

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 11 to 38, inclusive, resubmitted.

Departmental Expenditure

39. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; and the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned. [24936/21]

The Taoiseach: A tabular breakdown of the figures requested by the Deputy is below.

[<ahref="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-05-12_pq39-12-05-2021_en.docx">Advertising Costs 2021]

Since March of 2020, my Department has co-ordinated the communications strategy for the whole-of-government response to the pandemic that ensures maximum clarity for citizens, businesses and our wider community.

The strategy ensures that citizens have all of the information they need in relation to Covid-19, to protect the most vulnerable in our communities, themselves and their families and the health care system.

The strategy aligns with both World Health Organisation (WHO) and European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) advice, both of which emphasise the importance of ensuring the general public is aware of the seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak and further that a high degree of population understanding, community engagement and acceptance of the measures put in place are key in preventing further spread.

This necessitates expenditure on a broad range of targeted public messaging across a range of different information campaigns using national and local radio, national and regional newspapers, and social media platforms. The centralised approach adopted is helping to ensure effectiveness of advertising spend and consistency and amplification of the public health messaging across the various public awareness campaigns and to those hard to reach audiences.

The public information campaigns play a vital role in communicating the various strands of the pandemic. All platforms are utilised with some campaigns tailored for different audiences using specific channels. There have been 48 campaigns to date, and each campaign was advertised using a combination of National Press, Regional Press, Radio, Digital Display, Social Media, TV and Online Video. The media buying was engaged through PHD Ltd, and these contracts were placed under the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) Framework Agree-

ment.

Electronic Commerce

40. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will address a series of matters (details supplied) in relation to .ie domains and their usage by UK companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24818/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Robert Troy): The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is the statutory body responsible for the regulation of the electronic communications sector and the postal sector. It was given regulatory responsibility for the .ie namespace in 2007. The Communications Regulation Act 2007 sets out the terms for the registration of .ie domain names and they enable ComReg to make regulations and to “*specify an entity as the authority authorised to register ‘.ie’ domain names*”. In 2009, ComReg appointed .ie Domain Registry (IEDR) as the authority authorised to register .ie domain names in accordance with Section 32(4)(a) of the Act of 2007. The decision also stated that IEDR would set up and maintain a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) which would be the representative group of all stakeholders.

IEDR published its policy on Registration and Naming in the .IE, in which it set out the requirements for new registrants, including that they must provide evidence of their real and substantive connection to the island of Ireland. The requirements are set out in Section 2 of the policy document and it states that .ie names are only available to those either based on the island of Ireland, or those who have a real connection to the island of Ireland. Evidence of being based in Ireland can include: a CRO number, Revenue VAT number, registered business number, an Irish VAT number, proof of Irish income tax registration (sole traders), a trademark that is enforceable in Ireland or for individuals it might be a digital copy of an Irish driver’s license or Irish passport. If they are based outside of the island of Ireland, a connection to Ireland must be proven. Applicants must show that they trade with, or clearly intend to trade with, consumers or businesses on the island of Ireland. Acceptable evidence of this connection to the island of Ireland includes invoices, press releases, promotional material, or even a screenshot of the registrant’s e-commerce store that shows that consumers or businesses can select anywhere on the island of Ireland as their location for delivery.

IEDR has a process whereby stakeholders can suggest policy changes to IEDR’s Policy Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC was set up in 2014 and it considers and provides advice on policy issues concerning Ireland’s Internet top-level domain, .ie to its Board.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) has no role in relation to the policies and procedures which are used by IEDR. However, the CCPC does have a role in providing information to consumers about online shopping and in January of this year the CCPC published “Online shopping post-Brexit: A CCPC consumer guide to shopping online”, in which they advised consumers that a ‘.ie’ domain does not guarantee that consumers are dealing with an Irish-based business. The CCPC advised consumers that the most important step to take is to check where a business is based before they buy. It advised consumers to check the business’s registered address in the terms and conditions (T&Cs) section of the website to find out where the business is registered. The document went on to inform consumers that from 1 January last, all online shopping orders received from the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) are subject to Irish VAT and customs charges, depending on the value and the type of items concerned. Before ordering from outside the EU, consumers are reminded to check the T&Cs to find out what VAT and import charges that they may have to pay. The CCPC also published guidance for businesses selling online emphasising the importance of disclosing the geographic

location of their business, as required by the Consumer Rights Directive. Since 1 January, the CCPC have received 25 contacts from consumers on scenarios which would fall within the type of situation outlined here. These cases would include scenarios where consumers have advised the CCPC that they made a purchase for goods from .ie sites and subsequently found out that the traders were actually based in the UK or outside the EU.

Tourism Policy

41. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his Department will actively investigate the possibility of establishing Ireland as the events hub of the EU post-Brexit (details supplied); if a fund will be made available for same; if he will liaise with the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24854/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The impact of COVID-19 has not been uniform across areas of economic activity and affected sectors such as the events sector will continue to face challenges due to ongoing distancing requirements, changed consumer behaviour and lower demand. The outlook for internationally traded sectors is also uncertain and will depend on developments in export markets.

Nevertheless, I would like to thank the Deputy for her suggestion about Ireland becoming an EU hub for the events sector and would be interested in hearing about any proposals which I could share with my colleague, Minister Catherine Martin, whose Department is the lead in this area.

As the House will be aware, my Department recently launched the Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC) which gives grants to businesses which are not eligible for the Government's COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), the Fáilte Ireland Business Continuity grant or other direct sectoral grant schemes. This scheme aims to help businesses with their fixed costs, for example, rent, utility bills, security. A payment grant of €4,000 is available for the first quarter of this year. A decision on payment for the second quarter of this year will be made in due course.

Departmental Advertising

42. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24926/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Details of costs incurred by my Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date are set out in detail in the attached table.

Table 1 Expenditure from 1 March 2020 – 11 May 2021

Date	Campaign	Print/Online/Broadcast Outlet	Cost €
April 2020	Graphic Design of COVID-19 Supports for Businesses Document Template		738
April 2020	PPE Notice to Exporters – Newspaper Advertising	Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and The Irish Times	3,798

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Date	Campaign	Print/Online/Broadcast Outlet	Cost €
Total April 2020			4,536
May 2020	Graphic design work on Supports for Small Businesses Animation		1,107
May 2020	Translation into Irish of Covid-19 Return to Work Safely Protocol		800
May 2020	PPE Notice to Exporters - Newspaper Advertising	Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and The Irish Times	4,580
Total May 2020			6,487
June 2020	Translation into Irish of the COVID-19 Supports for Businesses Document Template		861
Total June 2020			861
July 2020	Translation into Irish of Data Protection - Work Safely Protocol		135
July 2020	Translation into Irish of the COVID-19 Supports for Businesses Document Template		18
Total July 2020			153
August 2020	Graphic design work on the Re-Start Grant Animation		984
August 2020	Translation into Irish of the COVID-19 Supports for Businesses Document Template		284
Total August 2020			1,268
October 2020	Translation into Irish of the COVID-19 Supports for Businesses Document Template		133
Total October 2020			133
December 2020	Graphic design work on the Shop Safely Animation		1,494
December 2020	Social Media Campaign – Shop Safely	Twitter and LinkedIn	1,861
December 2020	Translation of Covid-19 Work Safely Protocol		913
Total December 2020			4,268
January 2021	Infographics for Covid-19 Business Supports		290
Total January 2021			290
February 2021	Translation into Irish of the COVID-19 Supports for Businesses Document Template		605
February 2021	Infographics for Work Safely Protocol		310
February 2021	Infographics for Work Safely Protocol		656
Total February 2021			1,571
March 2021	Vaccines Export Authorisation – Newspaper Advertising	Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and The Irish Times	3,647
March 2021	Public health advice on shopping safely – graphic design and storyboard, animation and audio licence		615
March 2021	Infographics for Face Facts Campaign		1648
March 2021	Video for Work Safely Campaign		1,050
Total March 2021			6,960
April 2021	Vaccines Export Authorisation – Newspaper Advertising	Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and The Irish Times	5,562
April 2020	Design, artwork and infographics for Covid-19 Business Supports		610
Total April 2021			6,172
Overall Total			32,699

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

43. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the Covid-19 business supports that are available for event caterers excluded from current Covid-19 supports due to the rateable and fixed premises criteria; the supports being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24944/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): 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), Small business assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC), low-cost loans, the deferral and warehousing of tax liabilities and the waiver of commercial rates. The level of business supports is unprecedented.

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.

While there is a requirement for some schemes for businesses to be operating from a rated premises, in the case of SBASC they do not necessarily have to be the rate payer to qualify. Our objective is to assist businesses to meet some of the ongoing fixed costs of operating from a premises. We are not providing compensation for loss of personal income above this level or compensation for loss of profits for any sector.

I can assure you the Government is continuing to review the range of assistance schemes and eligibility criteria to ensure we have the right mix for the recovery.

