, where they employ an international protection applicant who holds a labour market access permission, within 21 days of that applicant being employed, and once again within 21 days of the employment ceasing. Declaration forms for this purpose are provided to eligible applicants by my Department's Labour Market Access Unit (LMAU) along with their permission letter.

If an employer or a prospective employer has any suspicions surrounding the legitimacy of a labour market access permission letter, they can contact the LMAU (Lmauqueries@justice.ie) at any time to verify its authenticity.

Immigration Policy

276. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice if an additional extension will be allowed for expired immigration permits given the situation with Covid-19 restrictions; and when an announcement will be made on the matter. [17673/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): For people currently living in Ireland and who hold either a valid immigration or an international protection permission registered with my Department, I announced on 26 March 2021, that all such permissions due to expire between 21 April 2021 and 20 September 2021, are automatically renewed to 20 September 2021.

In each instance, the automatic renewal of permission is on the same basis as the existing permission and the same conditions attach. In relation to persons with existing permission under Directive 2004/38/EC (Free Movement Directive), the automatic renewal is subject to the requirement that the person is complying with the requirements of the Directive.

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This is the seventh, and expected to be the final, extension of permissions granted since the outset of the pandemic. Any permission that was renewed by the previous notices is also automatically renewed by this notice until 20 September 2021.

The temporary extension of immigration permissions means that anyone who held a valid permission to be in the State in March 2020 is legally permitted to remain until 20 September 2021, even if their Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card has expired and they are awaiting a new one.

All renewals in the Dublin area are now being processed online only and the system has been available for all applicants since 20 July 2020 at <https://inisonline.jahs.ie>. Online renewal applications continue to be accepted and processed. I encourage Dublin based customers who can use the online system, to do so and to not wait until September.

The Registration Office in Burgh Quay remains closed as a result of the Level 5 COVID-19 restrictions announced by Government in December. Customers who were issued with appointments for first time registrations will be prioritised for appointments once the Public Office can safely reopen. As first time registration requires the taking of biometrics - fingerprints - this cannot be done online.

Registrations outside of the Dublin area are processed by the Garda National Immigration Bureau through the Garda Station network. Information on the contact details for all the registration offices outside Dublin is available at: <https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/office-of-corporate-communications/news-media/reopening-of-registration-offices.html>.

Human Trafficking

277. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice her plans to address the downgrading of Ireland to a tier-two country in the 2018 and 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17746/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Government is fully committed to addressing human trafficking in all forms, including through the provision of supports for victims of human trafficking, by educating the public to recognise the signs of trafficking and by continuing to work with our international partners in all relevant forums.

Officials within my Department have been preparing Ireland's response to the TIP questionnaire for a number of months. A response has been submitted to the U.S. Embassy for onwards transmission to the State Department, and officials are in regular communication with the Embassy to answer follow up queries and provide further input as required in that dialogue.

Our response to this year's Questionnaire outlines a number of measures that we have progressed in order to tackle human trafficking in Ireland.

The initiatives progressed by my Department and An Garda Síochána within the last year clearly demonstrate our commitment to tackling this heinous crime. Among the measures highlighted in our response is the funding my Department has committed to NGOs working to combat human trafficking. The details are set out in the tables below.

The response also highlights the priority actions being taken to ensure victims of trafficking are identified, protected, and provided with all the supports needed. To this end a new wider National Referral Mechanism is being created to protect and promote the human rights of trafficking victims. The supports available under the NRM include accommodation, medical care,

care planning, legal advice and aid, immigration permission, police services, employment and vocational training, translation and interpretation services and voluntary return home. I intend to bring proposals for a new NRM to Government this month.

My Department is also working with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Ireland on a Cultural Mediation project. The project will build the capacity of State professionals who work with or for migrants, to identify and address the needs of victims or potential victims of gender based violence and trafficking more effectively and to provide culturally sensitive support to them. It will also provide victims of gender based violence and trafficking better access to information and allow them to effectively engage with support and referral services. It will also promote a culturally sensitive approach to victims, through the use of cultural mediators.

Core Funding	Amount
Ruhama including COVID	€609,868
Ruhama Exit Pathways	€27,620
MRCI	€83,500
IOM Cultural Mediation Service Project II	€250,000
Dormant Account Funding	
IOM	€30,000

Awareness Raising/Frontline Training

Organisation	
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland	€28,754 to develop information resources and training on awareness of Human Trafficking for labour exploitation
Immigrant Council of Ireland	€35,000 for development and delivery of introductory and advanced online training modules on awareness raising of human trafficking in Ireland
MECPATHS	€20,398 for development and delivery of online education and awareness raising of human trafficking in Ireland to frontline professionals and students within the hospitality and services sectors and now for the aviation sector
DORAS	€23,552 for development and delivery of training and information resources on awareness raising of human trafficking aimed at frontline staff and volunteers to build capacity

Insurance Fraud

278. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice the number of incidents of fraudulent insurance claims reported by the insurance industry to An Garda Síochána in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17755/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner has responsibility, by law, for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. The Garda Commissioner is solely responsible for the allocation of personnel, as well as organisational matters including the structure and number of Garda units involved in investigating any given criminal matter, including insurance fraud, and the resourcing of criminal investigations. I am assured that allegations of insurance fraud made to An Garda Síochána are fully investigated by the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB).

As the Deputy will also be aware, *Operation Coatee* was launched in April 2019, its focus being the prevention of insurance-related fraud and associated crimes on a coordinated basis

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throughout Ireland. In circumstances where insurance fraud has already occurred, *Operation Coatee* is designed to maximise the prospect of identifying suspected culprits and, where possible and appropriate, to initiate criminal proceedings.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the specific incident type of Insurance Fraud was introduced on PULSE from 1 November 2018. Prior to 1 November 2018, Insurance Fraud reported to An Garda Síochána was recorded under more general fraud incident types.

The Garda authorities have provided the table below which sets out the number of fraudulent insurance claims, within the Insurance Fraud incident type, reported to An Garda Síochána in 2019, 2020 and up to and including 28 March 2021. The insurance company is the injured party in all of these incidents.

Year	2019	2020	2021 (up to 28 March)
Fraudulent Claims	63	48	Fewer than 10 incidents reported

For the Deputy's information, Incident counts are based on the date of reporting to An Garda Síochána and were collated based on PULSE data as of 01:30 on the 28 March 2021. Crime counting rules were applied to the data. These figures relate to fraudulent insurance claims only (based on recorded motive details and incident narrative) and do not relate to fraudulent applications for insurance or Ghost Broker incidents.

Private Security Authority

279. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice if she will engage with the Private Security Authority in relation to educating and training for licensed security professionals; and her views on the creation of a singular training and education course for a security licence which incorporates static guarding, door security, CCTV monitoring, conflict resolution and self-defence given that there is no current course offering a licence which covers all these skillsets. [17768/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Private Security Authority (PSA), an independent agency under the remit of my Department, is the regulatory body with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry in the State.

The Private Security Services Act 2004 (as amended) sets out the security services licensable by the Authority. I have no involvement in the day to day operations of the PSA.

The Private Security Authority currently regulates contractors across 12 different sectors of the security industry and employees across four sectors. Dates for the licensing of employees in the event security and private investigator sectors will be announced later this year.

The training requirements for each sector are quite specific and the requirements for those working as a security guard in a retail environment are significantly different from those required by a door supervisor or event security personnel.

Currently there are two separate level 4 minor QQI (Quality Qualifications Ireland) awards for security guarding skills and door security procedures. These can be combined by training providers and offered as a single course to participants who wish to be trained in both sectors. The combined course includes elements of CCTV monitoring, conflict resolution and self-defence relevant to the role of a PSA licensed security guard or door supervisor.

Following consultation with security employer and employee representatives and training providers, two new QQI courses which will replace the current awards are being developed and will be available from January 2022.

These new courses have revised and updated the current learner outcomes and also introduce additional outcomes to enhance the skills of the trainee. In addition, I am advised that the Authority is engaged with training providers on the development of a new physical intervention course which they plan to launch in 2022.

Private Security Authority

280. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice if security companies will be made to provide their employees with stab vests and body CCTV cameras while working in the interest of safety and security. [17769/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Private Security Authority (PSA), an independent agency under the remit of my Department, is the regulatory body with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry in the State.

The Private Security Services Act 2004 (as amended) sets out the security services licensable by the Authority. I have no involvement in the day to day operations of the PSA.

I am informed by the Authority, that all contractors licensed by them are required to comply with prescribed standards.

In the case of contractors in the security guarding and door supervisor sectors the prescribed standard is PSA 28:2013, Standard For The Licensing Of Door Supervisors (Licensed Premises) And Security Guard (Static) Contractors. Under this standard contractors are required to undertake a risk assessment at all locations where a security service is being provided.

As part of the risk assessment, contractors must assess the risks that security personnel might face, including risks from violence and outline and implement risk mitigating measures to eliminate or significantly diminish any identified risks.

Risk mitigating measures may include the use of personal protective equipment or technology.

The Authority has advised me that where body CCTV cameras are used it is important that all statutory requirements under Data Protection legislation are met by the contractor as failure to do so may result in the Authority taking action against their licence.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

281. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice if she has received the 2020 GSOC annual report to date; when this report will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17784/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I can inform the Deputy that the GSOC annual report for 2020 was submitted to me on 31 March 2021. Officials from my Department are currently considering the report with a view to publishing it as soon as practicable.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

282. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice further to Parliamentary Question No. 486 of 17 December 2020, the progress to date in preparing legislation relevant to community-based CCTV; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17811/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I can inform the Deputy that my officials are currently finalising the draft General Scheme of the Garda Síochána (Digital Recording) Bill, which I intend to bring to Cabinet for approval in the coming weeks. The General Scheme will be published on the Department of Justice website shortly thereafter. When enacted, this legislation will replace Section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

Immigration Policy

283. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice the status of the programme for Government commitment to regularise undocumented persons living in Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17814/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to bring forward a regularisation scheme within 18 months of the formation of the Government, to create new pathways for long-term undocumented people and their dependents, meeting specified criteria and bearing in mind Ireland's European Union (EU) and Common Travel Area (CTA) commitments.

As outlined in my Justice Plan 2021, a scheme will launch later this year and work is underway in my Department to give effect to this commitment. This work is being informed by an assessment of international best practice and having regard to our EU and CTA commitments. I will consult with relevant Government Departments, civil society and other interested parties, before finalising the Scheme .

In the meantime, I would encourage any person who is resident in the State without permission to contact my Department or their local immigration office and to take all appropriate steps to regularise their own and their family's status. In all cases, people must engage with the authorities if they wish to be permitted to remain here legally.

Visa Applications

284. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice the reason for the delay in issuing visa stickers to atypical workers in the fishing industry who have been approved for a visa; the reason the visa stickers are not issued at the same time as the visa approval is being confirmed; when a visa sticker will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17842/21]

285. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice the reason for the delay in issuing visa stickers to atypical workers in the fishing industry who have been approved for a visa; the reason the visa stickers are not issued at the same time as the visa approval is being confirmed; when a visa sticker will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17867/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 and 285 together.

I understand that the Embassy in Jakarta, where the Visa sticker issues from, have been experiencing some ICT problems. They will endeavour to issue the Visa stickers for the persons referred to by the Deputy as soon as possible.

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

Departmental Staff

286. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Justice if she will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in her Department by gender in tabular form. [17914/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): It has not been possible to collate the information requested by the Deputy within the time allowed. I will write to the Deputy to provide this information as soon as it is available.

Departmental Data

287. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types her Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17976/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): Unfortunately, my Department would not be in a position to create a schedule of the data sets, databases and file types that may have been shared with the Department of Health or indeed other Departments since 2000. Given the broad timeframe, the limited IT infrastructure over that period and changes which have occurred in my Department and in other Departments since 2020, this is not information which is available to-hand and any exercise to identify and retrieve this information would take a significant amount of time. If the Deputy is in a position to identify specific information she wishes to receive or identify the information sought from particular areas in my Department this would be very helpful and if the Deputy writes to me directly with those specifics I will arrange to have the details provided, if available, as soon as possible.

General Data Protection Regulation

288. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the number of complaints her Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17995/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I wish to advise the Deputy that the total Subject Access Requests (SARs) received, the number of SARs refused, the reason for refusal and subsequent complaints since 25 May 2018 are detailed in the table below.

Details of SARs Received

	2018 (from 25/5/18)	2019	2020	2021 (to 30/03)
Total SARs Received	141	427	429	146
SARs Refused	1	1	0	0
Reason for refusal	Records requested had previously been provided to the data subject.	Records requested related to a third party and not the data subject.		
Complaints received from data subject in relation to the refusal of a SAR.	0	0	0	0

Residency Permits

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the progress to date in the determination of an application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied); if permission to work will be given in the interim given the hardship Covid-19 is causing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18014/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): The person referred to by the Deputy is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 5 March 2020. However, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned. These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Citizenship Ceremonies

290. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice the number applications with respect to the new temporary process for granting citizenship which involves the signing of a statutory declaration of loyalty to the State instead of attending a citizenship ceremony received to date; the number of these applications that have been processed to date; if her Department has met with members of a group (details supplied); if she has taken into consideration the requests made by this group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18030/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): Officials from the Citizenship Division of the Immigration Service of my Department have recently held a virtual meeting with representatives of the group referred to by the Deputy to listen to their concerns. A number of suggestions were made by the group regarding the processing of applications and these are under active consideration. The engagement process, which has been very positive and productive, is ongoing. It has provided my officials with valuable customer insights on our service standards and procedures.

On 18 January 2021, I was pleased to announce a temporary system that enables citizenship applicants to complete their naturalisation process by signing a statutory declaration of loyalty.

This signed statutory declaration replaces the requirement for citizenship applicants to attend citizenship ceremonies, which have been temporarily suspended during COVID-19. The Citizenship Division of my Department is communicating with applicants regarding the requirements, on a phased basis.

Under the temporary new system, up to 4,000 qualifying applicants are currently being asked to complete a statutory declaration that is sent to them by email from the Citizenship Division of the Immigration Service of my Department and bring it to one of the listed designated officials. The designated official must witness the applicant sign the statutory declaration. The applicant must then send the signed statutory declaration, the appropriate fee and any other requested documentation to Citizenship Division. Final processing will then take place and a certificate of naturalisation, will be sent to the applicant.

My Department expects to continue the current statutory declaration process beyond March and we are aiming to have communicated with an additional 2,500 applicants in the system by the end of June.

To date, 3,615 communications have issued, 1,605 declarations had been returned and 887 certificates of naturalisation have already issued. More will issue in the coming weeks once the final processing of the returned declarations is completed.

It remains my intention that large scale ceremonies will recommence once circumstances allow. Since their establishment in 2011, citizenship ceremonies have been joyous occasions which mark the granting of Irish citizenships in a dignified manner and they have become a welcome addition to our public and civic life. In-person ceremonies have been provisionally scheduled to resume in December 2021, subject to the safety of all involved being assured.

Community Policing

291. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Justice the number of community policing Gardaí attached to each station in County Wicklow in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18071/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee): I can inform the Deputy that 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 approximately 14,600 Garda members and over 3,000 Garda staff nationwide.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is responsible under the law for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters and deployment of resources. As Minister, I have no role in such decisions. I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

The table below, which has been provided to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of community Gardaí assigned to Wicklow Division as at end December 2016 to end December 2020 and as at 28 February 2021, the latest date for which figures are available.