Energy Policy

44. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the details of the forthcoming electricity microgenerator scheme; and when the details of this scheme will be published. [24773/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Programme for Government commits to prioritising the development of micro-generation of electricity primarily for self-consumption by a household. Under the Climate Action Plan, a Micro-generation working group, chaired by my Department, is developing an enabling framework for micro-generation which tackles existing barriers and establishes suitable supports within relevant market segments. The proposed support mechanism was outlined in a public consultation launched in January (now closed) and the submissions received are currently being reviewed, with a view to publication of the final scheme design, subject to Government approval, in the coming months. While the primary aim of a micro-generation scheme is to enable a household to meet its own electricity needs, it is envisaged that a suitable payment for excess electricity generated on site and exported to the grid will be available to all micro-generators in the second half of 2021, subject to regulatory arrangements, in line with Articles 21 and 22 of the recast Renewable Energy Directive.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) published an updated Roadmap for the Clean Energy Package's Electricity and Renewables Directives in February, which provides for a public consultation on the regulatory framework for prosumer development later this year.

Departmental Bodies

45. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Commu-

nications the remuneration that has been provided by his Department to the members of the Climate Advisory Council in terms of pay and benefits including expenses which can be reimbursed from 1 January 2017 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24814/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):

The Climate Change Advisory Council was established by Ministerial Order (S.I. No 25 of 2016) on 18 January 2016 pursuant to section 8 of the Climate Change and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The Advisory Council consisted of eleven members appointed by Government, acting in a part-time capacity for a statutory five-year term. The overall costs associated with the operation of the Advisory Council are provided for through the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is funded, in part, through my Department's Vote.

Ordinary members of the Advisory Council receive an annual remuneration of €9,800, with the Chair receiving an annual remuneration of €16,250, in line with the scale of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform approved fees for chairpersons and members of State Boards. Ex Officio members of the Advisory Council do not receive remuneration. In line with the 'One Person One Salary' remuneration policy for public servants, members of the Advisory Council already in receipt of a public service salary may not receive any further remuneration by virtue of their membership of the Council. However, in certain cases, remuneration is paid directly to the member's parent institution to offset the costs of that member's commitments to the Advisory Council. Members of the Advisory Council also receive travel and subsistence expenses in line with public service rates.

I am advised by the EPA that the remuneration received in 2017 to date by members of the Advisory Council is as follows:

Sum of CCAC Remuneration 2017 to date

	2017	2018	2018	2020	2021	Total
Total CCAC Members Fees	87,010	75,050	75,050	75,050	16,250	328,410
Travel and Subsistence	2,742	1,777	2,265	1,145	0	7,929
Total Cost	89,752	76,827	77,315	76,195	16,250	336,339

Energy Conservation

46. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications when works will commence on the house of a person (details supplied) under the warmer homes scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24825/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):

The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). To date over 142,000 homes have received free upgrades leaving them better able to afford to heat their homes to an adequate level. The approximate average value of the energy efficiency measures provided to a household under the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme was €14,819 in 2020. Funding for the SEAI energy poverty retrofit schemes has increased to over €109 million in 2021. This is an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation and means that almost half of the total SEAI residential and community retrofit budget will support people vulnerable to energy poverty. This funding will mean that more households can receive free energy efficiency upgrades, making their homes warmer, healthier and cheaper to run, in line with the Programme for Government.

Individual applications to the Warmer Homes Scheme are an operational matter for the SEAI and as Minister I have no role in such matters. However in reference to the case raised by the Deputy, I have been informed by the SEAI that the application for the home in question was received in January and is currently awaiting a survey allocation.

There are currently approximately 8,000 homes on the scheme work programme. This includes homes that: are currently undergoing works; have been allocated to contractors for works; completed an initial home survey and are awaiting allocation to a contractor or are awaiting initial survey. SEAI data indicates that for homes completed in 2020, the average time from application to completion was approximately 18 months. The scheme operates nationally on a first come first served basis.

In addition to the increased budget allocation, delivery capacity has increased due to a new, broader contractor panel that commenced at the end of 2020. I have also secured additional resources this year to expand the capacity of the SEAI to deliver the scheme.

Electricity Supply Board

47. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his views on the ESB subcontracting works that are normally carried out by their own employees; his further views on the matter as a policy change by the ESB which is a semi-State body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24834/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Outsourcing or otherwise of services by ESB is a matter for the Board and Management of ESB and not a matter in which I as Minister have a function.

North-South Interconnector

48. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the terms of reference for the review of the North-South Interconnector limit it to reviewing previous findings and reports or will allow for new evidence, research and innovations to be assessed in view of the fact that EirGrid has recently identified the best performing option for the Kildare-Meath grid upgrade as a 400kV underground cable having previously argued against this option; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24880/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The North-South Interconnector is critical to improving the efficient operation of the all-island single electricity market and increasing security of electricity supply in Ireland and Northern Ireland. It will also help Ireland to move towards our 70% renewable electricity target by 2030. A resilient and well-connected energy infrastructure is vital for Ireland's economic well-being and the ability to respond to the future needs of energy consumers. The option of undergrounding the North-South Interconnector has been comprehensively assessed on several occasions. Most recently, my Department commissioned an independent report incorporating international industry expertise to examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the North-South Interconnector and the report from the International Expert Commission was published in October 2018. It found that an overhead line remains the most appropriate option for this piece of critical electricity infrastructure.

Notwithstanding this, I have decided to commission a further short review to assess if the overall finding from the 2018 report remains valid. Terms of reference for this study were pub-

lished on my Department's website on 21 April and are also attached for ease of reference. On 7 May, my Department launched a procurement using the appropriate procurement framework administered by the Office of Government Procurement.

[Terms of Reference]

Covid-19 Pandemic

49. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24927/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Trading Online Voucher was the one area of my Department which incurred expenditure of the nature referred to by the Deputy. With the advent of COVID-19 many small and micro-businesses found themselves with the challenge of having to shut their physical presence and adapt their business model, with many trading online for the first time. As part of the Government's COVID-19 Business Supports Package for small businesses, the terms of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme were amended and the budget significantly increased. The amount spent for the Trading Online Voucher Scheme in relation to advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021 is €10,016 broken down as follows:

Google Adwords: €7,431.

OSD Digital Agency Limited: €2,585

Electricity Supply Board

50. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he is satisfied that employees involved in the current ESB dispute have received consultation and information rights on the outsourcing of their work as outlined in the Employees (Provision of Information and Consultation) Act 2006 and the Industrial Relations Act 1990 (Code of Practice on Information and Consultation) (Declaration) Order 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25135/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Industrial relations such as those raised by the Deputy are operational matters in which I, as Minister, have no statutory function. ESB has informed my Department that the Network Technicians who are members of the Independent Workers Union (IWU) have decided to defer their industrial action as of 10 May.

Waste Management

51. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications further to Parliamentary Question No. 277 of 21 April 2021, the way that his Department will support persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical

incontinence wear; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25157/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
The position set out in reply to Question No. 277 of 21 April 2021 is unchanged.

Local Authorities

52. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the amount each local authority will receive from the €5 million additional funding for litter prevention and cleaning announced on 5 May 2021; the rationale for the assignment of funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25155/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
My Department issued a circular to each Local Authority about the additional €5 million funding allocation on 5 May and is liaising with individual Local Authorities to establish a platform for funding proposals and to identify where additional infrastructure is most needed. Each Local Authority will appoint a lead person to work with my Department. Once the process is complete, funding will be allocated and individual allocations will be known.

Air Quality

53. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to develop a regional approach to air quality and noise enforcement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25158/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
My Department has commenced discussions with the County and City Management Association, and other key stakeholders with a view to developing a regional approach to air quality and noise enforcement, in order to bring greater consistency and coordination to tackling the most pressing enforcement challenges. In order to progress these discussions further, I am establishing an Air and Noise Enforcement Working Group to include the various regulatory stakeholders, experienced Local Authority enforcement practitioners and representatives from existing shared service offices. The purpose of this Group is to determine the most effective enforcement approach, and to make their recommendations to my Department within the next six months.

Such a time-line is necessary given the findings of the Environmental Protection Agency report on Local Authority environmental enforcement activities for 2019 which was published recently. This report recommends that a regional approach to enforcement be adopted, and that the resources being allocated by Local Authorities to these areas be reviewed. The report also highlights a significant reduction in the level of enforcement reported and the need for Local Authorities to develop additional expertise in monitoring and investigations.

My Department has demonstrated its commitment to supporting Local Authorities in improving their level of performance in fulfilling their statutory obligations across a range of environmental areas. Our shared objective is the establishment of dedicated resources, within regional lead authorities, that will provide a robust enforcement regime that focuses greatest effort on the enforcement issues that matter most. I look forward to significant progress being made to fulfilling this commitment in the coming months.

Energy Policy

54. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to ensure that his Department has the capacity and expertise to manage the transition in energy efficiency and renewable energy and to carry out its expanded function in relation to carbon budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25159/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In October 2020, as part of the budget process, my Department received approval for a significant increase in staffing levels amounting to an additional 50 full-time employees, bringing my Department's total pay budget to €31.3 million.

The majority of these additional staff are being deployed across the energy and climate divisions of my Department in order to specifically work on the delivery of the commitments in the Programme for Government, including the transition in energy efficiency and renewable energy as well as the expanded function in relation to carbon budgets.

These staff are being recruited by working closely with the Public Appointments Service as well as the use of existing Civil Service Mobility schemes, to ensure that candidates with the required knowledge, expertise and capacity to perform the new and expanded functions are put in place.

My Department is also currently conducting a review of activities relating to energy policy to ensure that resources are aligned with Government's priorities in this area.

Post Office Network

55. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the progress his Department has made on addressing the actions relevant to his areas of responsibility outlined in the Private Members' Motion on the post office network on 16 November 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25161/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): An Post is a commercial State body with a mandate to act commercially. It has statutory responsibility for the State's postal service and the post office network. Decisions relating to the network, including those in relation to the size, distribution and future of the network are operational matters for the Board and management of the company.

Since the November 2016 Private Members' motion referred to by the Deputy was debated, a lot of work has been done to ensure An Post and the post office network remain viable.

An Post put in place a Strategic Plan, covering the period 2017 – 2021, in response to the structural challenges faced by the postal sector. As part of the delivery of the plan the company was split into two distinct business units, An Post Mails and Parcels and An Post Retail.

An Post is transforming its retail network by delivering new products and new formats. This includes, among other things, diversifying and growing the financial services products it provides for individuals and SMEs to include loans, credit cards and more foreign exchange products, local banking in association with the major banks and a full range of State Savings products. Two new dedicated sub-brands, An Post Money and a new business-to-business brand, An Post Commerce, were launched. Investment by An Post of €50 million in the network

is designed to encourage communities to use the enhanced services in their local post office.

An Post has also launched its Green Hub, a facility providing end-to-end project management and financial advice for all levels of home retro-fitting which will be supported by competitive loan rates. The Green Hub is essentially a one-stop-shop which will cover loan-only or full retro-fit services, from initial home assessments to completed works and an SEAI grant application and payment process. An Post has partnered with SSE Airtricity to give free home assessments and the fulfilment of works.

Government efforts have been focussed on supporting An Post in the roll out of new services and the delivery of its strategic plan. €30m in State funding was made available, of which €15 million is to support the renewal of the post office network and a further €15 million towards the continued fulfilment of a five-day per week mail delivery service. This helps secure the future of mail and post office services for local communities throughout the country in both rural and urban areas.

An Post has received an investment loan of €40m from the European Investment Bank to finance innovation and modernisation projects as part of its strategic plan. The borrowing is being used to help fund the capital costs associated with five investment programmes which are part of the Transformation Plan, including Post Office renewal.

Government continues to provide significant business to An Post through the Department of Social Protection's Social Welfare contract and National Treasury Management Agency business. A Capital Expenditure programme was approved at Ministerial level which, as part of the Company's commitment to the sustainability of its network, is designed to develop the newer elements of An Post's Financial Services business and mitigate declining core mail volumes and revenues on the Retail side of the business.

In line with its commercial strategy to increase its banking services, An Post announced a new partnership with Bank of Ireland to offer personal and SME withdrawal and lodgement services to Bank of Ireland customers across the An Post network of over 900 post offices nationwide. This builds on the agency banking services An Post already provides for a number of other leading banks including AIB and Ulster Bank with more than 4.5 million transactions and a cash value of almost €1.5bn annually.

The Government believes An Post has untapped potential to do more and make a further significant contribution across many areas of public, business and community life in Ireland. In that regard, Government recently approved the Report on the Provision of Offline Government Services and the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Group, co-chaired by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, to, *inter alia*, examine the feasibility of directing more Government business to the post office network. The Group has met twice in the past 3 weeks and will report back to Government by the end of July.

Government is committed to delivering services using channels geared to the needs of the public and remains committed to a sustainable Post Office Network as a key component of the economic and social infrastructure in both rural and urban areas.

All options will be considered fully and every effort made to give effect to the Government commitment to ensuring a sustainable and viable post office network.

Illegal Dumping

56. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of persons or companies fined for illegal dumping by Cork County Council and Cork City Council, respectively in each of the years 2015 to 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25162/21]

57. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the cost to Cork County Council and Cork City Council, respectively of illegal dumping in each of the years 2015 to 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25163/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 57 together.

Enforcement actions against illegal waste activity are a matter for the local authorities and the Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE) within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). My Department does not compile statistics in relation to costs incurred or fines imposed by individual local authorities. The EPA compiles comparative statistics on local authority performance relating to their waste enforcement activity under the Recommended Criteria for Environmental Inspection (RMCEI) process. Their most recent report in this regard is for the period 2019 and is available on their website at www.epa.ie. Information is also available through the Local Government Management Agency's series of service indicators annual reports which are available from the publications section of the LGMA's website <https://lgma.ie/en/publications/performance-indicators/noac-performance-indicators-report-2019.pdf>. The Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLA) Annual Report for 2019, available at www.werla.ie also contains useful data regarding actions taken by the wider local authority sector under the Waste Management Act. Questions in relation to the full annual costs of waste enforcement and the number of entities fined under the Waste Management Acts by individual local authorities should be directed towards those specific authorities.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 56.

Departmental Schemes

58. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of applicants awaiting the installation of SEAI warmer homes scheme upgrades by county; the average waiting time for applicants in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25164/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). To date over 142,000 homes have received free upgrades leaving them better able to afford to heat their homes to an adequate level. The approximate average value of the energy efficiency measures provided to a household under the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme was €14,800 in 2020. As indicated in the table below, there are currently 779 homes in Cork on the Warmer Homes work programme. The scheme operates nationally on a first come first served basis. SEAI data indicates that for homes completed in 2020, the average time from application to completion was approximately 18 months in Cork and nationally. The average wait times are expected to increase significantly in 2021 due to the extensive COVID-19 related restrictions on construction activity between March and June of last year as well as between January and 12 April of this year when the scheme was fully paused in line with Government guidelines. Works under

the scheme has now recommenced in line with activity in the residential construction sector.

The SEAI has advised me that the average wait times should only ever be used as a general guide and that wait times vary, based on the demand for the scheme at the time of application as well as other factors including the scale of works to be completed, access to the property, availability of materials and the weather.

It is important to note that funding for the SEAI energy poverty retrofit schemes has increased to over €109 million in 2021. This is an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation and means that almost half of the total SEAI residential and community retrofit budget will support people vulnerable to energy poverty. This funding will mean that more households can receive free energy efficiency upgrades making their homes warmer, healthier and cheaper to run, in line with the Programme for Government.

In addition to the increased budget, capacity by the industry to deliver more activity has also increased due to a new, broader contractor panel to provide works which commenced at the end of 2020. I also secured additional resources this year to expand the capacity of the SEAI to allow it drive the various grant programmes that it operates, including the Warmer Homes Scheme, and to ensure that level of activity envisaged under the Programme for Government is delivered.

This table shows a breakdown by county of the total national Warmer Homes work programme.

County	No. on warmer homes work programme
Carlow	93
Cavan	102
Clare	147
Cork	779
Donegal	390
Dublin	2404
Galway	391
Kerry	238
Kildare	256
Kilkenny	104
Laois	96
Leitrim	93
Limerick	263
Longford	74
Louth	157
Mayo	391
Meath	271
Monaghan	79
Offaly	138
Roscommon	144
Sligo	123
Tipperary	292
Waterford	213
Westmeath	184
Wexford	287

County	No. on warmer homes work programme
Wicklow	236
Grand Total	7945

Public Transport

59. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if he will address a matter (details supplied) in relation to a tax saver annual ticket; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24724/21]

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. The issue raised by the Deputy concerning the tax saver initiative is a matter for the relevant transport operators in conjunction with the NTA.

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.

Driver Test

60. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport the number of applicants waiting for driver theory tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24743/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): This is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Coast Guard Service

61. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport the plans that are in place to remove the Irish Coast Guard all weather search and rescue helicopter from Waterford; the reason for this proposal; if he will ensure that the Irish Coast Guard search and rescue helicopter will be retained in Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24765/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): I am not aware of any plans to remove or relocate the CHC base from Waterford Airport. The contractual relationship in relation to this base is between CHC and Waterford Airport. The Department's contract for a SAR helicopter service is with CHC which includes bases located in Dublin, Shannon, Sligo and Waterford airports. This is a 10 year contract which commenced in 2012 which has already been extended for 1 year and may be extended for a further 2 years. No tender has issued for a successor to this contract but a process has commenced in relation to this. Full details are available on a dedicated webpage on Gov.ie – located <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/ed653-irish-coast-guard-search-and-rescue-sar-aviation-project/>

Road Safety

62. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport if he will consider introducing a

special fund for safety barriers on regional roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24772/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from Councils' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

Under the Department's Discretionary Grant, Councils have the discretion to use grant funding for safety improvement works, including the provision of safety barriers. Local authorities can also apply for the provision of safety barriers under my Department's annual Safety Improvement grant programme. In view of these funding options, a specific grant programme for the provision of safety barriers on regional roads is not under consideration.

Guidance on the provision of safety barriers is given in Transport Infrastructure Ireland's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

Driver Test

63. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport the status of a driver theory test appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24783/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): This is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Road Safety Authority

64. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if he will report on the RSA's plans first proposed in 2015 to name and shame disqualified drivers; the outcome of the latest research commissioned by the RSA in 2019 due to be completed in March 2021 whereby disqualified drivers were given €150 vouchers to take part in the project; the timeframe for publication of the findings of this research; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24797/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The research has been completed and it is currently being reviewed by the RSA. Due to more urgent priorities following the Covid-19 pandemic, the review is behind schedule.

The report findings will be presented to the Board of the RSA following which the report will be published.