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

A detailed breakdown of the Garda workforce, including the national distribution of Community Gardaí, is available on my Department’s website, in the interests of transparency and for the convenience of Deputies and the wider public. This information is updated every month with the latest data provided by An Garda Síochána. The Information requested in relation to Community Garda may be accessed along with information about the wider Garda workforce at the following link:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Garda_Workforce

It is important to note that to date, the official categorisation as a Community Garda has simply referred to those exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society including giving talks to schools, community groups and others. However, the Deputy will appreciate that it is important to consider that community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána and all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. Indeed, this is fundamental to the new Garda Operating Model recommended by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and currently being rolled out under ‘A Policing Service for Our Future’, the Government’s implementation plan for the Commission’s recommendations.

Traveller Community

292. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health his plans and efforts to date to tackle heightened incidence rates of Covid-19 among the Traveller community (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17675/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): HPSC data indicate that during the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (22/11/2021 to 27/3/2021), there have been 263 outbreaks among the Traveller community associated with 3066 cases. Of these cases, 125 persons were hospitalised and 17 have been admitted to ICU. Sadly, there has been a total of 8 deaths due to Covid-19 among Travellers during this period.

The high incidence of Covid-19 outbreaks among Travellers is concerning and reflects two main factors: the basic living conditions in which Travellers live - the social determinants of health - and the tradition of family and communal events, such as funerals and christenings.

Both the Department of Health and the HSE pro-actively monitor and respond to Covid-19 among the Traveller population. The HSE has prioritised Travellers in terms of detection, case management and contact tracing. The following measures were introduced by the HSE national social inclusion office and public health:-

- Traveller Support plans developed in relevant CHO areas;
- regular teleconferences held with Traveller Health Units to develop guidance for Travellers;
- introduction of a national Traveller helpline; <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primary-care/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/traveller-helpline.html>
- development of Traveller specific guidance document which gives general advice about preventing the spread of COVID-19 and dealing with cases of COVID-19); <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/vulnerablegroupsguidance/>

- development of specific local supports in various CHOs to support Travellers, for example, the Community Assessment Hub in the Mater Hospital is accessible to Travellers;

- national COVID-19 Traveller Service User Experience survey carried out in September 2020, which will help inform service planning throughout the ongoing pandemic,

- website resource page developed with information and resources specifically for Travellers Traveller COVID 19 sharing resources.

- A National Traveller Outbreak Control Team with representatives from relevant stakeholders including Pavee Point,

In addition to the specific public health measures, the steering committee of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy provides regular updates on the whole of Government response to Covid-19 for Travellers. The Dept of the Taoiseach subcommittee on higher risk groups also monitors the situation for Travellers.

The roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme will make a significant advance in our approach to this pandemic. People at highest risk of suffering, and most vulnerable to the worst effects of COVID-19, are prioritised as part of this listing. People aged 16-64 from disadvantaged groups living in congregated settings are prioritised in group 9. This includes people from the Travelling community.

The HSE has hosted webinar on the roll out of the vaccination programme and developed Traveller specific vaccination programme resources. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/covid-19-vaccination-programme.html>

I am aware that the poor health status of the Traveller community makes them more vulnerable to the health complications associated with Covid-19. The HSE is finalising its national Traveller health action plan and will shortly submit the plan to the Department. I am committed to supporting this plan.

Court Orders

293. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the actions he will take following the refusal by the Central Mental Hospital to comply with a court order by refusing entry to a patient on 19 March 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17743/21]

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.

Vaccination Programme

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which Ireland and other European Union member states can rely on the delivery of adequate supplies of Covid-19 vaccines to meet their urgent requirements and to ensure that contract deficiencies are replenished without delay in order to meet urgent health targets in respect of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17653/21]

359. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which efforts

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are being made to ensure the acquisition of the number of Covid-19 vaccines initially indicated with a view to ensuring that targets indicated can be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18008/21]

360. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he expects targets in respect of Covid-19 vaccination to be met in the next two months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18009/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 294, 359 and 360 together.

Ireland is participating in an EU Procurement process with a view to accessing a portfolio of candidate vaccines against COVID-19 which are being negotiated with vaccine manufacturers by the Commission acting on behalf of Member States. Emergency Support Instrument (ESI) funding has been leveraged by the Commission to facilitate its negotiations with vaccine manufacturers, including with regard to production costs and securing a reduced per dose cost for Member States.

This process has provided Ireland with access to vaccines (at a reduced cost) that it would find it difficult to access otherwise within a year after the declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO. Four of the vaccines in the EU portfolio have already been awarded Conditional Marketing Authorisation (CMA) by the Commission.

Ireland supports efforts made by the Commission to safeguard the production and delivery of doses of vaccine in the quantities agreed with vaccine suppliers and to ensure that up-front funding provided through ESI has been properly used.

Covid-19 Pandemic

295. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the company that supplied the paper and the company that did the printing for Covid-19 brochures; if these services were put out to tender; if so, when this occurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17663/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I can confirm that three companies were involved in the printing of Covid-19 brochures, details of which are set out in tabular form below.

Company	Description of Service	Date
Inkspot	Print run of Covid-19 public information booklet (2 million copies in English)	16 March 2020
Colorman	Print run of Covid-19 public information booklet (1 million copies in Irish)	31 March 2020
Dafil	Print run of Covid-19 public information booklet (1 million copies in Irish)	07 April 2020
Inkspot	Print run of Handwashing brochure for nationwide post distribution	08 April 2020
Colorman	Printing of HSE Stay Safe Guidelines	29 June 2020

Due to the extreme urgency brought about by the unforeseen circumstances pertaining to the global pandemic, it was necessary to communicate the public health advice to every household in Ireland via mail drops or via newspaper inserts. In these instances, quotes were requested

from several printers and work was allocated based on the cost and speed required for the relevant work. The Department will undertake a tender exercise for this service in 2021.

Medical Aids and Appliances

296. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied); if he will review the decision to refuse the request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17668/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My Department has no role in assessing applications made to the HSE for aids and appliances. Complaint and review procedures have been established by the HSE in accordance with Part 9 of the Health Act 2004. I have asked the HSE to provide details of these procedures to the Deputy.

The Deputy may wish to note that under the Assistive Technology scheme, which is under the remit of the Minister for Education, funding is provided to schools towards the cost of computers and specialist equipment, which are required by pupils for educational purposes.

Hospital Waiting Lists

297. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the reason 3,054 women are waiting for gynaecological care at Tallaght Hospital and 1,452 women are waiting over 18 months; and the steps he plans to take to ensure the hospital has a full complement of staff of address the large waiting list. [17671/21]

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

The HSE is currently recommending that only critical time dependent elective procedures are undertaken at this time due to the on-going and significant increased demand for bed capacity related to COVID-19.

This decision was made arising from the rapid increase in Covid-19 admissions and to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work.

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 as the use of alternative settings including private hospitals, community facilities and alternative outpatient settings.

On 23 March the HSE published the “Safe Return to Health Services Plan”. This plan outlines a three phased plan for the proposed restoration of services across Community Services, Acute Hospital Operations, Cancer Services and Screening Services. It sets target times for their safe return and details the conditions and challenges that will have to be met.

Every phase of the plan has been informed by clinical guidance and putting patient and staff safety first.

Decisions in relation to the type and volume of activity will be made at site level based on

local COVID-19 numbers, available capacity and guidance from national clinical leads.

The schedule outlined in the plan for resumption of services will be regularly monitored by the HSE and updated as appropriate, dependant on public health advice and healthcare capacity.

The work of the HSE to improve access to elective care and reduce waiting times for patients is supported by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). This includes increased use of private hospitals, funding weekend and evening work in public hospitals, funding “see and treat” services where minor procedures are provided at the same time as outpatient consultations, funding hybrid services where public and private hospitals contribute to the treatment of patients, virtual clinics and clinical validation.

The NTPF have advised that they have provided funding for a number of Insourcing initiatives to reduce Gynaecology waiting lists at Tallaght University Hospital in 2020. As a result, 475 patients have to date received treatment through HSE insourcing initiatives. Details of these initiatives are outlined in the attached document.

€240 million has been provided in Budget 2021 for an access to care fund, €210m of which has been allocated to the HSE and a further €30m to the National Treatment Purchase Fund. This will be used to fund additional capacity to address the shortfall arising as a result of measures taken in the context of COVID-19, as well as to address waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised regarding the steps/plans to take to ensure the hospital has a full complement of staff to address the large waiting list, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Approved Outpatient (OPD) NTPF initiatives for Gynaecology for 2020 and to date 2021 for Tallaght University Hospital

NTPF Insourcing Approved OPD Gynaecology Initiatives Tallaght University Hospital as at 26/03/2021

Specialty	Initiative Type	Volume	Notes
Gynaecology	OPD	100	Nurse-led clinic
Gynaecology	OPD	125	GP-led clinic
Gynaecology	OPD	250	Physio-led clinic
	Total	475	

Hospital Appointments Status

298. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be given a date for surgery in St. James’s Hospital, Dublin given several appointments have been cancelled and their mobility is deteriorating rapidly. [17672/21]

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

The HSE is currently recommending that only critical time dependent elective procedures are undertaken at this time due to the on-going and significant increased demand for bed capacity related to COVID-19.

This decision was made arising from the rapid increase in COVID-19 admissions and to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for COVID-19 related

activity and time-critical essential work.

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.

On 23 March the HSE published the “Safe Return to Health Services Plan”. This plan outlines a three phased approach for the proposed restoration of services across Community Services, Acute Hospital Operations, Cancer Services and Screening Services. It sets target times for their safe return and details the conditions and challenges that will have to be met.

Every phase of the plan has been informed by clinical guidance and putting patient and staff safety first.

Decisions in relation to the type and volume of activity will be made at site level based on local COVID-19 numbers, available capacity and guidance from national clinical leads.

The schedule outlined in the plan for resumption of services will be regularly monitored by the HSE and updated as appropriate, dependant on public health advice and healthcare capacity.

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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

299. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if a comparison will be provided of Covid-19 incidence rates between the general settled population and the Traveller community (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17676/21]

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

300. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that the visiting restrictions in place in maternity services in response to the Covid-19 document from the national women and infants health programme in September 2020 will be updated regularly to reflect the changing circumstances of the pandemic and the response including vaccination roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17680/21]

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

301. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when members of the Traveller community with underlying conditions will be vaccinated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17681/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

On the 30th of March, the Government approved a further update to the COVID-19 Vaccination Allocation Strategy. Based on clinical, scientific and ethical frameworks produced by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee and the Department of Health, following the vaccination of those most at risk, future groups will be vaccinated by age, in cohorts of 10 years (i.e., 64-55; 54-45, etc.).

The move to an age-based model better supports the programme objectives by:

- protecting those at highest risk of severe disease first, which benefits everyone most;
- facilitating planning and execution of the programme across the entire country;
- improving transparency and fairness.

Further details are available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/93f8f-minister-donnelly-announces-update-to-irelands-vaccination-prioritisation-list/>

HSE Staff

302. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if HSE occupational health policy will be amended to allow the occupational health team to accept recommendations from medical consultant doctors regarding the ability of staff within the service to be fit or unfit to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17682/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this operational matter, as soon as possible.

Covid-19 Páindéim

303. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 1363 and 1451 of 24 March 2021, if the questions can be addressed with regard to the position of approved driving instructors and driver testers on the current vaccination priority list; his plans to ensure that workers who are most exposed are prioritised in view of the fact that the nature of their work puts them in regular contact with members of the public in a confined space for at least one hour at a time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17683/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

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Proposed Legislation

304. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the preparatory work under way in his Department on a public health (obesity) Bill as per the programme for Government; the stakeholders that have been and are being consulted in relation to same to date; the timeline for the development of the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17684/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The Programme for Government "Our Shared Future" published in June 2020 contained a commitment to "Work with key stakeholders to introduce a Public Health Obesity Act, including examining restrictions on promotion and advertising aimed at children".

The policy instrument for obesity in Ireland is “A Healthy Weight for Ireland”, the Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP), which was launched in September 2016 as part of the Healthy Ireland Framework. The OPAP covers a 10-year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy. The OPAP does not provide for the introduction of a Public Health Obesity Act. However, the Plan does provide for a mid-term review to be carried out, and this will take place in 2021. This will lead to a refreshed and updated Plan with a revised set of actions for the remaining lifetime of the OPAP. This review provides the opportunity to consider developments and new evidence since the publication of the OPAP and allow appropriate consideration and stakeholder engagement on a range of aspects, including proposed legislation to support our national approach to tackling obesity.

There are a number of elements which will inform the mid-term review of the Obesity Policy and Action Plan. An Implementation Progress Report on the actions within the Plan was published in February 2021. A Strategic Action Plan for the wider Healthy Ireland Framework, covering the years 2021-2025 is expected to be published in the coming weeks. An evaluation of the OPAP is also being carried out by the Health Research Board Centre for Health and Diet Research, University College Cork. This process will include the assessment of relevant experts, and it is expected that this will be completed in the second quarter of 2021. A strong evidence base will be required for any new legislative measures, and the review of the OPAP will build on the work already underway to identify gaps in the implementation of the Plan, including where actions need to be progressed, whether by legislative or other means, and where further research is required.

Given the multi-faceted nature of the obesity crisis, a high level of interdepartmental collaboration will be required to implement measures aimed at tackling obesity and in the preparation and implementation of legislation, and as envisaged in the Programme for Government, extensive stakeholder consultation would of course be necessary. However, the work which Healthy Ireland has undertaken over the years in identifying and developing relationships with stakeholders, and most recently through the development of the Strategic Action Plan, provide a strong basis upon which to work with stakeholders to examine the issues and implications involved.

Departmental Funding

305. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the funding for Healthy Ireland in each year since its establishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17685/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The Health and Wellbeing Programme in my Department is responsible for coordinating the implementation of Healthy Ireland which is the National Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025. Healthy Ireland is based on evidence and experience from around the world which clearly shows that to create positive changes in health and wellbeing takes the involvement of the whole of Government and all of society working in unison. Since Healthy Ireland was launched in March 2013, my Department has developed several policies and strategies to support population health and wellbeing, including those on obesity, physical activity, sexual health, tobacco and alcohol. Given the wider “health in all policies” approach of Healthy Ireland, investment across multiple sectors, through Government Departments and their agencies and in wider society, all contributes to broad health and wellbeing in the spirit of the Healthy Ireland Framework. Since its establishment the expenditure of my Department on Healthy Ireland per annum is as follows:

2013 €89,000;

2014 €586,000;

2015 €607,000;

2016 €1,156,000;

2017 €5,997,000;

2018 €5,587,000;

2019 €7,498,000;

2020 €7,331,000.

It is important to note that expenditure increased significantly in 2017 upon the establishment of the Healthy Ireland Fund. In addition to the Healthy Ireland Fund, expenditure is used for a number of initiatives, including the Healthy Ireland Survey.

Tobacco Control Measures

306. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of retail outlets registered to sell tobacco on the national register of tobacco retailers in 2020 to date in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17695/21]

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.