Road Safety

65. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the reason that manual notices continue to be sent to the Road Safety Authority with details of drivers disqualified in court when the Minister for Justice responded to a Parliamentary Question in February 2021

stating that the Courts Service has been ready to automate the electronic transfer of disqualifications to the National Driver Licence Service and the Road Safety Authority since the end of 2019 and are awaiting confirmation from his Department that they are able to receive the data in this format; the reason for the delay within his Department and the RSA to receive this data electronically; the timeframe for this work to be completed by his Department and the RSA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24798/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): My Department and the RSA have been actively engaged on this project with the Courts Service. Completion was postponed in March 2020 due to other urgent priorities requiring immediate and ongoing attention in terms of operations, ICT and legislation, such as the Driving Licence and Vehicle Testing extensions, that were introduced due to the pandemic, as well as support for the Health Service Executive. My Department is planning to resume the project when immediate urgent needs are no longer the priority in terms of our resources. We will engage with the RSA and the Courts Service at that time to re-schedule the development.

Road Safety

66. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 157 of 10 February 2021, if he has received the requested report from the Road Safety Authority regarding learner drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24799/21]

67. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 10 February 2021, if he has received the requested report from the Road Safety Authority regarding disqualified drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24800/21]

70. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 161 of 10 February 2021, if the report requested from the RSA is now available regarding disqualified learner drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24803/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66, 67 and 70 together.

My department did not request the referenced reports from the Road Safety Authority (RSA). The Deputy's requests in February were sent to the Road Safety Authority (RSA) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received the requested information directly from the RSA, I ask that she contact my office.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 66.

Road Safety

68. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 159 of 10 February 2021, if he will report on the 29 action plans from the 2013-2020 Road Safety Strategy that were not completed by the end of the strategy term on 31 December 2020; the reason he reported that there were only seven action plans incomplete by the end of the strategy term in his reply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24801/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): I understand that the RSA has been finalizing its report on the Actions under the Road Safety

Strategy 2013-2020. The research has been completed and it is currently being reviewed by the RSA. Due to more urgent priorities following the Covid-19 pandemic, the review is somewhat behind schedule.

The report findings will be presented to the Board of the RSA, following which the report will be published.

I would like to thank the Deputy for raising her question about my answer of 10 February last. I should clarify that the 7 uncompleted Actions from the Strategy referred to in my response on that occasion are the uncompleted Actions for which my Department has the lead role.

I now understand from the RSA that the total number of uncompleted Actions for all stakeholders is indeed 29, as the Deputy says. I apologise if there was any confusion over this.

Driver Licences

69. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to introduce the necessary legislation to close a loophole discovered in 2013 which allows learner drivers to continually renew their learner permit without ever having to sit a driving test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24802/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): I would not agree that there is a loophole in the current driver licensing legislation. The current legislation allows a learner driver to renew their learner permit for a third time on condition that they can show evidence that they have either sat, or applied to sit, a driving test. An applicant who provides evidence of having sat a driving test will receive a two year permit renewal. An applicant who provides evidence that a driving test has been arranged will receive a one year permit.

A person must be in possession of a valid learner permit in order to sit a test. In cases where a permit expires before a scheduled test could take place, a facility to renew the permit is required. This provision was particularly necessary when waiting times for driving tests were particularly long.

I am aware that there are a number of people driving on our roads on their 4th, 5th, 6th or subsequent learner permit. A learner permit is not a licence, but a permit to allow a person to drive while learning.

In October 2019, the Road Safety Authority sent proposals to my Department in relation to this issue. These proposals were examined and a submission was prepared for Ministerial approval. The measures set out in the submission took account of the shorter wait times for tests and the increased tester resources available at the end of 2019 as the opportune time to tackle the issue. Due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a review of the draft submission is now required. With the current backlog pending due to the halting of driving tests, it is prudent to delay any changes to regulations for long term permit holders in the short term, or until the driving test service is stabilised.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 66.

Driver Licences

71. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 162 of 10 February 2021, if he will provide additional details relating to the grounds on which he plans to provide for the power to revoke a driving licence; if he now plans to include a proposal to include the revocation of learner permits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24804/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The intention is to differentiate between the revoking of a licence and the disqualification of a person from holding a driving licence. A person can be disqualified from holding a licence for a period of time as a result of an offence committed while driving. A licence would be revoked where the eligibility criteria for holding a driving licence is no longer met, such as when the holder of the licence does not have, or no longer has, a right to reside in the State.

Officials in my Department are working with the Attorney General and the Office of Parliamentary Counsel on drafting the necessary changes to primary legislation which I intend to bring forward as committee stage amendments in the Road Traffic Bill. The revocation of a learner permit is also being considered.

Ports Policy

72. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport if it is planned to restore the status of Galway as a national port for the purposes of accessing national and EU funds to develop the port in view of the recommendation by an Bord Pleanála to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to grant imperative reasons of overriding public importance planning permission for the construction by a company (details supplied) of a new port; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24809/21]

73. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport if he plans to nominate Galway port for inclusion by the EU as a Ten-T port; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24810/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 73 together.

In line with National Ports Policy, no exchequer funding is provided to any port company, irrespective of their designation.

The National Ports Policy sets out criteria for the designation of ports as Ports of National Significance (Tier 1 or Tier 2) or Ports of Regional Significance. Galway Harbour Company does not meet the criteria laid out in National Ports Policy to be designated as a Port of National Significance (Tier 1 or 2): Ports of National Significance (Tier 1) are ports that are responsible for 15% to 20% of overall tonnage through Irish ports, and Ports of National Significance (Tier 2) are ports that are responsible for at least 2.5% of overall tonnage through Irish ports. Galway Port's average market share of national total tonnage handled since corporatisation in 1997 averages around 1.5%. Therefore, it is designated as a Port of Regional Significance.

Galway Harbour is also not included in the EU's Trans European Network for Transport (TEN-T) as it does not meet the qualification criteria.

However, in December 2020 officials from my Department and Galway Harbour Company met with officials from the European Commission to explore the potential for the inclusion of Galway Harbour Company on the comprehensive network. The European Commission's position was that whilst a review of the TEN-T Regulation was being conducted, the design and

qualification criteria for inclusion on the TEN-T Comprehensive Network should remain as is with some minor adjustments.

As part of the ongoing review of the TEN-T Regulation, officials from my Department met with the European Commission again in March of this year. At this meeting, it was once more highlighted that the current methodologies being used for inclusion on the comprehensive network do not provide for the potential role that ports such as Galway Harbour can play in contributing to the EU Green Deal.

Outside of these meetings, my Department has engaged with the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions to discuss the possibility of additional criteria being added to the TEN-T Regulation to allow for the inclusion of ports, particularly those in the Atlantic Region, on the Comprehensive TEN-T Network.

It is intended that officials from my Department will have a further meeting with the European Commission on the ongoing review of the TEN-T regulation. At this meeting, the inclusion of Galway Harbour on the TEN-T comprehensive network will again be raised. At that stage, a proposal on the matter will be formally made to the Commission.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 72.

Driver Test

74. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Transport when he plans to open up the centres for theory tests for car driving licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24847/21]

75. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport when the driver theory testing section will open for persons to sit the test given that persons are getting cancellations month after month and being asked to drive from one end of the country to the other to find a vacancy; if he will direct the section that the test be done online to facilitate persons waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24858/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 75 together.

The Driver Theory Test is considered a non-essential service and remains closed for now. The Department understands the frustration at this decision, however, these restrictions imposed by the Government based on the advice of NPHEA and their panel of scientific experts, are in place to minimize the impact of Covid-19 on this country and its people.

Officials both in this Department and in the Road Safety Authority are keeping the public health situation under constant review and are working extremely hard to ensure that Theory Tests can resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

Because the service was closed for long periods of time over the last year, a large backlog of customers has built up. To deal with the backlog, the RSA have plans to increase capacity when it is allowed to re-open. This additional capacity will see the number of tests increase from an average pre Covid19 output of 15,000 tests per month to 50,000 per month. This will help significantly to tackle the backlog.

The RSA is working to deliver an online driver theory test service. A pilot online driver theory test is underway for trucks and buses. This will be extended to car drivers in the com-

ing weeks, initially with 3,200 online tests being conducted per month. Online services will be made more widely available towards the end of 2021.

Regarding driving licences, National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) centres will continue to remain open for essential workers only until 17 May, when they will re-open for all customers. NDLS customers who have a Public Services Card or MyGovID can apply online at ndls.ie.

Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 74.

Córas Iompair Éireann

76. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if assurances will be issued by CIÉ that it will await the outcome of the High Court application from the trustees of the pension scheme before engaging in further discussions on the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24868/21]

83. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the status of his engagements with Córas Iompair Éireann regarding the 1951 pension scheme. [24985/21]

91. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport if he will write to the chairperson of CIÉ seeking assurances that CIÉ will wait on the outcome of the High Court application that elected pension trustees are making before engaging in any more discussions in relation to the 1951 pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25057/21]

92. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport if he will approve changes to the CIÉ regular wages pension scheme that were approved in a ballot of members in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25094/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76, 83, 91 and 92 together.

As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland.

The CIÉ Group has two pension schemes, namely the Regular Wages Scheme (“RWS”) and 1951 superannuation scheme (“1951 Scheme”) and issues in relation to CIÉ pension schemes are primarily a matter for the trustees of the schemes, the CIÉ Group and their employees.

In relation to the RWS, CIÉ has prepared and submitted draft Statutory Instruments (SIs) to give effect to the proposed changes to the scheme, and these drafts are now being considered by my Department. There are several steps involved before an SI can be made, including the statutory consultation process.

Concerning the 1951 scheme, I understand that members were recently balloted and have accepted Labour Court proposals which emerged on 23rd November 2020.