Tobacco Control Measures

307. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated amount of revenue that would be raised annually if an annual €500 tobacco retailer licence fee per retail outlet was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17696/21]

308. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if retail outlets in Ireland are required to register with a State body if they seek to sell electronic cigarettes; if so, the number of outlets in Ireland that are licensed to sell electronic cigarettes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17698/21]

309. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated amount of revenue that would be raised annually if an annual €50 electronic cigarette retailer licence fee per retail outlet was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17699/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 307 to 309, inclusive, together.

The current General Scheme for a Public Health (Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill provides for the introduction of a licensing system for the retail sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products (including electronic cigarettes). Under the proposed system, an annual licence will be required for each outlet where tobacco products or nicotine inhaling products are sold. The proposed annual fee is yet to be determined.

Currently there is a registration requirement for retail outlets that sell tobacco products.

Retailers must register on a once-off basis and require only a single registration irrespective of the number of retail outlets. There is no registration requirement for the retail sale of nicotine inhaling products.

It is not possible to estimate the number of retail outlets that would opt to sell or continue to sell tobacco products or nicotine inhaling products on the introduction of a requirement for an annual licence and fee.

Community Welfare Services

310. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for motorised wheelchairs in community healthcare organisation area 5 for the latest available date by area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17718/21]

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

311. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health the number of front-line workers eligible for Covid-19 vaccination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17724/21]

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

312. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if funeral directors have been considered for early vaccination against Covid-19 given their proximity to deceased victims of same and to family members of positive patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17730/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

On the 30th of March, the Government approved a further update to the COVID-19 Vaccination Allocation Strategy. Based on clinical, scientific and ethical frameworks produced by the

National Immunisation Advisory Committee and my Department, following the vaccination of those most at risk, future groups will be vaccinated by age, in cohorts of 10 years (i.e., 64-55; 54-45, etc.).

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Child Protection

313. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health the cost associated with the practice of his Department of collating and maintaining dossiers of sensitive information on children with autism who were involved in legal actions against the State in each of the years 2010 to 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17734/21]

314. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that all families affected by the practice of his Department of collating and maintaining dossiers of sensitive information on children with autism who were involved in legal actions against the State will be informed of this fact and provided with copies of all documentation of this nature; when he plans for contact to be made with these families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17735/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 313 and 314 together.

I take the allegations made in recent media reports extremely seriously. A team has been set up to establish the facts in respect of specific allegations made in the RTÉ Prime Time programme on 25th March 2021. The Department has engaged with the Data Protection Commissioner.

The allegations which were the subject of the RTÉ Prime Time programme on March 25th were brought to the Department's attention last year. The Department took the matters raised very seriously and commissioned an independent, expert review by an external Senior Counsel. This review was completed in November 2020. Subject to clarification of legal matters, I intend to publish this review at the earliest possible opportunity.

Hospital Car Parks

315. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount collected in parking charges at all State hospitals; and the breakdown by location and annual amount in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021. [17736/21]

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.

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Hospital Car Parks

316. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of instances in which hospital management or operators of their car parks have used debt collection companies to collect outstanding fees in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021. [17737/21]

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 Car Parks

317. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider introducing a car park fee waiver scheme for persons that are required to attend hospitals on a frequent and prolonged basis. [17738/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The *Programme for Government* makes a commitment to introduce a cap on the maximum daily charge for patients and visitors at all public hospitals, where possible and to introduce flexible passes in all public hospitals for patients and their families. I am very aware of the financial burden this issue can cause some patients and families. Accordingly, my Department and the HSE are currently examining the issue.

Hospital Staff

318. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1429 of 24 March 2021, if a guarantee will be provided that student radiographers will be treated the same as student nurses and midwives (details supplied); if student radiographers will receive a standardised travel and accommodation allowances, a pandemic payment grant and internship payment in their fourth year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17740/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As set out in my previous response, radiography students do not receive an allowance to support time spent on placement as part of their course. There are no plans to change this.

Student nurses and midwives differ from radiography students in that, uniquely there is, in the final year, a paid salary when they are specifically employed on an internship placement.

It should be noted that across the health and social care disciplines, there could be over 8,000 students on placement in hospital and healthcare settings. Of this number, around a third are final year students. The length of placements and the activities performed during these placements vary between the disciplines. These students are not employees and in many cases the nature of the placement can, in the main, be limited to participation in an observing and a learning capacity.

Health Services

319. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the significant upfront cost for women who use a long-acting reversible contraceptive (details supplied) to control their fertility; his views on whether this cost is prohibitive for many women

and an unfair financial burden on them; if he will take steps to make contraceptive products free for those who need them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17741/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Working Group Report on Access to Contraception examined the range of policy, regulatory and legislative issues arising in relation to improving access to contraception, including consideration of the use of LARCs. The report found that barriers to accessing contraception do exist for some people and that these barriers go beyond cost to include embarrassment, lack of knowledge, inconvenience and lack of local access. At the same time, the report was clear that contraception use in Ireland is high and stable.

Eligibility for access to contraceptive products is currently governed by the same eligibility framework as applies more broadly in the Irish healthcare system, and the supports available to individuals in terms of mitigating the cost of LARCs are also the same.

Those who hold a medical card can access contraception, including LARCs, free of charge except for a €1.50 per item prescription charge levied at the pharmacy. In addition, those who possess GP visit cards can see their doctor without charge, effectively removing the clinical cost associated with LARCs, although the individual would still have to pay for the product itself.

For those not in possession of either a medical card or GP visit card, contraception is considered as an out-of-pocket expense. However, the Drug Payment Scheme covers in full the cost of prescribed medication in excess of €114 a month for an individual or family which can serve to limit this cost.

Despite the delay caused by the need to focus on and prioritise the response to the current pandemic, it remains a commitment of this Government to provide free contraception over a phased period, beginning with women aged 17-25.

Mental Health Services

320. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase capacity at the Central Mental Hospital in the short term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17742/21]

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.

Care of the Elderly

321. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Health when Monasterevin day care centre will reopen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17750/21]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

322. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if cases of a double mutant variant of the novel coronavirus similar to that found recently in the Indian state of Maharashtra have been detected in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17756/21]

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

323. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the case of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17767/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Government has introduced more stringent measures applying to international travel in order to mitigate against the risk of new variants being imported through travel and to protect the progress we are making in suppressing transmission domestically.

Passengers arriving into Ireland from overseas may be required to complete a COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form, to present evidence of a negative pre-departure RT-PCR test taken within 72 hours of arrival and to observe mandatory home quarantine.

Uruguay is currently a designated state under the Health (Amendment) Act 2021. Passengers who have been in a designated state within 14 days of arrival to Ireland must observe a period of quarantine in a designated facility. Limited exemptions from this requirement are set out in the Act including for international transport workers, members of An Garda Síochána or the Defence forces travelling in course of their duties and for persons travelling for urgent, unavoidable and time sensitive medical reasons.

Vaccination Programme

324. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HSE is advising students who are currently in their final semester of college and on placement within a HSE setting that they will not be allowed to remain on placement unless they are vaccinated despite this vaccination not being mandatory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17770/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for consideration and direct reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

325. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if those with a BMI of 40+ fall into a specific Covid-19 vaccine cohort; if they will be vaccinated based on their age or other health conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17771/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by

the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

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Autism Support Services

326. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will receive therapy services. [17772/21]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

327. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health when the €100 weekly payment to student nurses will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17774/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In the context of COVID-19, I appointed Professor Tom Collins to undertake a short-term review of the current allowances available to student nurses and midwives. His report was submitted to me on 31 December 2020.

The key recommendation in this Report is that an additional and exceptional Student Nurse/Midwife Pandemic Placement Grant of €100 per week for each week spent on supernumerary placement be introduced from January 2021 for the duration of the pandemic.

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I have confirmed my full acceptance of the Report's recommendations and my Department has directly engaged with nursing/midwifery union representatives in this respect.

The position on the implementation of the Collins report remains that I have accepted the recommendations of the report and my Department officials are continuing to engage with representative bodies. I am hopeful this engagement will conclude shortly which will allow for the implementation of these additional measures which will further assist student nurses and midwives during this challenging time.

Hospital Facilities

328. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will include a palliative care unit in the new 50-bed care of the elderly unit in St. Anthony's in South Tipperary General Hospital which is currently under construction (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17778/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): In conjunction with South Tipperary Hospice Home Care Team, the HSE's Older Persons Services are currently providing two Level 2 palliative care beds in St Anthony's Unit, Clonmel, an 18 bed residential care unit for older people.

Level 2 palliative care is provided by healthcare professionals with additional training and experience in palliative care, in both acute and community settings. Level 3 palliative care is the provision of palliative care to patients with more complex and demanding care needs. This care is provided by an interdisciplinary team under the direction of a consultant physician in palliative medicine. Such care is provided in specialist inpatient palliative care units, or hospices, as well as primary care settings and acute hospitals.

As part of the national community nursing unit replacement programme, it is planned that a new 50 bed unit for Older Persons Services under Public Private partnership will commence in the third quarter of 2021 with an expected completion and occupation date of 2023. This unit will replace the existing St Anthony's Unit. It is planned that two Level 2 beds will continue to be provided in this new unit.

I understand that Level 2 Palliative Care beds will continue to be provided in St Theresa's District Hospital Clogheen, Cluain Arann Nursing Unit Tipperary and Dungarvan Community Hospital.

An additional 20 Level 3 in-patient beds will be provided in the new South East Regional Palliative Care Unit in University Hospital Waterford, which is due to open on 31st July 2021.

With this development, it is not envisaged that Level 3 beds will be provided outside of this specialist regional palliative care unit. It is intended that there will be an ongoing requirement for limited Level 2 beds and the HSE will continue to liaise with Home Care Team with regard to these beds.

Addiction Treatment Services

329. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps his Department is taking to address increased drug and alcohol misuse among young persons in an area (details supplied) particularly in the home; if additional supports and funding will be provided to community and youth services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17786/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The Department of Children administers the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme. This is a targeted youth funding scheme which provides out-of-school supports to marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable young people between the age of 10 and 24, with a particular focus on use of drugs. The scheme consolidates a number of previous funding schemes and the initial application process was open only to services that had been funded under those schemes. It became operational on 1 July 2020 under its policy and operating rules. The UBU Your Place Your Space scheme funding for 2021 is €41.79 million.

The Department of Children has advised that a total fund of €1 million has been allocated for the establishment of up to 8 new UBU Your Place Your Space services in 2021. Full year funding for each of these new services is to be a maximum of €120,000 per service. Youth services in the area should engage with the City of Dublin Youth Services Board to identifying local needs .

The Department of Health and the HSE support drug and alcohol task forces to assess the extent and nature of the drug problem and to initiate appropriate responses, so that there is a coordinated approach involving all sectors to the problem of substance misuse in local communities.

The 2021 overall funding allocation from the Department and the HSE for the task force in the area referred to is €901,237. Of this, the Department €263,277 for four projects, three of which target children/young people at risk and their families.

In 2019, additional funding was allocated for 14 strategic initiatives to address priorities set out in the National Drugs Strategy. Each initiative will receive funding of €190,000 over 36 months until mid-2022. Two initiatives are funded in CHO 9: Ante and post-natal care partnership for women using drugs and/or alcohol and Service User participation Programme to optimise service users recovery and treatment.

Budget 2021 allocated an additional €1m for targeted drug and alcohol initiatives through the network of drug and alcohol task forces. The allocation of this additional funding will be informed by the priorities arising from the mid-term review of the national drugs strategy, which my Department is undertaking in conjunction with stakeholders.

I believe that the impact of problem drug and alcohol use is a national issue, affecting people from all walks of life. In line with Sláintecare, I am committed to a population-based approach to allocating resources for drug and alcohol services. This will ensure funding is allocated on an equitable and rational basis in accordance with health and social needs.

Covid-19 Pandemic

330. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health if a proportionality assessment has been carried out on all the current Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17794/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ireland's response has been guided by seven ethical principles: solidarity, fairness, minimising harm, proportionality, reciprocity, privacy and a duty to provide care. In March 2020, the Department of Health published the *Ethical Framework for Decision-making in a Pandemic*, setting out these principles. This Framework can be found online: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/dbf3fb-ethical-framework-for-decision-making-in-a-pandemic/>.

The NPHE, in considering and making recommendations on COVID-19 restrictions, is at all times guided by these ethical principles, including proportionality.

As the Deputy will appreciate, Ireland's epidemiological situation remains uncertain as a number of disease indicators are now static or potentially disimproving. Ireland is still experiencing high levels of infection across the country and the health service remains under pressure. Level 5 restrictive measures therefore remain in place. Any measures introduced are aimed at limiting the spread and damage of COVID-19, and are necessary to protect 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.

On 30 March the Government announced a slight easing of restrictions from 12 April in recognition of the significant impact that the extended period of Level 5 restrictions is having on people. The focus of this slight easing of measures is on enabling more outdoor activities so as to improve the health and wellbeing of society. This move reflects the continuing focus on proportionality and reducing harm as we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health Services

331. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if he will take immediate steps to reopen the gay men's health service based at the Meath primary care centre which has been closed for over a year; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the clinic is one of the busiest sexual health services and the only one specifically serving LGBTQ+ persons and is the only public sexual health service that has not reopened since March 2020; the plans for its reopening; his plans to set up new sexual health testing centres nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17798/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The COVID-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented interruption to normal healthcare activity in 2020/2021, affecting the provision of all healthcare services including public STI clinics and the GMHS.

Over the last year, the HSE has reconfigured STI services, establishing online booking systems and providing virtual appointments, in order to support STI service provision in line with the social distancing and infection prevention control requirements due to COVID-19.

Public STI clinics have prioritised those with symptoms and who require treatment, in order to treat active infections and minimise onward transmission. The GMHS website and other resources such as www.man2man.ie and www.sexualwellbeing.ie are regularly updated to reflect current service delivery and to signpost users to the HSE list of approved STI and PrEP services.

All PrEP service providers have maintained existing PrEP service users in the programme, providing virtual consultations, postal prescriptions and attendance for screening or treatment where necessary. It is difficult to predict the level of any number of infectious diseases including STIs that will occur post pandemic, but with the resumption of normal service, there is an expectation that increased testing will bring increased diagnoses.

The HSE is continuing to progress a number of initiatives that aim to reduce the level of HIV and STIs nationally and improve access to services for those in need.

- The promotion of safer sex messages to the public via a range of social media platforms including twitter, facebook and Instagram.

- During the pandemic, the public has been advised about STI clinic restrictions and encouraged to consider safer sexual practices to reduce the risk of HIV and STI transmission.

- Those who are symptomatic are advised to contact a clinic directly for an emergency appointment.

- Guidance was issued around sex and COVID-19 which advised the public to limit numbers of partners to reduce transmission of HIV/STIs as well as COVID-19 during the pandemic.

- Condoms are freely available to NGO partners and service providers via the National Condom Distribution service and a number of NGOs established postal services to make condoms and lubricant accessible to service users throughout the pandemic while venues were closed.

- Free rapid HIV testing is available in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick through community NGO partners HIV Ireland, Sexual Health Centre Cork, Sexual Health West and GOSHH. NGO partners have adapted their services and are currently providing free rapid HIV testing from their offices or alternative venues.

- STI/HIV testing is currently available through a HSE home STI testing pilot project in Dublin, Cork and Kerry. Tests are being made available in a phased manner to ensure there is sufficient capacity in local clinics for service users who may need follow-up treatment or support.