I have therefore referred the Deputies questions to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Covid-19 Pandemic

77. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020

to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24938/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department has incurred the following expenditure matching the description outlined by the Deputy.

Advertising Campaign	Advertising Company	Mediums used	Date	Amount
Covid-19 Passenger Information flyers	Snap Leeson Lane, JKPrint	COVID-19 passenger information flyers at ports and airport	December 2020	€3,265
Total expenditure				€3,265

In addition, my Department is continuing to work as part of a cross Government Communications Group on a range of targeted public information campaigns, including COVID-19. This group, led by the Department of an Taoiseach, is tasked with providing a coordinated and whole of government response to the pandemic and as such, leads on the type of public awareness campaigns mentioned in the Deputy's Question.

Road Safety Authority

78. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport when the RSA stakeholders forum members who have exceeded their tenure will be asked to step down to allow for new members to be elected to the forum. [24974/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): This is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Road Safety Authority

79. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport the required qualifications for driving test staff for each level of driver license testing. [24975/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The standards and qualifications to be met by driver testers are set out in schedule 8 of the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 537 of 2006). The schedule was most recently amended by S.I. No. 489 of 2020. As well as being approved by the Oireachtas and being available in the Oireachtas Library to all members of both Houses, legislation is in the public domain, and may be consulted at www.irishstatutebook.ie.

Road Safety Authority

80. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to renew out of date permits for driving instructors. [24976/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Due to level 5 restrictions and the need to adhere to Government public health protocols, it has not been possible in recent months for the Road Safety Authority to carry out all of the check tests that are legally required to renew driver instructor licences in a timely manner.

In response to these delays and in anticipation of the resumption of Initial Basic Training

(IBT) and the partial resumption of Essential Driver Training (EDT) on the 10th of May, my Department has now moved to extend these licences. Under regulations signed into law last week, any driver instructor licence issued between the 1st of September 2018 and the 3rd of January 2021 will now be valid for 3 years rather than 2. The expiry date of these licences will thus be an additional 1 year from the date originally specified on the licence.

I understand that the Road Safety Authority has contacted Approved Driving Instructors across the country to inform them of this extension.

Road Safety Authority

81. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to follow-up on the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport and Communications Networks recommendation to open regular communication and consultation between the RSA and the union representatives for approved driving instructors. [24977/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): As this is a matter for the Road Safety Authority I have forwarded the Deputy's query to the Authority for direct response. I would ask that she contact my offices if no reply is received within ten working days.

Road Safety Authority

82. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport when the 40 newly-recruited driving testers will be fully trained and qualified to commence driving licence testing; the level of training being given; the body providing the training; and the qualifications of the personnel that are carrying out this training for the new staff. [24978/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): Under the Road Safety Authority Act and as provided by the Oireachtas, the driver testing service, is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

The information requested is held by the Authority and this question is being referred to it for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 76.

Driver Test

84. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport if a person (details supplied) will be prioritised for an appointment for a driver theory test to allow them entry to a college placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24986/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): Under the Road Safety Authority Act and as provided by the Oireachtas, the driver testing service, including the theory test, is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority.

Individual cases are a matter for the Authority and the question in relation to this case is being referred to it for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has

not been received within ten days.

Driver Test

85. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport when it is planned to resume driver theory tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25014/21]

87. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport if it is planned to extend the pilot scheme driver theory test remotely to include category B vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25016/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 87 together.

The Driver Theory Test is considered a non-essential service and remains closed for now. The Department understands the frustration at this decision, however, these restrictions imposed by the Government based on the advice of NPHEA and their panel of scientific experts, are in place to minimize the impact of Covid-19 on this country and its people.

Officials both in this Department and in the Road Safety Authority are keeping the public health situation under constant review and are working extremely hard to ensure that Theory Tests can resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

Because the service was closed for long periods of time over the last year, a large backlog of customers has built up. To deal with the backlog, the RSA have plans to increase capacity when it is allowed to re-open. This additional capacity will see the number of tests increase from an average pre Covid19 output of 15,000 tests per month to 50,000 per month. This will help significantly to tackle the backlog.

The RSA is working to deliver an online driver theory test service. A pilot online driver theory test is underway for trucks and buses. This will be extended to car drivers, initially with 3,200 online tests being conducted per month. Online services will be made more widely available towards the end of 2021.

Driver Test

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport if a driver theory test will be expedited for a person (details supplied) on the resumption of theory testing for work purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25015/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Under the Road Safety Act and as provided by the Oireachtas, the driver testing service, including the theory test, is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

Individual cases are a matter for the Authority and the question in relation to this case is being referred to the RSA for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 85.

Public Transport

88. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport the estimated cost of the additional investment needed to provide greater capacity across all modes to meet expected increase in demand if free public transport was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25023/21]

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 the statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services and also has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of public transport services contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable. The funding of those services comprises both the fares paid by passengers and the subvention payments from the Exchequer. The main purpose of the subvention payment is to meet the gap between income from fares and the cost of operating services.

The provision of public transport services is heavily dependent on passenger fare revenue as it normally contributes about 65% of the operational cost. The remaining 35% of cost is covered by the PSO grant and the Department of Social Protection grant under the Free Travel Scheme. In Budget 2020, and prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, over €300 million was provided for PSO and Local Link services. Due to the impact of Covid-19, which resulted in the collapse of fare revenue on public transport, a further €370 million (in addition to the c. €300m already provided) was allocated to enable the continued operation of public transport services in 2020. My primary focus is to ensure that public transport services continue to operate during this pandemic, and I secured almost €659m for PSO services in 2021, of which €30m is to support the licensed bus sector.

Any assessment of a proposed change to public transport fare structures would be a matter for the NTA to consider in the first instance. 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.

Public Transport

89. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to introduce an integrated ticketing system across the public transport network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25024/21]

90. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport the amount spent in each of the years 2015 to 2020 on improving the ticketing systems across the public transport network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25025/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 90 together.

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 integrated ticketing.

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

12 May 2021

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 89.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 76.

Question No. 92 answered with Question No. 76.

Defence Forces

93. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Transport his response to the Defence Forces proposal that the Air Corps takes over some maritime search-and-rescue operations including the implications for the current service provider; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25141/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The current service provider, CHC Ireland (CHCI), is engaged in a 10-year contract with my Department, which commenced in 2012. The contract has already been extended for 1 year and may be extended for a further 2 years. No tender has issued for a successor to this contract but a procurement process has commenced.

In light of recent media commentary on this process, the Department issued a lengthy update to all interested parties to provide, inter alia, clarity to potential bidders on the process. This update, along with all other pertinent information is available on our SAR Webpage.

As set out in that update, the Secretary General of Department of Defence requested the Secretary General of the Department of Transport to explore the option of the Air Corps providing some element of the IRCG's aviation service as part of the business case in November 2020.

On foot of this request, an Air Corps submission was received by my Department last March which is being reviewed as part of the preparation of a detailed business case on the entire IRCG aviation service. This is part of a deliberative process which will lead to a Government decision in due course and on which it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

Public Transport

94. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 40 and 41 of 6 May 2021, if the 100x is also facing cancellation by Bus Éireann; his plans to cover the towns and areas mentioned in the original Parliamentary Question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25145/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The position remains as outlined in my response to PQ Nos. 40 and 41 of 6th May 2021. I am not aware of any plans by Bus Éireann to withdraw the 100X Dundalk to Dublin Expressway service.

The Deputy's previous questions (PQ Nos. 40 and 41 of 6th May 2021) have been forwarded to the NTA for direct response.

Housing Schemes

95. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Finance the provisions in place for persons that have lost their home to repossession or recession to purchase a home now in cases in which they cannot save the 20% deposit needed as non-first time buyers. [24820/21]

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 the Central Bank's mandate, the Central Bank introduced macroprudential measures for residential mortgage lending by such institutions in February 2015. The objective of the 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 macroprudential measures apply loan-to-value (LTV) and loan-to-income (LTI) restrictions to residential mortgage lending by financial institutions regulated by the Central Bank. The LTI limit is 3.5 times the borrower's income. For second and subsequent buyers, the LTV limit is 80% of the value of the residential property (i.e. a deposit of 20% is required from the house purchaser). A mortgage deposit can help households to absorb a certain reduction of house prices before the borrower falls into negative equity.

Allowances to exceed the LTI limit and LTV limit have been central to the framework of the mortgage measures since their introduction. The allowances acknowledge that higher LTI and LTV mortgages can be appropriate in certain circumstances. Mortgage lenders are allowed to issue up to 20 per cent of the value of new mortgage lending to second and subsequent buyers at LTVs above 80 per cent. This could include borrowers in the specific circumstance referenced by the Deputy.

The allocation of allowances is a matter for individual lenders, based on an evaluation of each specific borrower and the lender's own credit policies. The mortgage measure limits are in addition to individual banks' credit policies and are not a substitute for lenders' responsibilities to assess affordability and lend prudently.

Ultimately, however, subject to the requirement to comply with the provisions of the macro-prudential mortgage lending rules, the Central Bank Consumer Protection Code and other regulatory requirements, it remains the responsibility of an individual lender to assess the credit worthiness of an individual and to decide whether or not to provide a loan in any particular case, or how much credit to provide in any particular case.