At the outset of Covid-19, staff in the Gay Men's Health Service were reassigned, by reason of necessity, to other HSE services. Some staff continue to be redeployed to Covid-19 services, including to the COVID-19 vaccination programme which commenced in recent months. COVID-19 has placed increased demands on HSE services which are required to be delivered in accordance with current restrictions.

Community Healthcare East re-opened the GMHS in January 2021 on a phased basis, and in line with Government and HSE Guidelines. Existing PrEP users continue to be seen in the GMHS. The Clinic's Consultant in Infectious Diseases (Gay Men's Health service (GMHS) and GUIDE Clinic, St James's Hospital) and other doctors are providing virtual consultations and PrEP service users attend the GMHS for STI screening and blood testing. Those with diagnosed STIs, or requiring Hepatitis and/or HPV vaccine, continue to be treated in GMHS also.

Previously the GMHS relied heavily on agency staff. This is no longer the situation. The funding allocated to the HSE in respect of the GMHS PrEP programme was received in 2020 as recurring funding. This has facilitated a recruitment campaign to fill the posts for the GMHS PrEP programme to commence in the latter part of 2020. This recruitment is ongoing.

HSE Community Healthcare East will continue to reinstate services in the GMHS on a phased basis and in line with the HSE's Safe Return to Health Services. HSE Community Healthcare East has made every effort to restore, and maintain services as far as possible and will continue to do so, subject to current demand for health services, and subject to resources available.

Decisions concerning the provision of sexual health services are made in line with the objectives and strategic vision of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 - 2020 (NSHS), which aims to improve sexual health and wellbeing and reduce negative sexual health outcomes by ensuring that everyone living in Ireland has access to high quality sexual health information, education and services throughout their lives.

The current Strategy was intended to cover the period from 2015 – 2020, but has now been extended to 2021. It is the intention of my Department to conduct stakeholder consultations and

a review of the NSHS this year. The outcome of the consultations and the review will determine the future direction of the Strategy.

It should be noted that the HSE is currently piloting a free home STI/HIV testing service, supported by the Sláintecare Integration Fund, in Dublin, Cork and Kerry. The first phase of tests was made available early January 2021. As a result of very high initial demand for the service, tests will now be made available in a phased manner to ensure there is sufficient capacity in local clinics for service users who may need follow-up treatment or support.

Decisions in relation to the manner and location of future sexual health services will be made in the context of the above factors.

Protected Disclosures

332. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of a protected disclosure by a person (details supplied). [17801/21]

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

333. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to ensure vaccinations carried out by private hospitals are in keeping with HSE protocols. [17802/21]

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

334. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the request of an organisation and persons (details supplied) for cardiac patients to be given priority access to the vaccine reflecting the medical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17804/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

On the 30th of March, the Government approved a further update to the COVID-19 Vaccination Allocation Strategy. Based on clinical, scientific and ethical frameworks produced by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee and the Department of Health, following the vaccination of those most at risk, future groups will be vaccinated by age, in cohorts of 10 years (i.e., 64-55; 54-45, etc.).

The move to an age-based model better supports the programme objectives by:

- protecting those at highest risk of severe disease first, which benefits everyone most;
- facilitating planning and execution of the programme across the entire country;
- improving transparency and fairness.

Further details are available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/93f8f-minister-donnolly-announces-update-to-irelands-vaccination-prioritisation-list/>

Covid-19 Pandemic

335. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce regulations to back up the existing guidance in respect of nursing home visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17819/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): It is important to note that nursing home providers are ultimately responsible for the safe care of their residents. Under Regulation 11 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 it is the legal responsibility of each registered provider to make arrangements for a resident to receive visitors, having regard to any risks that may present for the resident or other residents. Public health guidance has been developed in order to assist and support providers in this regard.

While the current guidance provides for visiting on critical and compassionate grounds, this new guidance now expands the scope of visiting on general compassionate grounds. It also refines the guidance across Levels 1 to 5, which now provides for increased visiting at Levels 3, 4 and 5, subject to risk assessment and no open outbreak.

Residents may be facilitated to receive:

- **Two visits per week** where 8 out of 10 of every resident and healthcare worker in the nursing home has completed their vaccination schedule.
- There is no requirement to limit visits to less than one hour.

I have written to all nursing home providers, through HIQA's communication portal, to emphasise the need for all providers to follow the revised guidance on visitation. The adoption of a holistic and person-centred approach, noting the key role that visiting, social connections and communication with family and friends has in the context of residents' overall health and wellbeing must be sustained. I expect every effort to be made to ensure visits are facilitated to the greatest extent possible, in line with the revised guidance and public health advice. Providers are also encouraged to frequently communicate with residents and families on the matter of visiting and to respond to phone calls by family members, in so far as is practicable, given the constraints on staff.

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In addition, I have requested that in the ongoing monitoring, regulatory and inspection processes, that the Chief Inspector of Social Services (HIQA) would place a particular focus, as appropriate, on the visiting arrangements in place. I have requested that, in the event that the Chief Inspector evidences any concerns of a systemic nature, that the Department would be kept informed of the issues and proposed responses to same.

Finally, the Department of Health also wrote to the representative body for private and voluntary nursing homes on 24th of March, emphasising the importance of all long-term residential care services making every effort to fully apply the suite of guidance that has been made available, to support providers to meet their obligations in this regard.

Public Procurement Contracts

336. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when the available spaces on the panel for the provision of hand sanitiser to her Department and the HSE will go out to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17826/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): All facilities management consumables for my Department are provided by our service contractor as part of a comprehensive facilities management service contract.

This contract was established in conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) through a public procurement competition. It was conducted in accordance with the open procurement procedure as required under the European Union Award of Public Authority Contracts.

The contract that resulted from this competition was awarded in respect of the provision of all cleaning and hygiene related consumables, including hand sanitiser.

With regard to the HSE, I have forwarded your query to them and asked that they respond directly to you on this.

Paediatric Services

337. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be made to the paediatric diabetic clinic in Mullingar Hospital to allow services to continue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17834/21]

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 Provision

338. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the business case submitted by a person (details supplied) regarding the funding required to provide long-term residential care will be approved; and if the matter will be expedited. [17843/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance

their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As 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

339. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Health the list of states from which arrivals at ports and airports in the State are required to quarantine clarifying in each case whether the quarantine is required due to the prevalence Covid-19, the prevalence of variants of the disease or both, respectively; and the rate of Covid-19 prevalence or variants' prevalence, respectively that resulted in each state's designation. [17846/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Persons arriving to Ireland from overseas are required to quarantine, subject to a number of exemptions. Those arriving from higher risk states or who have not complied with pre-departure test requirements are required to complete quarantine in a designated facility. Other passengers are subject to home quarantine requirements. Limited exemptions from these requirements are set out in the Act and in SI No.135/2021.

Prior to the passing of the Health (Amendment) 2021, states had been specified as Category 2, within the meaning of SI 44/2021, following recommendations made by the CMO to the Minister for Health. 33 territories were specified as Category 2 states following consultation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

An Expert Advisory Group on Travel was established on 1 March and has taken a risk-based approach to inform recommendations to the Chief Medical Officer, who in turn makes recommendations to the Minister for Health on countries to be made designated states under the amended Health Act 1947 Health Amendment Act 2021. This approach considers factors including the risk of sustained human transmission of COVID-19, as measured by the 14-day incidence in that country relative to that in Ireland, in addition to the risk of importation of a variant of concern and/or variant of interest based on the actual or potential prevalence of such variants.

The designation of states will be subject to ongoing review in line with the provisions of Section 38E of the Health Act 1947, which was inserted by the Health (Amendment) Act 2021. The Government and public health advice is to avoid all non-essential international travel.

Proposed Legislation

340. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when it is planned to publish the nursing home support scheme (amendment) Bill; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17854/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme, commonly referred to as the *Fair Deal Scheme*, has been in operation for over 10 years and there is broad agreement that the Scheme operates well and continues to provide appropriate financial assistance where it is required.

However, it is recognised that the Act, in its current form, does not place caps on the financial assessment of family owned and operated farms or businesses when calculating the means to pay for nursing home care. This places a potentially onerous burden on family successors and

could challenge the future viability of these productive assets.

Therefore, the Department of Health has proposed a policy change to the Scheme, to cap contributions based on farm and business assets at three years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset. The stated policy objective of the legislation is to introduce additional safeguards in the Scheme to further protect the viability and sustainability of family farms and businesses that will be passed down to the next generation of the family to continue to work them as productive assets to provide for their livelihood.

This change was approved by Government and underwent pre-legislative scrutiny in the last Dáil. Progress on the development of the Bill was negatively impacted by the dissolution of the last Dáil and by the COVID-19 pandemic. The response to the pandemic has been and continues to be a national and public health priority. However, work on this legislation has continued to progress. I requested a waiver to conduct pre-legislative scrutiny from the Business Committee, given this was already undertaken in the previous Dáil, and this waiver was granted on 4th February 2021. I have met with the Attorney General to discuss this legislation, and there has been an ongoing and active engagement between the Department of Health and the Office of the Attorney General on the development of the legislation, which will be brought to the Houses of the Oireachtas at the earliest possible opportunity. It is on the priority list for publication in the Spring legislative session. The Bill will be enacted upon completion of all stages in the Oireachtas and signed into law by the President.

Home Care Packages

341. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to previous Parliamentary Questions and representations to the HSE if weekend home care will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if a review of their care plan will be expedited with a view to providing complete seven-day care. [17856/21]

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

Vaccination Programme

342. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if the Covid-19 vaccine will be administered to the remaining islanders under 70 years of age who are permanently resident on offshore islands, on the islands as happened in the case of the older cohort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17858/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or

death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

On the 30th of March, the Government approved a further update to the COVID-19 Vaccination Allocation Strategy. Based on clinical, scientific and ethical frameworks produced by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee and my Department, following the vaccination of those most at risk, future groups will be vaccinated by age, in cohorts of 10 years (i.e., 64-55; 54-45, etc.).

The move to an age-based model better supports the programme objectives by:

- protecting those at highest risk of severe disease first, which benefits everyone most;
- facilitating planning and execution of the programme across the entire country;
- improving transparency and fairness.

Further details are available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/93f8f-minister-donnely-announces-update-to-irelands-vaccination-prioritisation-list/>

Vaccination Programme

343. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the reason students who do not avail of Covid-19 vaccination will not be facilitated with clinical placements within HSE hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17861/21]

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

344. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if the HPV vaccination will be made available to girls who missed out on their original vaccination; if the vaccine will be made available free of charge via their general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17862/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The committee's recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. It makes recommendations on vaccination policy to my Department. The NIAC continues to revise recommendations to allow for the introduction of new vaccines in Ireland and to keep abreast of changes in the patterns of disease. Therefore, the immunisation schedule will continue to be amended over time.

In 2009, the NIAC recommended HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination for all 12 to 13 year old girls to reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer when they are adults. In September 2010, the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of secondary school.

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The NIAC recommended that the HPV vaccine should also be given to boys. On foot of the NIAC's recommendation, my Department asked the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a health technology assessment (HTA) to establish the clinical and cost-effectiveness of extending the current immunisation programme to include boys in the first year of secondary school.

The HIQA completed the HTA in December 2018, recommending that the HPV immunisation programme be extended to include boys. A policy decision was made to extend the HPV immunisation programme to include boys, starting in September 2019, with the introduction of a 9-valent HPV vaccine.

The ages at which vaccines are recommended in the immunisation schedule are chosen by the NIAC in order to give each child the best possible protection against vaccine preventable diseases. As the HPV vaccine is preventative it is intended to be administered, if possible, before a person becomes sexually active, that is, before a person is first exposed to HPV infection.

Therefore, the gender-neutral HPV vaccination programme targets all girls and boys in first year of secondary school to provide maximum coverage. All vaccines administered through the School Immunisation Programme are provided free of charge.

My Department will continue to be guided by NIAC's recommendations on any emerging evidence on this issue in the future.

Anyone not in 1st year of secondary school or age equivalent in special schools or home schooled during the 2020/2021 school year who wishes to get the HPV vaccine, must go to their GP or sexual health clinic and pay privately for the vaccine and its administration.

Departmental Records

345. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if dossiers similar to that exposed in a programme (details supplied) have been compiled and held by his Department or its agents including the State Claims Agency on any other person or groups of persons involved in legal actions against his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17863/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I take the allegations made in recent media reports extremely seriously. A team has been set up to establish the facts in respect of specific allegations made in the RTÉ Prime Time programme on 25th March 2021. The Department has engaged with the Data Protection Commissioner.

The allegations which were the subject of the RTÉ Prime Time programme on March 25th were brought to the Department's attention last year. The Department took the matters raised very seriously and commissioned an independent, expert review by an external Senior Counsel. This review was completed in November 2020. Subject to clarification of legal matters, I intend to publish this review at the earliest possible opportunity.

Departmental Data

346. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if dossiers similar to that exposed in a programme have been compiled and held by his Department or its agents including the State Claims Agency on persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17865/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I take the allegations made in recent media reports extremely seriously. A team has been set up to establish the facts in respect of specific allegations made in the RTÉ Prime Time programme on 25th March 2021. The Department has engaged with the Data Protection Commissioner.

The allegations which were the subject of the RTÉ Prime Time programme on March 25th were brought to the Department's attention last year. The Department took the matters raised very seriously and commissioned an independent, expert review by an external Senior Counsel. This review was completed in November 2020. Subject to clarification of legal matters, I intend to publish this review at the earliest possible opportunity.

Emergency Departments

347. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date to provide a new emergency department for Galway University Hospital; when the new emergency department will be operational in the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17897/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Enabling works for the temporary ED are in progress and work on construction is due to commence at the end April/early May. It is anticipated that the handover of the internal re-planned area of the temporary ED will be at the end of Q2 2022. Fitting out will then be undertaken.

Separately, a design team has developed a feasibility report for the construction of a permanent ED and Women & Children's Block at University Hospital Galway.

Vaccination Programme

348. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if he will seek a report from NIAC on the prioritisation of cohorts of persons on the vaccine priority list including family carers and cardiac patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17898/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

On the 30th of March, the Government approved a further update to the COVID-19 Vaccination Allocation Strategy. Based on clinical, scientific and ethical frameworks produced by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee and the Department of Health, following the

vaccination of those most at risk, future groups will be vaccinated by age, in cohorts of 10 years (i.e., 64-55; 54-45, etc.).

The move to an age-based model better supports the programme objectives by:

- protecting those at highest risk of severe disease first, which benefits everyone most;
- facilitating planning and execution of the programme across the entire country;
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Further details are available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/93f8f-minister-donnelly-announces-update-to-irelands-vaccination-prioritisation-list/>

Departmental Staff

349. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department by gender in tabular form. [17912/21]

Minister for Health (Stephen Donnelly): A breakdown by gender of higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries currently employed in the Department of Health is attached in tabular form.

Grade	Gender	Headcount
Assistant Secretary	Female	3
	Male	3
Principal Officer	Female	43
	Male	39
Assistant Principal Officer	Female	109
	Male	75
Higher Executive Officer	Female	64
	Male	47
Administrative Officer	Female	46
	Male	35

Maternity Services

350. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that pregnant women can be joined by their partner for maternity appointments and childbirth; the current policy in each maternity hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17926/21]

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 Waiting Lists

351. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in reduc-

ing waiting lists for assessment of need; if additional resources have been provided towards the provision of appropriate follow-up services in circumstances in which they are needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17932/21]

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

Vaccination Programme

352. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Health the category branch bank staff fall under in the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out. [17938/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and my Department, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020.

On the 23rd of February, I announced an update to Ireland's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Strategy. In comprising the initial Vaccine Allocation Strategy, the NIAC listed several conditions associated with increased risk of severe disease and death. In the intervening period, national and international evidence has become available which has enabled a more detailed analysis of underlying conditions that may increase the risk of developing severe disease or death. The NIAC has now been able to more comprehensively identify those medical conditions and to distinguish between those which place a person at very high or high risk of severe disease if they contract the virus. Medical conditions and the magnitude of the risk they pose will continue to be monitored and periodically reviewed.

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Health Services Provision

353. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when a building project will proceed to the next stage in view of the urgent need to provide additional accommodation at a healthcare facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17942/21]

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Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Vaccination Programme

354. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that cross-Border workers will be prioritised in receiving surplus UK vaccinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17943/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Ireland is participating in a Procurement Exercise being operated by the European Commission on behalf of Member States to procure suitable, safe and effective vaccines, in sufficient quantities, to combat COVID-19. Six APAs have been negotiated by the Commission under this process to date.

Ireland's COVID-19 vaccination programme strategy is to distribute all available vaccines as quickly as is operationally possible, prioritising those who are most vulnerable to COVID-19.

The programme is based on the principles of safety, effectiveness and fairness, with the objective of reducing severe illness, hospitalisations and deaths from COVID-19 infection.

Vaccine are being made available without charge to all persons resident in the State.

Departmental Records

355. **Deputy Malcolm Noonan** asked the Minister for Health if a risk assessment of families on the grounds of the families' likelihood to pursue legal action against the State was a determinant in the management of such files in view of the fact that his Department manages dossiers on autistic children and their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17945/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I take the allegations made in recent media reports extremely seriously. A team has been set up to establish the facts in respect of specific allegations made in the RTÉ Prime Time programme on 25th March 2021. The Department has engaged with the Data Protection Commissioner.

The allegations which were the subject of the RTÉ Prime Time programme on March 25th were brought to the Department's attention last year. The Department took the matters raised very seriously and commissioned an independent, expert review by an external Senior Counsel. This review was completed in November 2020. Subject to clarification of legal matters, I intend to publish this review at the earliest possible opportunity.

Departmental Records

356. **Deputy Malcolm Noonan** asked the Minister for Health if his Department manages dossiers on autistic adults or their representatives who are seeking appropriate autism specific services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17946/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I take the allegations made in recent media reports extremely seriously. A team has been set up to establish the facts in respect of

specific allegations made in the RTÉ Prime Time programme on 25th March 2021. The Department has engaged with the Data Protection Commissioner. The allegations which were the subject of the RTÉ Prime Time programme on March 25th were brought to the Department's attention last year. The Department took the matters raised very seriously and commissioned an independent, expert review by an external Senior Counsel. This review was completed in November 2020. Subject to clarification of legal matters, I intend to publish this review at the earliest possible opportunity.

Services for people with disabilities are generally delivered according to need rather than specific diagnosis. Adults with autism are likely to receive services from a range of different areas within the health services. Those services are provided by the HSE. The current Programme for Government contains a range of commitments around improving services for all people with disabilities, including those with Autism. In Budget 2020, the Minister for Health secured €2 million in funding for the further development of an Autism Plan, which includes a range of measures to improve Health services for people with Autism and their families. The funding secured means that a range of priorities can now be further developed and implemented.

HSE Records

357. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the protocol and or procedure he has in place for retrieving patient files, data and information from the HSE for use by his officials. [17983/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly) : Exchanges of information between the Department and the HSE are subject to compliance with obligations under data protection legislation.

With regard to the very small number of significant patient safety incidents and issues of concern that arise in the health service annually, there is a Patient Safety Communications Protocol in place between the Department and the HSE.

General Data Protection Regulation

358. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17993/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My Department is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of data subjects and adhering to obligations under data protection legislation.

The information sought by the Deputy is enclosed in the table below.

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Complaints received from members of the public under the GDPR	1	1	1	3
Data Information Requests Received	7	17	9	10
Data Information Requests Refused/Declined	0	2*	1*	0

*Reason for Refusal - The Department is not the Data Controller.

Questions Nos. 359 and 360 answered with Question No. 294.

Eating Disorders

361. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the number of dieticians and specially trained staff for eating disorders allocated to the CAMHS aftercare services in County Clare; the aftercare services available in Ennis for patients with eating disorders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18022/21]

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.

Dental Services

362. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists in County Clare who received payments from the dental treatment services scheme in 2018, 2019 and 2020 and in the first quarter of 2021, in tabular form; the number of dentists in County Clare who made claims for payment in relation to new dental patients; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that most dental clinics are now not taking on new medical card patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18023/21]

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.

General Practitioner Services

363. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a scheme to address the problem with replacing general practitioners in County Clare in which some general practitioners are retiring due to lack of housing and services available in many areas given there is no incentive for new general practitioners to relocate to areas in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18024/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): GPs are self-employed private practitioners and therefore may establish practices at a place of their own choosing. Under the GMS scheme, the HSE contracts GPs to provide medical services without charge to medical card and GP visit card holders. Where a vacancy arises in a practice with a GMS contract, the HSE becomes actively involved in the selection process to find a replacement GP. As of 1 March 2021, there are no GMS GP vacancies in County Clare.

The Government, aware of the workforce issues currently facing general practice, has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice. These include changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday as well as the introduction of supports for rural GP practices.

Following agreement with GPs in 2019 on a range of service developments and reforms, the

Government has committed to increasing investment in general practice by approximately 40% (€210 million) over the period 2019 and 2023.

The Agreement provides for significant increases in capitation fees for GPs who participate in the reform programme and the introduction of new fees and subsidies for additional services such as the chronic disease programme. There is also increased support for GPs working in rural practices and for those in disadvantaged urban areas as well as improvements to maternity and paternity leave arrangements.

In addition, the number of GPs entering training has increased steadily over the past number of years, rising from 120 in 2009 to 214 in 2020, with a further increase foreseen in 2021. The ICGP noted a record number of applications for the 2021 GP training programme.

I am confident that these measures will see an increase in the number of GPs working in the State, improving access to GP services for patients throughout the country.

Covid-19 Tests

364. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of tests for Covid-19 undertaken daily in each of the walk-in testing centres since they opened; the positivity rate in each centre; if the positive cases from the walk-in clinics are being contact traced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18025/21]

367. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of positive cases for Covid-19 that are contact traced; the number of days on average that contact tracing goes back to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18028/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 364 and 367 together.

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

365. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the total population of agency nurses and healthcare assistants; the number of these who are vaccinated; the way in which the remainder will be identified for vaccination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18026/21]

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

366. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that arrived here in each week from 8 March 2021 to date and declared on the passenger locator form that they had been in one of the 33 designated states in the previous 14 days; the number from each designated state in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18027/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): All passengers arriving into the state

are required to complete a COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form (PLF) in accordance with SI 45/2021. There are limited exemptions from this requirement, as set out in the regulations, such as for international transport workers or for diplomats. The Passenger Locator Form is used to support a system of engagements with arriving passengers including the targeting of public health messaging by SMS and may be used for contact tracing.

It should be noted that PLF data does not constitute formal arrival data into the state, due to the different intended purpose for the system and also the number of exempted persons as set out above. In addition, some passengers may complete a PLF in advance but be unable to travel as intended, and the data below may include some duplicates for certain travellers. Passengers may have completed a PLF and continued their journey without staying overnight in the state or having transiting onto Northern Ireland.

The data below is an indicative number of passengers whose journey originated in a designated state as well as those passengers that listed a designated state in their recent travel history from 8 March to 21 March. This is the most recent date with validated data. A total of 33 states are designated by the Minister.

26,118 Passenger Locator Forms were completed 8th March – 21st March from all countries of departure for relevant travellers.

5% of the Passenger Locator Forms indicated a designated state during this period.

The data provided below is where a minimum number of 10 arrived from a designated state, as providing any smaller numbers could risk identifying individual passengers. Where a passenger has declared that they have travelled in a number of designated states prior to arriving into Ireland, the most recent state is reported. Passengers will only appear once on this report.

The data in the table below includes the number of accompanying children under 16 declared on the PLF. No further information is recorded on passengers under 16 years of age.

The figures below are subject to change due to ongoing data cleansing e.g. duplication where passengers completed the PLF twice.

	08-14 Mar	15-21 Mar	Total
Brazil	449	246	695
UAE	290	180	470
South Africa	89	50	139
Argentina	37	18	55
Austria	13	15	28
Chile	-	13	13
Other states*	76	48	124
Total	954	570	1524

*Other states -

Angola, Botswana, Bolivia, Burundi, Cape Verde, Colombia, Chile, DR Congo, Ecuador, Eswatini, French Guiana, Guyana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Rwanda, Suriname, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Question No. 367 answered with Question No. 364.

368. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if the private security contractor overseeing compliance in mandatory hotel quarantine has expertise in or has had training specific to policing quarantine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18029/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Mandatory Hotel Quarantine service provider is required to provide a Private Security Authority (PSA) licensed contractor to be always present at the Designated Facilities. The service provider must ensure that all personnel who carry out a security function comply with the licensing requirements of the Private Security Authority and must comply with the Private Security Services Act 2004.

The licensed private security contractor has a 24/7 on-site presence at each designated facility. The private security services are required to ensure that guests adhere to all infection prevention and control protocols during their stay, and to ensure access to the hotel is controlled. Should a guest attempt to leave the facility without permission before completion of quarantine, security personnel are required to report any such incident to the facility's State Liaison Officer immediately and to An Garda Síochána.

Covid-19 Pandemic

369. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if a person who works on rotation of five weeks on an oil rig 200 miles off the coast of Brazil and five weeks at home will have to go into supervised quarantine each time they come home; if not, if they are considered a seafarer carrying out their employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18037/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Health Act 1947, as amended, provides that all persons arriving in Ireland from a designated state, or having travelled through a designated state in the previous 14 days, are required to undergo mandatory quarantine in a designated facility unless they are an exempted traveller under the Act. The full list of exempted travellers is available on gov.ie/quarantine.

The provisions of the Act also allows for travellers to request a review of decisions relating to their quarantine. However this can only be undertaken once quarantine has begun.

The Act refers to a "...maritime master or maritime crew who arrives in the State in the course of performing his or her duties" as an exempted traveller. This provision would not therefore apply to person working on an oil rig, as they are not a seafarer nor are they arriving in the State in the course of performing their duties. Furthermore this provision applies only to maritime crew on-board ship serving Irish ports.

Neither I as Minister for Health nor my Department have any role in decisions relating to whether individual persons must enter mandatory quarantine or whether individual persons are exempted travellers. All such decisions are to be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

Covid-19 Pandemic

370. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if persons returning from red listed countries who have a vaccine certificate will have to go into supervised quarantine for two weeks at their own expense; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18038/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Health Act 1947, as amended, provides that all persons arriving in Ireland from a designated state, or having travelled through a designated state in the previous 14 days, are required to undergo mandatory quarantine in a designated facility unless they are an exempted traveller under the Act.

A National Oversight Group for Variants of Concern has been established to monitor and address the challenges posed by variants of COVID-19, including the potential for a difference in the effectiveness of various vaccines against those variants. Quarantine of persons arriving from areas with a high incidence of variants of concern is considered a deterrent against the emergence of such variants in the state and as such all persons arriving from those designated states are required to undergo mandatory quarantine in a designated facility, regardless of vaccination status, unless otherwise exempt.

The designation of states will be subject to ongoing review in line with the provisions of Section 38B of the Health Act 1947, which was inserted by the Health (Amendment) Act 2021.

Departmental Reports

371. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to comply with the request from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health that he make the senior counsel report on the allegations of a whistleblower (details supplied) available to the whistleblower immediately and publish it a few days later. [18050/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The allegations which were the subject of the RTÉ Prime Time programme on March 25th were brought to the Department's attention last year. The Department took the matters raised very seriously and commissioned an independent, expert review by an external Senior Counsel. This review was completed in November 2020. Subject to clarification of legal matters, I intend to publish this review at the earliest possible opportunity.

My Department and I have active and ongoing engagement with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health. I trust this sets out my intentions in respect of this request clearly.

Covid-19 Tests

372. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if urgent consideration will be given to opening a mobile test centre in north County Dublin given the high levels of Covid-19 in the Skerries and Balbriggan local electoral area. [18051/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As part of the HSE's enhanced COVID-19 testing for local communities, from Thursday March 25th, five new 'walk-in, no appointment necessary' testing centres have been opened to actively look for cases of COVID-19. These centres, which are opening in areas where the number of positive cases is particularly high, will allow people who don't have symptoms of COVID-19 to get a free test without having to contact their GP first. Around 20% of people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic.

The testing centres will be open from Thursday, 25 March to Wednesday, 31 March from 11am to 7pm. Social distancing measures will apply as people turn up for testing.

Testing people with no symptoms will help to find positive cases earlier, will help in breaking chains of transmission and will help us better understand how and why the virus is spreading quicker in certain areas.

The initial locations at Blanchardstown, Grangegorman, Irishtown, Tallaght and Tullamore have been decided based on local disease prevalence and public health director's advice. The locations will change week-on-week. Decisions on future locations of walk-in centres will be made following assessments made by the Directors of Public Health in the HSE based on the prevailing incidence rates.

Anybody may use this free, walk-in COVID-19 testing provided they

- Are aged 16 years and over.
- Do not have symptoms of COVID-19 but would like to be tested.
- May not have their own GP (doctor)
- Live within 5k of the walk-in testing centre.

Persons who want to be tested should bring photo ID and provide a mobile phone number so the HSE can contact them with their results. Working with the National Ambulance Service, the HSE aims to carry out 300-500 COVID-19 tests per day at each walk-in centre. Any detected cases will be referred to contact tracing in the same way as detected cases that were referred through by a GP.

On an ongoing basis, NPHEC considers and reviews, based on public health risk assessments, how best to target testing to detect, and mitigate the impact of, the virus across the population. This includes keeping Ireland's national testing policy under continuing review.

Covid-19 Pandemic

373. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Health if mandatory hotel quarantine or home quarantine concessions will be available for incoming travellers who have received a vaccine approved by the European Medicines Agency, EMA, and have had a negative PCR test within 72 hours of arrival; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18062/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Health Act 1947, as amended, provides that all persons arriving in Ireland from a designated state, or having travelled through a designated state in the previous 14 days, are required to undergo mandatory quarantine in a designated facility unless they are an exempted traveller under the Act.

A National Oversight Group for Variants of Concern has been established to monitor and address the challenges posed by variants of COVID-19, including the potential for a difference in the effectiveness of various vaccines against those variants. Quarantine of persons arriving from areas with a high incidence of variants of concern is considered a deterrent against the emergence of such variants in the state and as such all persons arriving from those designated states are required to undergo mandatory quarantine in a designated facility, regardless of vaccination status, unless otherwise exempt.

The designation of states will be subject to ongoing review in line with the provisions of Section 38B of the Health Act 1947, which was inserted by the Health (Amendment) Act 2021.

Hospital Waiting Lists

374. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for cata-

tract treatment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18068/21]

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

The HSE is currently recommending that only critical time dependent elective procedures are undertaken at this time due to the on-going and significant increased demand for bed capacity related to COVID-19.