Departmental Schemes

96. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance if a help-to-buy scheme application by a person (details supplied) is being examined; the projected timeframe for the processing of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24758/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Help to Buy (HTB) incentive is a scheme to assist first-time purchasers with the deposit they need to buy or build a new house or apartment as their home. The incentive provides a refund of Income Tax and Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) paid in Ireland over the previous four years, subject to limits outlined in the legislation.

As part of the Government's July 2020 Jobs Stimulus Package the relief available to first-time buyers was temporarily increased (to end 2020) to a maximum of €30,000 where certain conditions were met by the applicants. This temporary increase was further extended to 31 December 2021 in the 2020 Finance Act.

I am advised by Revenue that the HTB application submitted by the persons in question has already been approved under 'stage 1' of the process. Revenue has also confirmed that it has

made direct contact with the persons to advise them on the requirements that must be completed to progress their claim under ‘stage 2’ of the process. Revenue also provided them with contact details should they encounter any further difficulties.

Departmental Schemes

97. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if restaurant and bar owners providing outdoor dining services will be able to continue to avail of the employment wage subsidy scheme when they are permitted to reopen from 7 June (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24761/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) is an economy-wide scheme that is open to all sectors. It focuses primarily on business eligibility, delivering a per-head subsidy on a flat rate basis to the employer. The objective of the EWSS is to support businesses, encourage employment and help to maintain the link between employers and employees. The EWSS has been a key component of the Government’s response to the continued Covid-19 crisis to support viable firms and encourage employment in the midst of these very challenging times. To date, payments of over €3 billion and PRSI credit of over €500 million have been granted to 48,900 employers in respect of 558,000 workers.

The EWSS “turnover test” has been specifically designed so as to target the subsidy at otherwise viable employers whose businesses continue to be adversely impacted by Covid-19 by requiring a comparison of the firm’s pre-pandemic operations with their current operations. The primary employer qualification for the EWSS is based on the employer’s turnover in the current six-month period being less, compared with the same pre-pandemic position period in 2019. The legislation provides that the employer must be able to demonstrate that it is operating at no more than 70% in either the turnover of business or the customer orders received by the employer by reference to the period from 1 January to 30 June 2021 compared with the equivalent period in 2019.

To answer the specific point raised in the Deputy’s question, the turnover qualification requirement for EWSS applies regardless of whether the business is required to close fully or partially due to public health restrictions, or indeed if the business could remain open throughout the pandemic. The “turnover test” is the determining factor as regards eligibility for the EWSS and accordingly, the business must have suffered at least a 30% decrease in its turnover and this disruption is due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The EWSS is designed to be flexible for the employer and take account of potentially sudden changes in turnover so if there is a reduction in turnover in the future because of a change in circumstance the employer may be entitled to make a claim for that later period.

With the agreement by Government on the revised plan, COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021: The Path Ahead, a cautious and measured approach will be taken as we lay the foundations for the full recovery of social life, public services and the economy. It is therefore appropriate that key business supports should remain in place until the end of June 2021.

As the revised plan is implemented, the EWSS will play an important role in getting people back to work as public health restrictions are eased, thereby reducing the numbers dependent on social welfare payments over time, including the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP).

The Government’s position remains that there will be no cliff-edge to the EWSS. 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.

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.

Departmental Schemes

98. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a payment system (details supplied) being proposed by Ireland’s main financial institutions; his views on whether it may affect competition within the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24821/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly, it should be noted that this proposed joint venture is subject to approval by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) and as such it is not appropriate for me to comment on this proposed joint venture in more detail. I understand the CCPC will complete a detailed and robust examination and subsequently either approve, approve subject to commitments or block the proposed transaction.

I am informed by officials in the Central Bank of Ireland that any new arrangement must obtain the required regulatory approval and/or be held to the relevant oversight standards by the competent authority, if applicable. With regard to latter, the Eurosystem recently published information on a proposed harmonised oversight framework to meet the challenges posed by the evolving nature of the retail payment system. The proposed oversight framework for electronic payment instruments, schemes and arrangements (PISA) is based on the Principles for Financial Market Infrastructures (PFMIs). Under the PFMIs a payment arrangement should have objective, risk-based and publicly disclosed criteria for participation, which permit fair and open access.

Departmental Expenditure

99. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24928/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that the Department of Finance has no record of any spend on advertising in relation to Covid-19 awareness raising initiatives from 1st March 2020 to date.

Departmental Schemes

100. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to fulfil the programme for Government commitment to prioritise green finance strategic actions that are developed in line with climate justice targets and sustainable development goals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25167/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland has traditionally been a strong supporter of sustainable finance initiatives, and the Irish Government has long recognised the need for action on these initiatives both to take advantage of the associated opportunities and to address the need for transition from unsustainable practices. Reflecting this, sustainable finance is a specific horizontal priority within the Government’s current strategy for the further development of the international financial services sector, ‘*Ireland for Finance*’.

The Strategy aims to make Ireland a leader in the field, in particular through further enhancing and deepening the base of expertise and activity in sustainable finance that we already have here.

To this end, the *Ireland for Finance* Action Plan 2021 has 10 (from the 46 overall) action measures which will progress the sustainable finance agenda. These include the development and delivery of training and education programmes to build capacity and expertise in the industry in Ireland, as well as a ‘deep dive’ into Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) data needs to measure progress and identify barriers in advancing this agenda. Additionally, an assessment of outstanding issues with identifying and managing biodiversity impacts, dependencies and associated financial sector risks is being undertaken.

More broadly Ireland has been active with an increasingly important role in international efforts to accelerate the sustainable finance agenda, including through our role in the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action, and the Central Bank’s involvement with the international Network for Greening the Financial System.

This is in addition to my Department’s input and work across International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and World Bank where sustainable finance and climate action are central areas of interest especially in the development of post-Covid recovery measures. Other IFIs such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), where Ireland is an active member, are implementing strategies for the coming decades to ensure that at least 40% of their funding for new projects will be climate-related as part of an overall objective of transitioning to green low carbon economies by 2030 and net zero by 2050.

At EU level, I welcome the work being undertaken by the EU Commission in developing a renewed strategy for sustainable finance, in particular by progressing the transition by boosting sustainable investments and by moving sustainable finance beyond climate objectives.

Similarly, the EU’s Green Taxonomy regulation, and the disclosures directive, which will form the cornerstone of the new regulatory regime, are major steps forward. Their implementation will be instrumental in identifying, measuring and helping remove barriers to the advancement of our common sustainable goals in the years ahead.

Departmental Expenditure

101. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24933/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has had no expenditure of this nature.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

102. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works has advanced proposals to install CCTV cameras at Clare Abbey, County Clare to curb ongoing vandalism and destruction of the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24970/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Commissioners of Public Works have advised that there are a number of issues at Clare Abbey which renders the installation of a full CCTV system at the site impractical ; these include a lack of land ownership at the site, the lack of a power supply and possible threat to archaeology if cabling were to be installed.

While wires-free options are available, there are a number of logistical issues associated with them, not least, compliance with GDPR legislation, which need to be overcome and these are actively under review at present.

Tax Code

103. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he is taking to fulfil the programme for Government commitment to direct a proportion of the proceeds of the carbon tax towards climate-focused measures in the agri-food sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25140/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The Programme for Government recognises the special economic and social role that agriculture plays in Ireland, but also commits to the creation of schemes that will encourage and incentivise farmers to farm in a greener and more sustainable way. This is with the aim of developing a sustainable Irish agricultural sector that protects the environment and aligns with emerging consumer sentiment, while benefiting farmers and rural communities

The Programme for Government commits to the allocation of €1.5bn in projected carbon tax receipts over the next ten years for this purpose. The first step in meeting this commitment was in Budget 2021 through the allocation of €20m in anticipated additional carbon tax receipts for the creation of pilot environmental programmes. This was supplemented with the continuation of the €3m in funding that was provided for agricultural programmes from carbon tax receipts in 2020, bringing the total funding for carbon tax supported measures in the agricultural sector to €23m in 2021.

These funds will be used to create an innovative, results-based pilot scheme for farmers who improve the bio-diversity and carbon management of their land, by undertaking specific actions which they report directly based on the results generated from their actions.

The use of carbon funds in 2021 was detailed in the Budget Day publication “The Use of Carbon Tax Funds 2021” which continues to be available on the budget.gov.ie website. Carbon tax funding in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine is allocated to a specific sub-head, B.13, against which progress on spending the allocated funds can be tracked.

Questions regarding the operational details of the pilot programmes should be directed to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine.

Grant Payments

12 May 2021

104. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if grants are available for the upgrading of tourist boats (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24763/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to them for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

National Monuments

105. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if there are supports available for local groups to erect monuments as part of the Decade of Centenaries programme. [24782/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): My role as Minister with responsibility for leading the coordination of the Decade of Centenaries 2012-2023 Programme is to help ensure that the challenging events of this important and formative period in our history and related themes, are meaningfully, proportionately and sensitively remembered.

On 16 December 2020, I announced funding of €1.75 million for local authorities in 2021, to support their leading role in developing community-led commemorative activities, for the final phase of the Decade of Centenaries Programme.

The provision or maintenance of memorials, erection of monuments, plaques, busts or statues and the production of commemorative medals or pins are not currently supported under my Department's funding allocation.