This decision was made arising from the rapid increase in Covid-19 admissions and to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources were made available for Covid-19 related activity and time-critical essential work.

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 as the use of alternative settings including private hospitals, community facilities and alternative outpatient settings.

On 23 March the HSE published the “Safe Return to Health Services Plan”. This plan outlines a three phased plan for the proposed restoration of services across Community Services, Acute Hospital Operations, Cancer Services and Screening Services. It sets target times for their safe return and details the conditions and challenges that will have to be met.

Every phase of the plan has been informed by clinical guidance and putting patient and staff safety first.

Decisions in relation to the type and volume of activity will be made at site level based on local COVID-19 numbers, available capacity and guidance from national clinical leads.

The schedule outlined in the plan for resumption of services will be regularly monitored by the HSE and updated as appropriate, dependant on public health advice and healthcare capacity.

In recent years, my Department has worked with the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to improve access for patients waiting for high volume procedures, including cataracts. Ophthalmology services are provided throughout all hospital groups in the country, with cataract removal one of the key procedures carried out as part of this specialty.

A key development in improving access to Ophthalmology services was the opening of a stand-alone high-volume consultant-led cataract theatre by the University of Limerick Hospital Group in Nenagh Hospital in 2018, with the intention that it would facilitate patients from surrounding geographical areas to avail of their treatment there. The impact of such initiatives can be seen in the reduction in the waiting times to access cataract procedures since 2019. At the end of February 2021 there were 4,317 patients waiting for a cataract procedure compared to 6,276 in February 2019.

The work of the HSE to improve access to elective care and reduce waiting times for patients is supported by the NTPF. This includes increased use of private hospitals, funding weekend and evening work in public hospitals, funding “see and treat” services where minor procedures are provided at the same time as outpatient consultations, funding hybrid services where public and private hospitals contribute to the treatment of patients, virtual clinics and clinical validation.

€240 million has been provided in Budget 2021 for an access to care fund, €210m of which

has been allocated to the HSE and a further €30m to the National Treatment Purchase Fund. This will be used to fund additional capacity to address the shortfall arising as a result of measures taken in the context of COVID-19, as well as to address waiting lists.

The data requested by the Deputy regarding the waiting time for cataract treatment by county is outlined at the following link. This data provides the number of patients by time band on the cataract waiting list by county/area of residence.

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-04-01_pq374-01-04-21_en.xlsx

Health Services Provision

375. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the nationwide roll-out of the shared care cataract treatment model, which is already in operation in the Sligo region, known as the Sligo scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18069/21]

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

376. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the issuing of vaccines to a school (details supplied); the actions being taken to make sure this does not happen again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18073/21]

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

377. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health his plans for vaccine passports in regard to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18074/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): On 17 March 2021, the European Commission published its proposal for a Regulation to introduce a ‘Digital Green Certificate’. The aim of the proposal is to facilitate free movement in the EU through a common framework for the issuance, verification and acceptance of certificates relating to vaccination, testing and recovery.

Careful consideration is being given to the proposal and its many policy, infrastructural and operational implications across a number of sectors in Ireland and my Department is engaging constructively in the on-going technical discussions at EU level, in collaboration with relevant Departments, to ensure we can achieve alignment in relation to a return to international travel for non-essential purposes, as soon as it is safe to do so.

Vaccination Programme

378. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health if a student who did not avail of

the free human papillomavirus, HPV, vaccine in their first year of secondary school can avail of the vaccine at a later date while they are still a student in the school; if not, if this policy will be reviewed in order to encourage as many students as possible to avail of this vaccine before leaving school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18076/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The committee's recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. It makes recommendations on vaccination policy to my Department. The NIAC continues to revise recommendations to allow for the introduction of new vaccines in Ireland and to keep abreast of changes in the patterns of disease. Therefore, the immunisation schedule will continue to be amended over time.

In 2009, the NIAC recommended HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination for all 12 to 13 year old girls to reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer when they are adults. In September 2010, the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of secondary school.

The NIAC recommended that the HPV vaccine should also be given to boys. On foot of the NIAC's recommendation, my Department asked the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a health technology assessment (HTA) to establish the clinical and cost-effectiveness of extending the current immunisation programme to include boys in the first year of secondary school.

The HIQA completed the HTA in December 2018, recommending that the HPV immunisation programme be extended to include boys. A policy decision was made to extend the HPV immunisation programme to include boys, starting in September 2019, with the introduction of a 9-valent HPV vaccine.

The ages at which vaccines are recommended in the immunisation schedule are chosen by the NIAC in order to give each child the best possible protection against vaccine preventable diseases. As the HPV vaccine is preventative it is intended to be administered, if possible, before a person becomes sexually active, that is, before a person is first exposed to HPV infection.

Therefore, the gender-neutral HPV vaccination programme targets all girls and boys in first year of secondary school to provide maximum coverage. All vaccines administered through the School Immunisation Programme are provided free of charge.

My Department will continue to be guided by NIAC's recommendations on any emerging evidence on this issue in the future.

Anyone not in 1st year of secondary school or age equivalent in special schools or home schooled during the 2020/2021 school year who wishes to get the HPV vaccine, must go to their GP or sexual health clinic and pay privately for the vaccine and its administration.

Health Promotion

379. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding available for Food Dudes and Incredible Edibles; the funding that has been available for these schemes in each year since they started; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17686/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): As the

Deputy will be aware, the EU School Fruit and Vegetables scheme, the main objective of which is to promote the consumption of fruit and vegetables amongst school children, is implemented in primary schools under the Food Dudes Healthy Eating Programme. The Programme is an evidence based, incentivised healthy eating programme which is rolled out to children over three years: Year 1 is based on a 16 day intervention programme followed up by maintenance programmes in Years 2 and 3 and is underpinned by strong accompanying educational measures. It is managed by Bord Bia and has the support of a wide range of national stakeholders including the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Department of Social Protection.

The Programme is funded annually by the EU Commission with supporting national funding from my Department's budget as available. The total EU budget for the scheme, in the period 2017-2023, is €250 million per school year of which up to €150 million is for fruit and vegetables and up to €100 million for milk. This budget is broken down by country based on the number of children, the level of regional development and, for milk, on how the budget was previously used.

The Commission adopts a decision to fix the EU budget by country for each school year. The annual EU allocation to Ireland is set by the European Commission at €1.7million, However it is open to Ireland to apply for additional Union aid under EU reallocation rules which may or may not be granted by the EU Commission as this is subject to availability. Within this allocation to a Member State, 75% is available to spend on product and the balance is available for accompanying educational measures, publicity and evaluation.

The EU Scheme in its current format commenced in 2017 for school year 2017/2018. Ireland's EU allocation for School Fruit and Vegetables, national funds, and participation rates during this time period is as set out at the following link:

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-04-01_pq379a-01-04-21_en.docx

With regard to the Incredible Edibles initiative, this is not a Department Scheme. The initiative is a brand name of a programme run by Agri-Aware, a private Irish agri-food educational body. It is established as a charitable trust funded by the Irish farming and agri-food industry and is sponsored by a number of number of private and public organisations including my Department and State Bodies under my remit.

School Milk Scheme

380. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of schools and students participating in the school milk scheme in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17688/21]

381. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the value of products provided here under the EU school milk scheme in each of the past five years in respect of the five heat-treated milk products under category 1 and category 2 of the scheme; the value of products that are provided here under the scheme for each of the past five years in respect of category 1 products that are heat-treated milk with chocolate, fruit juice or flavoured; if the value of products provided under category 1 are broken down in terms of the quantity and value provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17689/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 380 and 381 together.

1 April 2021

As the Deputy may be aware, the EU School Milk Scheme, the main objective of which is to promote and encourage milk consumption amongst school children as part of a healthy balanced diet, is operated in Ireland by the National Dairy Council (NDC) through the Moo Crew Programme. The scheme is open to pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools, and a portion of fresh drinking milk (189ml approximately) is distributed to each participating child on a daily basis. The Scheme is supported by strong educational accompanying measures to educate children about the health and nutritional benefits of milk. It has the support of a wide range of national stakeholders including the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

The Scheme is currently implemented under a six year EU School Scheme Strategy 2017-2023 (incorporating both the School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme and the School Milk Scheme). It is funded annually by the EU Commission with supporting national funding from my Department's budget as available.

The total EU budget for the scheme, in the period 2017-2023, is €250 million per school year of which up to €150 million is for fruit and vegetables and up to €100 million for milk. This budget is broken down by country based on the number of children, the level of regional development and, for milk, on how the budget was previously used. The annual EU allocation to Ireland is set by the European Commission at €900,398. However, it is open to Ireland to apply for additional Union aid under EU reallocation rules which may or may not be granted by the EU Commission as this is subject to availability. Within this allocation to a Member State, 75% is available to spend on product, the balance being made available on accompanying educational measures, publicity and evaluation.

The EU Commission adopts a decision to fix the EU budget by country for each school year. In Ireland, only fresh drinking milk as a priority, with the possibility of cheese and yogurts, are products authorised to be distributed here under the programme. This is in line with our six year Scheme Strategy 2017-2023 approved by the EU Commission and in line with the Healthy Eating Guidelines of the Department of Health. The distribution of other products in Ireland under the School Milk Scheme does not accordingly arise: no products such as heat-treated milk with chocolate, fruit juice or flavour were distributed.

The EU Scheme in its current format commenced in 2017 for school year 2017/2018. Ireland's EU allocation for School Milk, national funds and participation rates during this time period is as set out at the following link.

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-04-01_pq380-381a-01-04-21_en.docx

In addition to the EU funding and national Funding outlined above, a parental levy applies in non-DEIS schools.

Felling Licences

382. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the wait time for felling licence applications; the number of applications outstanding; his plans to address the backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17748/21]

392. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of timber felling licences granted in the first three months of 2020 and 2021, respectively; the volume of timber involved, in cubic metres, in each case; the number of applications still on hand; the length each application is on hand by the number of months; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [17889/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 382 and 392 together.

I am aware of the issues facing the forestry sector and the timber industry and considerable efforts have been made to address them. Additional resources have been recruited and training, information and guidance has been provided to both Departmental staff and registered foresters and, as a result, we have seen gains in terms of output.

The introduction of Project Woodland, recently launched by Minister-of-State Pippa Hackett, with responsibility for forestry, is our strategy for resolving the licensing issues. This new structure aims to ensure that the current backlog is addressed. The Project involves a review and refresh of our processes and procedures and includes outside stakeholder participation to bring an independent perspective. It is a task-driven process, with clear deliverable and milestones.

Working Group 1 under Project Woodland is specifically tasked with reducing the backlog and then plotting a trajectory to achieve this target. The recommendation in Ms Jo O'Hara's Implementation Report is that this Group publish a process to achieve these targets, including prioritisation and scheduling and that a monthly dashboard show the outcome of this process against the target trajectory. Meanwhile, Working Group 4 will address Effective Processes, which will include clearer explanations for the statutory basis for forestry regulation and the introduction of more efficient and effective processes. I expect there will be cross-cutting issues between these two groups.

A target to issue 4,500 licences in 2021 has been set which is a 74% increase on 2020.

As regards current output, since the beginning of the year, my Department has issued 518 tree felling licences, for 1.624 million cubic metres of timber. This is an increase of almost 20% in the number of felling licences issued in Q1 2020. There are currently 4,576 tree felling licence applications awaiting decision, which includes a batch application by Coillte of 1,864 licences advertised on 19th March. The average time to decision for tree felling licence applications received is 13 months.

It is worth noting that there are always licences in the system at various stages of processing. These are the initial stages of an application being made, while the registered forester finalises application documents to referral to prescribed bodies. referral to the inspector and/or ecologist/archaeologist, to making final decision. Applications may also be returned to the applicant (and their registered forester, where relevant) for further information.

I remain hopeful and confident that the changes presented under the Project Woodland structure to processes within my Department will bear fruit, particularly to give confidence to all applicants that they can receive a timely decision on their forestry licence application.

Wildlife Control

383. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the deer management forum is next due to meet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17749/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): In 2015, my Department, together with the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht, published Deer Management in Ireland – A Framework for Action, which recommends a series

of actions on deer management and conservation in a number of areas, including addressing the impact of deer in places where they are abundant. The Irish Deer Management Forum was established to implement the various actions listed in the Report. The forum last met in March 2018. The Forum itself comprised representatives from the main stakeholder areas such as landowners, forestry, hunting and conservation organisations, as well as representatives from both Departments.

Both my Department and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, which is the parent Department of the NPWS, are in the process of examining the future direction of the Forum and its aims in the context of representation on the Forum as well as funding mechanisms. A meeting date will be organised when the future direction of the Forum has been agreed between the Departments involved.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

384. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 2035 of 24 March 2021, the analysis his Department has carried out into the possibility of retrospectively amending SI 786 of 2007 to enable responsible persons to prescribe anti-parasitic medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17781/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Under Article 105(4) of Regulation 2019/6, which is directly applicable in EU Member States from January 2022, professionals other than veterinarians are permitted to prescribe certain veterinary medicines if a Member State facilitated this at the time the Regulation came into force in 2019. Such a system did not exist in Ireland at that time. The applicable legislative framework in Ireland has never extended rights to issue a veterinary prescription to any other professional other than a veterinarian. Therefore, my Department's view is that Ireland is not in a position to retrospectively avail of this derogation. This view has been informed through consideration and analysis by policy officials, consultation with the EU Commission and with internal legal advisors.

However, given the range of views on Article 105(4), my Department committed to seeking further legal advice from the Attorney General's Office which was submitted in late 2020 and is receiving attention in that office currently.

The concerns specifically focus on the legislation as it impacts on the supply of anti-parasitic veterinary medicines, which here-to-fore were exempt from the need for a prescription and which route of supply was recently changed to requiring a prescription by the Health Product Regulatory Authority. This decision was as a result of evidence of the development of resistance to the medicines.

It is the intention of my Department to make a statement on the matter to all stakeholders when the advice is received.

Harbours and Piers

385. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps that have been taken to progress the deepwater quay project at Ros a Mhíl Harbour since the publication on 4 September 2020 of the final quay wall peer review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17782/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Fishery Harbour Centres Act 1968 established the concept of fishery harbours in the State and invested their management in the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine took over responsibility for the Fishery Harbour Centres (FHCs) in October 2007. Ros an Mhíl is one of six Fishery Harbour Centres, the others are located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth and Killybegs.

Funding is made available on an annual basis by my Department to the FHCs, including Ros an Mhíl, via the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. A phased programme for the infrastructural development of Ros an Mhíl FHC has been progressed over the last number of years, which has seen a significant investment. In total, approx €31.6m has been invested in capital developments at Ros an Mhíl FHC between 2000 and 2020.

The possibility of a deep-water berthing project at Ros an Mhíl FHC has been mooted for some time.

In 2018, the Department commissioned engineering consultants to undertake a review of the design solutions, scoping options and operational aspects of a possible future project. An interim draft of the Quay Wall Peer Review Report was received in April 2019. This report identified the need for additional site investigations to be carried out in Ros an Mhíl FHC. These site investigation works were carried out in August/September 2019 and have now been completed.

The final Quay Wall Peer Review report was received on 27th July 2020 and a further update was issued on 4th September 2020. The Department is considering this report in full, including the site investigation results, to inform a future assessment of possible design solutions and scoping options, which will, in themselves, inform any future decisions on progressing this project. Planning permission had been obtained for this project, this permission has been extended to April 2023.