The guidance of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on Centenary Commemorations advises that local commemorative endeavours could helpfully focus on acknowledging the significance of the event or action, rather than on the individual personalities involved, which would be a matter for personal commemoration and personal remembrance. The Group advocates that the emphasis must always be on remembrance and commemoration of locally significant historical events and the avoidance of any sense of celebration. My Department has developed comprehensive guidance for the allocation of funding to assist local authorities. However, it is, of course, within the discretion of individual local authorities to provide support from within their own resources to local communities who wish to erect and maintain monuments, where this is deemed the appropriate approach.

It is anticipated that local authorities will receive a number of requests from commemorative committees and community groups seeking support for the erection of monuments and other memorials as we navigate through the sensitive forthcoming period of commemorations. While we recognise that these incidents and actions are undoubtedly of great local significance in the narrative of the part played by individual counties during the Struggle for Independence and Civil War, this is just one element within the Community Strand of the overall Decade of Centenaries Programme.

There is scope for a rich diversity of interesting and engaging commemorative initiatives to be curated from within the annual funding allocation from my Department to each of the local authorities. The provision or maintenance of monuments, memorials, plaques, busts, or statues, is not, however, eligible for funding under the Community Strand of the Decade of Centenaries Programme from my Department's funding.

Departmental Schemes

106. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will consider developing and promoting Ireland as the new and automatic events hub for the European tour events crewing industry (details supplied) given that the UK is outside of the EU post Brexit, and in view of Ireland's international reputation in arts and culture; if a fund will be made available to that end; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24853/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): In 2021, in order to support and develop the arts, culture, audio-visual and live entertainment sectors in Ireland Government has committed additional resources of €135m representing a 74% increase on the allocation at the outset of 2020. These funds support artists, arts organisations and production companies to sustain through this crisis period and make a vital contribution to the recovery of our society.

This additional funding includes a €25 million allocation for the Live Performance Support Scheme, part of a €50m suite of measures to support the live entertainment sector and provide vital support and opportunities for continued activity in the sector. The measures are aimed at providing significant job contracts for all workers in the live entertainment sector, including musicians, actors, crew and technicians. The supports in place also ensure that artists and arts workers will be well placed to avail of international opportunities once it is safe to do so thereby reaffirming Ireland's global cultural reputation.

The Government encourages the development of sustainable, high skilled sectors that add productive value through domestic and international activity. Ireland is constantly developing our European relations for the benefit of artists and professionals. In relation to European touring by artists and professionals, Ireland is currently represented through Music From Ireland's Vice Chairmanship of the European Music Exporters Exchange. They have delivered a comprehensive report to the European Commission which aims to generate new knowledge and approaches to European music export through research and innovative pilot actions and are currently working on the delivery of an Export Toolbox for European artists and professionals. Details are available on the following link: <https://www.europeanmusic.eu/2020/12/implementing-steps-to-develop-and-promote-european-music-export/>.

Departmental Schemes

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the progress to date in determining eligibility for the live performance support scheme in the case of a company (details supplied); when a decision is likely to issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24859/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Live Performance Support Scheme 2021 (LPSS 2021) was launched to assist in the employment of artists, performers, technicians, support staff and musicians of all genres in the commercial live performance sector by promoters, producers and venues. By the closing date of 14 April 2021, 400 applications were received seeking grants of €80 million. Given the available funding of €25 million, it will not be possible to award grants to everyone who applied. As a result, the LPSS 2021 is a competitive scheme.

I recognise the enormous work and effort that went into all applications by the hundreds of producers, promoters and venues that have applied and my Department will ensure that all

proposals received from all applicants, including the company referred to by the Deputy, will be examined and assessed with due care and consideration and .

It is Departmental policy to ensure that every application is treated fairly and impartially and is given an equal chance of success. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application at the same time.

Departmental Schemes

108. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the status of a proposal for a three-year pilot scheme of a universal basic income for artists, writers and musicians proposed by the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24864/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce report titled Life Worth Living, was published in November 2020 and made ten recommendations for the sector. The recommendations included a proposal to pilot a basic income scheme for a three-year period in the arts, culture, audiovisual and live performance and events sectors. The Taskforce was of the view that a pilot basic income would keep the sector intact, minimising the loss of skills and contributing to its gradual regrowth, with ongoing benefits: social and economic, local and national.

I believe the arts sector represents an appropriate area for a pilot basic income scheme for many reasons. It is characterised by low, precarious and often seasonal income. Artistic and creative work is intrinsically valuable to society; it includes a broad mix of employment types. This is an exciting proposal and has been the subject of positive commentary both nationally and internationally. We can now work to see how it can be enhanced.

I have established an Oversight Group with the remit of addressing the outstanding recommendations of Life Worth Living. The membership of the Group is drawn from departments and agencies which have the ability and wherewithal to make appropriate progress on the outstanding recommendations, and to whom recommendations of the Taskforce are addressed.

The Oversight Group is being chaired by my Department joined by representatives of the Departments of Finance, Social Protection, Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Public Expenditure and Reform as well as Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Directors of the Arts Council and Screen Ireland are also members and they will be joined by a representative of the County and City Managers Association.

I have asked the Oversight Group to prioritise the examination of Recommendation 1, a basic income for artists. I have engaged with relevant Ministerial colleagues on this matter and they have indicated their support for developing proposals. This would be independent of the work of the Low Pay Commission which has been tasked by my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, to examine the Programme for Government commitment to pilot a Universal Basic Income within the lifetime of this Government commitment. I intend therefore to proceed with the development of proposals for a basic income for artists as a matter of priority.

Separately, the Programme for Government contained a commitment to request the Low Pay Commission to examine Universal Basic Income, informed by a review of previous international pilots, and resulting in a universal basic income pilot in the lifetime of the Government.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment has requested the Low

Pay Commission to examine the commitment in the Programme for Government and the Commission has agreed that this request will form part of its workplan for 2021. The terms of reference for the study on Universal Basic Income are currently being finalised by the Commission and research is due to begin shortly.

Covid-19 Pandemic

109. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the amount expended by her Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24937/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): I have been informed by officials in my Department that no funding has been allocated to, or contracts entered into for awareness raising campaigns or advertising relating to COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic.

My Department is actively engaged in delivering COVID-19 communications with the public and with stakeholders through various channels. This work is carried out in-house by the communications team and other teams within the Department. Communications activities are very important at this time and cost effectiveness is always a factor in my Department's plans.

As part of its policy response to the crisis, my Department has supported a range of measures to provide for content which would normally be presented to live audiences, to be made available online.

Ministerial Communications

110. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when a file (details supplied) that requires Ministerial consent will be signed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25031/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): My Department has been engaging with Wexford County Council with a view to ensuring that the leisure centre referred to by the Deputy remains in sporting use and it is hoped that all matters will be finalised shortly. The Deputy should note that I, nor my Department, have any role regarding operator contracts for leisure centres.

Departmental Schemes

111. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if water activities such as boat trips are included in the outdoor activity fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25123/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the second platform under Fáilte Ireland's *Platforms for Growth* capital investment programme. Through the grants scheme for this platform, Fáilte Ireland will provide €19m in funding to Local Authorities for the specific purpose of developing activity facilities centres in 22 selected waterside locations around the country,

where water-based activities are a key visitor attraction. As the administration of the relevant programme is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland I have asked them to provide further information to the Deputy. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Departmental Funding

112. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if applications for the large-scale sport infrastructure fund 2018 to 2028 are closed; if Dublin City Council can make a late application under stream 2 before 2025 or 2028; and her plans to introduce a new large-scale sport infrastructure fund after 2028. [25169/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): The Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) was launched in 2018 to provide Exchequer support for larger sports facility projects, including swimming pools, with at least €100m being made available over the period to 2027. The first call for proposals opened for applications on 19th November 2018 and closed on 17th April 2019. Following a detailed assessment process, approximately €86.4m has been awarded to date to 33 different projects.

While it is not proposed to open the LSSIF for new applications at present, my Department is undertaking a review of the fund which is expected to be complete in the coming months. This review will consider, inter alia, progress on all existing grants and whether any additional grants should be awarded. The timing of any new call for proposals will also be considered. Any new allocations or a new call for proposals, whether Stream 1 or 2 in, will be dependent on receiving additional funding for the LSSIF following the completion of the review of the National Development Plan.

Covid-19 Pandemic

113. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will provide updated guidelines for private music and drama teachers in anticipation of reopening; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25170/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Arts Council has worked with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to develop guidance for children and young people's arts and cultural activities. The guidance was recently published on the Arts Council's website

This guidance will continue to be updated in line with any relevant changes to public health measures in the coming months. This guidance was reviewed by the Department's external Health and Safety advisors to ensure compliance with:

- The Government's *Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021 – The Path Ahead* ;
- The Government's Stay Safe Guidelines; and
- The Government's Work Safely Protocols.

The guidelines will assist those engaging in arts and cultural activities with children to provide a safe and controlled environment which will mitigate against the risk of spreading COVID-19. This guidance is a living document, which means that as government restrictions

and public-health guidelines evolve, this document will also evolve to reflect new government advice and changes to protocols as they emerge. *The Arts Council's Young People, Children and Education* guidance may be used for organised cultural activities for children and young people, including early-childhood arts activities and arts training and education services that are delivered outside of early learning-and-care, formal education and youth-work contexts.

The Guidance is available the following link ;

http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Contact_us/COVID-19/YPCE%20C-19%20Reopening%20Guidelines_April%202021.doc.pdf.

Music and drama classes are included with organised indoor and outdoor events. *The Path Ahead* Framework sets out when it is considered that organised indoor or outdoor events can take place. From 10 May 2021 organised outdoor gatherings with a maximum attendance of 15 people can take place. In all these cases robust protocols and protective measures, including appropriate supervision and capacity limits, should be in place.

The Government's *COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 - The Path Ahead* plan sets out the Government's objectives for the full recovery of social life, public services and the economy. The government has decided to move ahead with this *The Path Ahead* plan. We are now in the early stages of the Recovery phase of the pandemic. The decision is based on advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), that a cautious and gradual phased reopening over May and June, with an emphasis on outdoor activity and a moderate increase in social contact, can be considered low to medium risk. NPHE has advised that there is scope to ease a range of public health measures in this manner with sufficient time between any easing of measures to assess the impact. This allows us to continue through the Recovery phase, focusing on what is safest and generates the most benefit and with a focus on outdoors activities – both social and economic.

Departmental Reviews

114. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if information will be provided on his Department's review of siting and size conditions for rooftop solar panels on homes and review of exemptions for educational and community buildings as part of the current development of interim planning regulations; if further information will be provided on the stated need to consider environmental assessment reporting before finalisation; when the interim planning regulations will be submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25271/21]

123. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide information on his Department's review of siting and size conditions for rooftop solar panels on homes and review of exemptions for educational and community buildings as part of the current development of interim planning regulations; if he will provide further information on the stated need to consider environmental assessment reporting before finalisation; when the interim planning regulations will be submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24987/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 123 together.

Under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended (the Act), all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires planning permission. Section 4 of the Act and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001,

as amended (the Regulations), set out various exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission. Any such exemptions are subject to compliance with any general restrictions on exemptions set out in the Act or the Regulations and to the specific conditions set out in each class of exempted development in Schedule 2 of the Regulations. Included in the planning exemptions set out in the Regulations are those applying to the installation of solar infrastructure on a variety of building types, including houses, businesses, industrial and agricultural to which specific conditions are attached.

As part of the Climate Action Plan 2019, my Department is currently undertaking a review of the solar panel exemptions, and is actively engaging with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications as well as other key stakeholders, with a view to finalising a proposal for draft amending Regulations to reflect, inter alia, technical developments in the sector. One of the key considerations of the review is to ensure that solar panels can be erected - subject to certain siting and size conditions - without the need to obtain planning permission, thereby facilitating more widespread generation of renewable energy for self-consumption. Also included in this review are solar panel exemptions for educational and community buildings.

The main outstanding issue that remains to be addressed in the current review is the potential for “glint and glare” impacts for aircraft and the need to ensure that they do not result in any real or potential threat to aviation safety. Accordingly, my Department has been engaging with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications as well as the Irish Aviation Authority, in order to find a safe and workable solution in relation to this particular aspect of the review. The Department has begun the tendering process for this project, which will involve the development of aviation safeguarding maps for each airport/aerodrome in the country, and has received feedback from potential tenderers estimating a timeline of up to 9 months for its completion.

In recognition of the length of time that it is expected to take to complete the aviation safeguarding maps, my Department has decided to adopt an interim measure which would allow revised regulations to be introduced prior to the completion of these maps, but with defined exclusion zones around airports and aerodromes for solar installations. My Department has consulted with the Irish Aviation Authority on this matter, and has developed draft interim regulations in this regard.

These draft regulations have now been reviewed under the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC, and it has been determined that they are likely to have significant effects on the environment, necessitating the undertaking of a full SEA on the draft proposals, which will include public consultation as part of the process. This process is expected to take between four and five months to complete.

Following the public consultation and consideration of any submissions received, and as required under planning legislation, the proposed exempted development regulations must be laid in draft form before the Houses of the Oireachtas and receive a positive resolution from both Houses before they can be made and the SEA process concluded.

The process for finalising the interim solar panel planning exemptions as referred to above, with exclusion zones around airports and aerodromes, is now expected to be completed in Q4 2021. These interim regulations will allow for the vast majority of the country to be covered by the solar panel exemptions apart from those areas in close proximity to airports and aerodromes.

Work on the development of the aviation safeguarding maps for airports and aerodromes is expected to be completed by Q4 2021. The final supplementary set of regulations will be prepared thereafter and, subject to environmental reporting considerations, will subsequently be laid in draft form before the Houses of the Oireachtas for approval in a timely manner.

Departmental Schemes

115. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if a guarantee from a company (details supplied) will suffice in lieu of a HB47 homebond or premier guarantee under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24736/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme (RIHL) is designed to enable credit worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties or self-builds.

In relation to self-builds, the RIHL requires that construction is covered by latent defect insurance policies and is underwritten by Insurance Companies. Builders', manufacturers' or engineers' certification are not equivalent to latent defect insurance and therefore cannot be used as a substitute.

Departmental Data

116. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of housing developments across the country in which foreign investment funds have purchased units by county in tabular form. [24780/21]

117. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the measures his Department has taken to gather information on the number of new build and existing housing that has been bought by foreign investment funds in County Tipperary (details supplied). [24781/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 117 together.

My Department does not collect data in relation to the ownership of individual housing units purchased and sold in the housing market.

I understand that data published by market commentators indicates that approximately 15,500 units were owned by investment trusts at the end of 2020.

The Property Registration Authority (PRA), which was established as an independent statutory body under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, records property transactions and ownership in Ireland. The PRA has advised my Department that it does not hold details of the type requested.

Departmental Schemes

118. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the spend on the cessation of the turf-cutting compensation scheme in each year since its establishment; the number of persons who availed of this scheme in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24835/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

(Deputy Malcolm Noonan): Ireland, like all EU Member States, Ireland is bound by the requirements of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive. These Directives aim to ensure the protection of habitats and species which have been selected for conservation within special areas of conservation and special protection areas.

Significant efforts have been made by the State to resolve the issue of the protection of Ireland's raised bog special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas within the framework of the Habitats Directive. This has included the establishment of the Peatlands Council, intensive and on-going engagement with turf cutting interests, the farming community, non-governmental organisations and with the European Commission, as well as the establishment of a long-term compensation scheme for affected turf cutters.

The Cessation of Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme (CTCCS) was established in 2011 for domestic turf cutters arising from the cessation of turf cutting on raised bog special areas of conservation and was extended in 2014 to include raised bog natural heritage areas. This scheme is applicable to turf cutters who have been affected by the designation of raised bogs as special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas encompassed by the scheme and who fulfil the qualifying criteria of the scheme. It is comprised of a payment of €1,500 per annum, index-linked, for 15 years, or relocation, where feasible, to a non-designated bog, together with payment of €500 on the signing of a legal agreement under the scheme.

2590 applicants are regularly receiving compensation under the scheme. There are other affected turf cutters, who may qualify under the scheme, who have not yet applied. I would encourage them to do so.

While applicants are waiting for relocation sites to be investigated, prepared and developed, they may, on an interim basis, opt for the annual payment of €1,500 (index-linked) or opt to receive an annual supply of up to 15 tonnes of cut turf delivered to their homes. To date, 1,215 deliveries of turf have been made to applicants.

Of the 2,590 applicants regularly receiving compensation under the scheme, 185 have applied for relocation to a non-designated bog.

The total spend to the end of 2020 on payments, turf deliveries and relocation under the CTCCS was €46.9 million, the breakdown of this expenditure per year is as follows:

Year	Expenditure under the CTCCS	Applicants Availing of the CTCCS
2011	€45,000	30
2012	€3,919,459	1772
2013	€4,871,983	1880
2014	€4,931,018	1972
2015	€4,615,579	1982
2016	€5,211,280	2197
2017	€5,695,973	2346
2018	€6,202,841	2475
2019	€6,432,279	2546
2020	€5,031,520	2461
Totals	€46,889,952	N/A

The expenditure to date in 2021 is in the region of €1.5 million, with 732 applicants having already received a compensation payment for 2021. 14 applicants have been relocated to non-designated bogs in 2021 to date.

Departmental Advertising

119. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24931/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department has not incurred any expenditure on advertising in relation to COVID-19 related matters.

In 2020, my Department spent €192,907 on awareness-raising public information material as part of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This expenditure related to the design and translation of the Community Call national leaflet into a number of languages and also included the production of Braille and Irish Sign Language versions of this leaflet.

This expenditure also included procurement of the graphic design of the COVID-19 Guide for the Bereaved (available on gov.ie).

Departmental Data

120. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of new social homes delivered via build programmes in County Mayo each year since 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24939/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department provides funding to all local authorities, including Mayo County Council, to support the delivery of new social homes via a range of programmes, including through build, acquisition and leasing. Statistics on all social housing delivery activity including via build programmes, is publicly available on my Department's website, at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

In addition to the statistics on delivery over the years by each local authority, a detailed Social Housing Construction Status Report is published quarterly and provides scheme level detail on new build social housing activity for the local authorities, including projects that are on site, in planning or design and completed projects. The most recent publication covers the period up to the end of Q4 2020 and is available at the following link: <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-obrien-publishes-2020-social-housing-statistics/>.

Departmental Data

121. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of properties to date in rent pressure zones per local authority in respect of quarter 1 2021 data that have been identified as potentially in breach of short-term lettings regulations; the number of site inspections that have taken place; the number of change of use planning applications received; the number of warning letters issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24942/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

12 May 2021

(Deputy Peter Burke): My Department requests information from local authorities on the implementation and enforcement of the Short-term Letting