As is the case with all developments in the six Fishery Harbour Centres generally, any future decision with regard to formally initiating this project in Ros an Mhíl FHC, will only be considered on the basis of available exchequer funding and competing national priorities.

Agriculture Schemes

386. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) can have their situation considered as a force majeure case in this instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17823/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Farmers who joined BEAM agreed to reduce the production of bovine livestock manure nitrogen on their holding by 5% for the period 1st July 2020 to 30th June 2021 as compared with the reference period of 1st July 2018 to 30th June 2019.

I am mindful that some BEAM participants may be locked up by TB during the course of the 12-month reduction period. In that context, my Department is currently writing to all BEAM participants who are locked up advising them, that their 5% reduction requirement will be reduced on a pro rata basis relative to the number of days they were locked up.

The person named has a 5% reduction requirement of 257kg of bovine Nitrates. The period of TB restriction commenced on 11th March 2021 so, for the 20 days of restriction to date, the 5% reduction requirement will reduce by 14.1kg and will continue to be reduced by 0.704kg for each day they continue to be restricted.

The figures available online on Agfood.ie will reflect these changes and the revised figures will be available in the monthly update letters sent to all participants.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

387. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a family (details supplied) will receive payment under the beef data and genomics programme, BDGP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17827/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): In applying to join the Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP), the person named committed to participating in the programme for the full six years of the programme. The BDGP application was received under a specific Herd Number.

One of the requirements of the Programme is that a valid Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application is submitted to the Department on a yearly basis and on which all land parcels are declared. If the eligible forage hectares declared in any year is less than 80% of the maximum payable area notified to successful applicants in Year one, due to the sale or transfer of the land, the applicant concerned will not be permitted to continue participation in BDGP.

In 2020, a BPS application was received under the partnership number provided. There are two herdnumbers under this partnership, including the one under which the BDGP application was received. However, all the lands were declared under the other herdnumber. As there was no land declared under the herdnumber which made the BDGP application, no payment will issue under BDGP.

A letter will issue to the person named in the coming days detailing this decision and their right to appeal the decision if they wish.

Forestry Sector

388. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when his Department will provide this Deputy with a timeframe for forestry licence applications that have been in the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17828/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I am aware of the issues facing the forestry sector and considerable efforts have been made to address them. Additional resources have been recruited and training, information and guidance has been provided to both Departmental staff and registered foresters and, as a result, we have seen gains in terms of output.

The introduction of Project Woodland, recently launched by Minister-of-State Pippa Hackett, with responsibility for forestry, is our strategy for resolving the licensing issues. This new structure aims to ensure that the current backlog is addressed. The Project involves a review and refresh of our processes and procedures and includes outside stakeholder participation to bring an independent perspective. It is a task-driven process, with clear deliverable and milestones.

Working Group 1 under Project Woodland is specifically tasked with reducing the backlog and then plotting a trajectory to achieve this target. The recommendation in Ms Jo O'Hara's Implementation Report is that this Group publish a process to achieve these targets, including prioritisation and scheduling and that a monthly dashboard show the outcome of this process against the target trajectory. Meanwhile, Working Group 4 will address Effective Processes,

which will include clearer explanations for the statutory basis for forestry regulation and the introduction of more efficient and effective processes. I expect there will be cross-cutting issues between these two groups.

A target to issue 4,500 licences in 2021 has been set which is a 75% increase on 2020.

I remain hopeful and confident that the changes presented under the Project Woodland structure to processes within my Department will bear fruit, particularly to give confidence to all applicants that they can receive a timely decision on their forestry licence application.

The tables below show the average time taken to decide on an application received for each of the three categories of licence, broken down by the year received, for 2018 to 2020.

It is worth noting that there are always licences in the system at various stages of processing. These are the initial stages of an application being made, while the registered forester finalises application documents to referral to prescribed bodies, referral to the inspector and/or ecologist/archaeologist, to making final decision. Applications may also be returned to the applicant (and their registered forester, where relevant) for further information.

The average time taken for a decision to issue on a felling application, averaged over the last three years was seven months. The average time an undecided felling licence has been in the system is 13 months.

The average time taken for a decision to issue on an afforestation application, averaged over the last three years was six months. The average time an undecided afforestation licence has been in the system is 17 months.

The average time taken for a decision to issue on a Forest Road application, averaged over the last three years was six months. The average time an undecided Forest Road licence has been in the system is 15 months.

Felling

Year Received	Avg. Days from app to licence	Months (30)
2018	180	6
2019	241	8
2020	137	5
All years	197	7
Undecided	406	14

Afforestation

Year Received	Avg. Days from app to licence	Months (30)
2018	180	6
2019	201	7
2020	136	5
All years	182	6
Undecided	495	17

Roads

Year Received	Avg. Days from app to licence	Months (30)
2018	186	6
2019	189	6
2020	164	5
All years	184	6
Undecided	437	15

Forestry Sector

389. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of forestry licences issued by his Department for the first quarter of 2021; if the commitment to issue 4,500 licences in 2021 will be honoured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17829/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): As of Friday 26th March, the Department has issued 814 forestry licences in 2021. This is 18% of the target of 4,500 that will issue this year. The number of forestry licences issued this year is almost 20% higher than the same period last year.

I remain hopeful and confident based on these figures that target of 4,500 will be met in the remainder of the year notwithstanding that it will be an enormous challenge to reach those targets. In overall terms, when compared with end-March last year, Q1 2021 has resulted in:

- Afforestation decisions are down 12% but the area approved is up 14%
- Forest Roads decisions up 81% and length up 125%
- Felling decisions are up 37%, volume is up 53%
- The full end of quarter figures will be outlined in the next Forestry Dashboard.

There is considerably more work to do and the implementation of Project Woodland in collaboration with stakeholders remains a key political priority for me. We are continuing to invest in resources and reform our processes and procedures to improve our licensing output.

Forestry Sector

390. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the details of the decision in 2010 to impose the 20% rule on forestry and farmers, including accompanying reports and correspondence from the EU at that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17830/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): A decision was made to restrict the planting of unenclosed land in December 2010.

Enclosed land is, in general, more fertile and less exposed than unenclosed land and trees planted on enclosed land generally perform much better than trees planted on soil types associated with unenclosed land. This position is supported by many publications including ‘Sitka spruce in Ireland, Joyce, P.M. and OCarroll, N. 2002, and by ‘The distribution and productivity of Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) in Ireland in relation to site, soil and climatic factors’. Farrelly N. et al 2009. and the Code of Best Forest Practice - Ireland (2000).

Prior to the decision to restrict planting of unenclosed land, a number of well-known studies supported the position that habitat types associated with unenclosed land are more environmentally sensitive than enclosed land. For example, various studies including 'Phosphorus release from forest harvesting on an upland blanket peat catchment by Rodgers *et al* in 2010 established that peat soils do not buffer phosphate in the same way mineral soils do and that there will be a release of phosphate into receiving waters post-harvesting, even with the installation of protective setbacks along watercourses.

Concerns also existed in relation to the importance of unenclosed land for forging and breeding by a wide range of protected bird species (e.g. Hen harrier). Similarly, concerns existed in relation to undesignated Annex 1 habitats such as wet and dry heath, and highly endangered protected species such as freshwater pearl mussel, whose lifecycle is dependent on natural habitats typically associated with unenclosed land. Such environmental issues were discussed at this time with the European Commission.

At the time, another consideration was the fact that many plantations on unenclosed land that received grant and premium aid failed and the Department often engaged with the applicant to recoup the monies paid.

The planting on unenclosed land will be reviewed in the context of Project Woodland.

Fish Producer Organisations

391. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the establishment of a new independent organisation (details supplied); if this organisation will be included in future rounds of consultation that he holds with the industry; and if it will be invited to participate in the work of the seafood task force. [17840/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I am aware of the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

There is already a significant number of fisher's organisations representing the interests of the fishing fleet, namely, the National Inshore Fisheries Forum (NIFF) and the five Producer Organisations (Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation, Irish South & West Fish Producer's Organisation, Irish South & East Fish Producer's Organisation, Irish Fish Producer's Organisation and the Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation).

Therefore, I would urge industry to work within the recognised bodies of the Producer Organisations and the NIFF at the Task Force and other relevant representative consultative groups to ensure that it has a coherent and clear voice, particularly during this challenging period for the fleet.

Question No. 392 answered with Question No. 382.

Apiculture Industry

393. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to concerns expressed by an association (details supplied) with regard to the potential importation of bees from continental Europe either for release in Ireland or the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17902/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I fully acknowledge the important contribution bees make to agriculture and biodiversity as both pollinators and honey producers. In this regard, my Department provides a range of supports and initiatives to encourage and assist beekeepers and the national beekeeping associations. These supports include funding to carry out applied research through the National Apiculture Programme, grants to national beekeeping associations and grant aid to fund capital investments for beekeepers. My Department has funded a number of studies under the Genetic Research Grant Aid Scheme looking at various aspects of this honeybee species and specifically *apis mellifera mellifera*. In 2021, funding has been allocated for an innovative queen rearing project.

In relation to the importation of honeybees into Ireland, this is allowed under regulations governing intra-Community trade with other EU Member States. The specific health requirements for trading in bees are laid out in Council Directive 92/65/EEC. All imports of bees must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the country of export after a physical inspection of the bees and their packaging has taken place. This is to ensure that imported bees are healthy and do not harbour pathogens or parasites that may be harmful to our native bee stocks.

The importation of bees into the UK via Northern Ireland is a UK internal matter.

Departmental Staff

394. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administrative officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in his Department, by gender, in tabular form. [17903/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The gender breakdown of staff in my Department at the requested grades is shown in the following table.

Grade	Female	Male
Administrative Officer	21	20
Assistant Secretary *	3	8
Assistant Principal	88	83
Higher Executive Officer	165	142
Principal Officer	17	29

* It should be noted that the figures shown here include the Chief Inspector and Chief Veterinary Officer in my Department, as these roles are equivalent to the Assistant Secretary Grade.

Forestry Management

395. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 2021 of 24 March 2021, if the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, advised his Department to increase the buffer radius from 3 km to 15 km; if his attention has been drawn to the clear guidance on page 32 of the appropriate NPWS assessment document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17921/21]

396. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason all forestry projects are required by his Department to adhere to a 15 km buffer zone when the clear guidance from the National Parks and Wildlife Service states the distance can be much less than 15 km and, in some cases, less than 100 m, and must be evaluated on a case-by-case

basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17923/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 395 and 396 together.

The Habitats Directive and the transposing legislation SI 477 of 2011 require, *inter alia*, that an appropriate assessment is undertaken where screening identifies a likelihood of the project having a significant effect on a European site(s). This is true regardless of the separation distance between the project and the European site(s).

A likely zone of impact is used in order to identify those European Sites to be specifically addressed during screening. In making a decision regarding the likelihood of a project having a significant effect on a European Site(s), all European Sites within a certain radius (or 'likely zone of impact') should be considered at screening stage, in addition to hydrologically-connected European Sites. For example, in relation to a Special Protection Area, it is important to consider whether the project area lies within the foraging distance of bird species for which that SPA was designated, and many of these foraging distances exceed 3km.

This was one of the reasons why 3km was not deemed appropriate. There were a number of factors which prompted the Department to make the change in mid-2019. We were advised by our Ecology consultants that our appropriate assessment screening decisions would be vulnerable to challenge if we continued to consider at screening stage only those European Sites within 3km. Practice in other land use sectors where appropriate assessment screening is required is also to provide for a 15km likely zone of impact. Furthermore, results on individual cases heard by the FAC also indicated that the 3km radius was not appropriate.

My Department are in close contact with their counterparts in the NPWS and they are aware of our screening process. The document referred is currently under review by the NPWS. I can assure you that each file is assessed on a case by case basis.

Agriculture Schemes

397. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17954/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The European Innovation Partnerships Initiative (EIP) under the current Rural Development Programme involves the establishment of Operational Groups to develop ideas, or take existing ideas/research and put them into practice. The ultimate aim of these innovation partnerships is to road-test new ideas and practices which can be used more widely by farmers and others to improve productivity, enhance resource efficiency and pursue sustainable farming practices. These EIPs are pilot projects and, as such, are restricted in the number of farmers that they can accept into their schemes.

The Department approved applications for funding, following a competitive open call for proposals under the EIP Initiative. In their application for funding under the open call, each project group indicated, based on their capacity, the level of funding required to carry out the pilot project including funding for the number of farmers that they planned to involve in each project. In successful EIPs, such as the one referred to, it may be the case that not all interested farmers can be accommodated within the pilot project.

Existing EIP groups have been working hard on the actions in their proposals and have

built a deep understanding of the impacts these works are having on biodiversity and habitat quality. The results of this work to date will be invaluable in negotiating the next CAP and in programme design for these sensitive areas in the next CAP Strategic Plan.

We are currently making plans for new and expanded EIPs in the next CAP and we are engaging with stakeholders on the design of these through the CAP consultation process.

Departmental Data

398. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types his Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17966/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Given the 20-year span of the question, it is not possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy in the required time. The information is currently being compiled and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

General Data Protection Regulation

399. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of complaints his Department has received from members of the public under the heading of general data protection regulation, GDPR, and data information requests from 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined, in tabular form. [17984/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the attached tables.

[[Table](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-04-01_pq399-01-04-21_en.docx)]

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

400. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied that carbon emission reduction targets are being met without damage to agrifood production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18010/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): In December 2020, I published the AgClimatise roadmap. This roadmap sets out a series of ambitious actions for the next decade and beyond which will be transformative for Irish agriculture. The roadmap will enable the sector to reduce agricultural GHG emissions by 10-15%, while maintaining, and indeed, hopefully increasing agricultural output through efficiency gains over the years ahead.

One of the major objectives of AgClimatise is an overall reduction in chemical nitrogen fertiliser use to 325,000 tonnes by 2030, a key objective of the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy. The roadmap places significant emphasis on measures that will maintain grass productivity with

reduced levels of chemical fertiliser use. These measures include an increased use of lime on farms, the use of clover and other multispecies swards and a greater uptake of low emission slurry spreading technology. The Teagasc Signpost farms initiative, along with the many public and private advisors, will play a key role in up skilling farmers over the years ahead.

By implementing the Ag Climatise roadmap over the course of the next decade, I am very confident that we can transition the sector to a more long term sustainable platform, with co-benefits for water, air quality and biodiversity, while at all times, maintaining productivity in the sector.

Ultimately, I want to ensure that, as a priority, we protect farm family incomes while also protecting the environment.

Organic Farming

401. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of hectares under organic production by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18039/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Based on 2020 BPS details, the total area of organic and organic in-conversion land in each county is as follows.

County	Organic Area (hectares)
CARLOW	238.63
CAVAN	3,348.72
CLARE	2,791.77
CORK	8,989.53
DONEGAL	2,437.97
DUBLIN	376.62
GALWAY	6,616.42
KERRY	5,502.53
KILDARE	1,402.87
KILKENNY	1,702.48
LAOIS	2,547.33
LEITRIM	3,670.45
LIMERICK	4,229.48
LONGFORD	1,141.06
LOUTH	244.03
MAYO	1,936.81
MEATH	1,383.82
MONAGHAN	1,057.45
OFFALY	2,509.15
ROSCOMMON	7,491.9
SLIGO	1,902.93
TIPPERARY	4,772.41
WATERFORD	1,029.95
WESTMEATH	2,737.01
WEXFORD	1,422.7
WICKLOW	1,976.85

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Organic Farming Scheme

402. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants in the organic farming scheme by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18040/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The table below gives the number of participants in my Department's Organic Farming Scheme in 2020.

County	Total
Carlow	<10
Cavan	68
Clare	68
Cork	189
Donegal	40
Dublin	< 10
Galway	93
Kerry	83
Kildare	37
Kilkenny	41
Laois	45
Leitrim	91
Limerick	103
Longford	27
Louth	< 10
Mayo	39
Meath	28
Monaghan	29
Offaly	57
Roscommon	170
Sligo	34
Tipperary	113
Waterford	24
Westmeath	57
Wexford	40
Wicklow	34

Organic Farming Scheme

403. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average amount received by participant in the organic farming scheme by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18041/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Based on payments that issued in 2020 under the Organic Farming Scheme, the average amount received by farmers in each county is as follows;

County	Average payment
Carlow	€9,504.27
Cavan	€5,270.95

County	Average payment
Clare	€5,296.03
Cork	€6,102.71
Donegal	€5,285.16
Dublin	€7,389.21
Galway	€5,782.36
Kerry	€5,782.48
Kildare	€6,019.76
Kilkenny	€6,408.80
Laois	€7,838.39
Leitrim	€4,439.40
Limerick	€5,288.10
Longford	€5,146.13
Louth	€9,681.52
Mayo	€5,664.80
Meath	€5,769.36
Monaghan	€6,059.64
Offaly	€5,910.45
Roscommon	€5,607.63
Sligo	€6,015.61
Tipperary	€6,211.60
Waterford	€6,170.77
Westmeath	€5,892.30
Wexford	€5,103.23
Wicklow	€5,975.96

The table above refers to all payments under the Organic Farming Scheme that issued in 2020. It must be noted that 70% of farmers who are in the Organic Farming Scheme are also participants in GLAS. Farmers who select certain actions on a land parcel in GLAS may not be entitled to a payment under the Organic Farming Scheme on the same land parcel.

The calculation of the payment due to a farmer under the Organic Farming Scheme includes a stocking density calculation. In order to receive the full payment, a stocking density of 0.5 livestock units per hectare is required. For farmers who do not have this stocking level a pro-rata payment will issue.

Organic Farming

404. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of farmland and number of hectares he is targeting for organic production by 2030; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18042/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The organic sector in Ireland is a relatively small component of the overall agri-food sector with less than 2% of the land area under organic production. However, it is experiencing considerable growth at present with the area of land under organic production now at approximately 74,000 hectares, an increase of nearly 50% since 2014.

I am committed to continuing the implementation of the National Organic Strategy 2019-

2025 which sets out ambitious growth targets for the sector by aligning it closely with the market opportunities.

The current Programme for Government target is to align the utilisable agricultural area under organic production in Ireland with the EU average of 7.5%.

The increase in land under organic production in recent years has been driven by the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). I was pleased, therefore, to reopen the OFS this year with a budget of €4 million which should allow for a further 400 - 500 farmers entering the Scheme. The expected increase in area under organic production as a result of this reopening together with measures under the new CAP will assist in the achievement of these targets.

Agriculture Scheme Applications

405. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received for compensation as a result of avian influenza from 2020 to date in tabular form; the number of successful applications; the number of successful applicants that have since received their compensation in full to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18043/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): There were a number of outbreaks of Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza in early 2020. Although there is no legal ground for a mandatory compensation scheme in respect of this particular subtype, my Department agreed to establish a once-off ex gratia financial support scheme to provide some support to those affected.

The deadline for receipt of applications was 31st July 2020. All affected flock owners were eligible to apply and were eligible for support, subject to meeting the criteria as laid down in the terms and conditions for this once-off ex-gratia support scheme. Thirteen applications for the scheme were received and all 13 applications were successful. Payments of these ex-gratia supports to flock owners were issued in late November 2020.

In December 2020, there was one outbreak of notifiable Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N8. Three flocks were depopulated on foot of this outbreak – the infected flock and two additional risk flocks as a precautionary measure. Compensation for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is provided for in legislation and is progressing in relation to these flocks.

Beekeeping Industry

406. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulations governing the importation of non-native bees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18044/21]

407. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the threat posed to native bees as a result of the importation of non-native bees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18045/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 407 together.

I fully acknowledge the important contribution bees make to agriculture and biodiversity as both pollinators and honey producers. In this regard, my Department provides a range of

supports and initiatives to encourage and assist beekeepers and the national beekeeping associations. These supports include funding to carry out applied research through the National Apiculture Programme, grants to national beekeeping associations and grant aid to fund capital investments for beekeepers. My Department has funded a number of studies under the Genetic Research Grant Aid Scheme looking at various aspects of this honeybee species and specifically *apis mellifera mellifera*. In 2021, funding has been allocated for an innovative queen rearing project.

In relation to the importation of honeybees into Ireland, this is allowed under regulations governing intra community trade with other EU Member States. The specific health requirements for trading in bees are laid out in Council Directive 92/65/EEC. All imports of bees must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the country of export after a physical inspection of the bees and their packaging has taken place. This is to ensure that imported bees are healthy and do not harbour pathogens or parasites that may be harmful to our native bee stocks.

Afforestation Programme

408. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the incentives that are planned to re-engage farmers with forestry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18046/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I fully acknowledge that farmers are central to reaching our ambitious afforestation targets and have been the backbone of the afforestation programme in Ireland since its inception. It is clear that there has been a reduction in engagement from farmers and while there are likely multiple reasons for this, one contributory factor is likely the delays in issuing forestry licences. In order to address the twin objectives of addressing licensing issues and encouraging woodland creation, Project Woodland has been set up under the leadership of Minister-of-State Hackett, who has responsibility for forestry.

It involves four different Working Groups reporting to the Minister through a Project Manager and a Project Board. The Working Groups are working concurrently, focussing on different areas. The first will concentrate on the backlog, the second on a vision for forestry, the third on devising a fit-for-purpose organisational structure and communication and the fourth on streamlining the licensing process for the future. Through this framework, it is hoped that a renewed confidence in forestry will be fostered, that communication of its benefits will be more widely understood and that, looking to the future, a new vision for forestry in Ireland will be developed.

In relation to incentives for farmers in future Forestry Programmes, Working Group 2 – “A Shared National Approach” of Project Woodland - has been tasked with developing a new Forestry Strategy and work in this group has started. This work will inform any new incentives to be introduced in the successor to the current Forestry Programme. It will be farmer-centred and will be aimed at re-engaging farmers with forestry.

Forestry has a number of benefits for farmers including on-farm income diversification. Farmers who are interested in receiving information and advice on the available supports provided by my Department are encouraged to contact their Farm Advisor or Teagasc Forestry Advisor. In addition, details on all Forestry Grant Schemes are available on my Department’s website at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/642e6-forestry/>.

It remains the case that the afforestation of private lands is the focus of the current Forestry

Programme 2014-2020 which commenced in 2015 and has recently been extended to the end of 2022. This programme consists of 11 separate measures to encourage the planting of forests, also with specific supports for farmers.

Measures included in the programme are voluntary and comprise the main Afforestation Scheme which is delivered through the generous grants and premiums available, across 12 different planting categories, covering 100% of the cost of establishing new forests and also providing annual premium payments which are paid for 15 years. In addition, farmers can benefit from supports for the establishment of new forest roads, as well as the thinning of a forest plantation.

Agro forestry is also supported under the current forestry programme which allows for grazing of animals to take place on land that is also planted with trees. The forestry for fibre category provides for the planting of eucalyptus and poplar which can be harvested after 15 years, a much shorter rotation than traditional forestry where clearfell could take place between 35 and 40 years from the date of planting. Timber from this type of planting can be used for domestic heating on the farm itself or supplied to local markets to meet a growing demand for firewood.

It is notable that during the course of the current Forestry Programme so far, this approach has resulted in 2,500 farmers planting a total of 16,000 hectares of forestry on their land.

Forestry Sector

409. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he plans to take to reform the forestry licensing system and to address the manner in which it discriminates against farmers unable to complete their own NIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18047/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I am aware of the issues facing the forestry sector and considerable efforts have been made to address them. Additional resources have been recruited and training, information and guidance has been provided to both Departmental staff and registered foresters and, as a result, we have seen gains in terms of output. Nonetheless we know we must do more to deliver a better service.

The introduction of Project Woodland, recently launched by Minister of State Pippa Hackett, with responsibility for forestry, is our strategy for resolving the licensing issues. This new structure aims to ensure that the current backlog is addressed. The Project involves a review and refresh of our processes and procedures and includes outside stakeholder participation to bring an independent perspective. It is a task-driven process, with clear deliverable and milestones.

Working Group 1 under Project Woodland is specifically tasked with reducing the backlog and then plotting a trajectory to achieve this target. The recommendation in Ms Jo O'Hara's Implementation Report is that this Group publish a process to achieve these targets, including prioritisation and scheduling and that a monthly dashboard show the outcome of this process against the target trajectory. Meanwhile, Working Group 4 will address Effective Processes, which will include clearer explanations for the statutory basis for forestry regulation and the introduction of more efficient and effective processes. Working Group 4 will also consider piloting an environmental report process with a recommendation for where this should be used, alongside grant support. I expect there will be cross-cutting issues between these two groups.

The NIS is used across all development applications in the national and other planning processes and arises as part of compliance, where relevant, with the Appropriate Assessment

process under the Habitats Directive. In cases where an NIS is required and not provided by the applicant, the Department will carry out the ecological assessment. However, providing an NIS will significantly reduce the time taken to process the application.

Forestry Sector

410. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the role of project manager of project woodland is a full-time position; the number of hours allocated to this role per week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18048/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Project Woodland, under the leadership of Minister-of-State Hackett, who has responsibility for forestry, is an initiative to tackle issues in forestry in Ireland and to promote and encourage woodland creation.

It involves four different Working Groups reporting to Minister Hackett through a Project Manager and a Project Board. The project Board is being chaired by the Secretary General.

The Working Groups are working concurrently, focussing on different areas. The first one will concentrate on the backlog, the second on a vision for forestry, the third on devising a fit for purpose organisational structure and communication, and the fourth on streamlining the licensing process for the future.

Each Working Group is made up of stakeholders drawn from the Minister's existing Forestry Policy Group and is chaired by an independent, experienced outsider. All Groups have met already and the Project Manger has updated the Project Board on the outcomes from those meetings, with good progress being made and plans for meeting the milestones and objectives of the Groups being put in place. These groups are supported, as appropriate, by resources within my Department.

The Project Manager is the Assistant Secretary with responsibility for forestry and agri-environment schemes within my Department. As such his role is intrinsically linked with the delivery of actions from the Mackinnon Report, which is being facilitated through Project Woodland. He will be supported by a full time Management Professional and a systems analyst who are currently being recruited.

I am committed, along with Minister Hackett, to the success of Project Woodland and all appropriate resources across my Department will be in place to ensure that it can be delivered for the benefit of the forestry sector and society.

Calafóirt agus Céanna

411. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir le síneadh a chur le céibh Inis Oírr; cén uair atá súil ag a Roinn le tairiscintí a lorg don obair seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [17851/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Mar is eol don Teachta is iad Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe atá freagrach as Cé Inis Oírr agus is iadsan a bheidh ag tabhairt faoi aon phróiseas tairisceana. Tá mo Roinn agus an Comhairle Chontae ag obair le chéile le tamall chun an cás gnó maidir leis an bhforbairt a thabhairt chun críche.

Pléadh an cás gnó ag cruinniú don ghrúpa ard-bhainistíochta na Roinne an t-seachtain seo, agus tá i gceist agam a gcuid tuairimí maidir leis an gcás a mheas i ndiaidh briseadh na Cásca.

Calafóirt agus Céanna

412. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail cén dul chun cinn atá déanta ar fhorbairt na céibhe in Inis Meáin; cén uair atá súil ag a Roinn go n-aontófar dearadh don obair sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [17852/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Tá teagmháil rialta idir oifigigh na Roinne agus oifigigh an Chomhairle Contae chun forbairt an Chalaoidh Mhóir in Inis Meáin, a phlé.

I 2020 chuir mo Roinn maoiniú ar fáil do Chomhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe, chun ionsamhlú den chéibh a choimisiniú ón gColáiste Náisiúnta Mara na hÉireann - National Maritime College Ireland (NMCI).

Tuigtear dom nach raibh rochtain ar an áis NMCI ag an Comhairle Contae fós de bharr na srianta ag eascairt as COVID-19. Faoi láthair tá Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe ag plé leis an NMCI faoi bhealaí chun an obair a chur chun cinn agus chun deis a thabhairt do ionadaithe ón oileán a bheith páirteach, ag cur san áireamh na treorlínnte maidir le sláinte poiblí agus srianta taistil.

Nuair a bheidh an chuid seo don togra curtha chun geríoch beidhfear ábalta dul ar aghaidh leis an chéad chuid eile d’fhorbairt na céibhe ar a n-áirítear an dearadh.

Departmental Staff

413. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will provide a breakdown of the higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in her Department by gender in tabular form. [17916/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The below table provides a breakdown of staff at the grade of higher executive officers, administration officers, assistant principal officers, principal officers and assistant secretaries in this Department by gender only:

Grade	Male	Female
Assistant Secretary	1	2
Principal Officer	9	4
Assistant Principal Officer	14	12
Administration Officer	2	6
Higher Executive Officer	12	26

Departmental Data

414. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a schedule will be provided of the data sets, databases and file types her Department has shared with the Department of Health since 2000. [17978/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien): The COVID-19 Stability Fund for Community and Voluntary Organisations, Charities and Social Enterprises was a cross-Government initiative, led by the Department of Rural and Community Development, with administrative support provided by Pobal.

Application data was shared with the Department of Health in order to facilitate application appraisal and grant approval, in line with the terms and conditions of the application process. The information shared was all non-personal and did not extend to any personal information.

General Data Protection Regulation

415. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of complaints her Department has received from members of the public under the heading of GDPR and data information requests since 2018 to date in 2021; the number of data information requests that have been refused and accepted, respectively; the number of GDPR requests refused; and the basis on which they were declined in tabular form. [17997/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has not received any complaints from members of the public under the heading of GDPR in the timeframe set out. The annual figures for data information requests, also known as subject access requests, received are outlined below:

2018: 0

2019: 0

2020: 1 This request was withdrawn and was handled under Freedom of Information legislation

2021 to date: 0

Community Development Projects

416. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the organisations and groups supported by the scheme to support national organisations in the community and voluntary sector; the funding each has received from 1 January 2020 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18015/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien): The Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO) is a key element of my Department's support for the role of the sector in contributing to the development of strong and vibrant civil society and in improving outcomes for those most disadvantaged. The scheme provides multi-annual funding towards core costs of national, community and voluntary organisations that demonstrate good governance and deliver services and supports that have a focus on one or more of the following: addressing poverty, social exclusion and promoting equality.

The current scheme commenced on 1 July 2019 and will expire on 30 June 2022. The scheme is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department.

The total allocation for the duration of the scheme 2019-2022 is €18.8m. Funding has been allocated to 74 national community and voluntary organisations to cover the 36 month period

1 April 2021

of the scheme, as set out in the table below.

[table]

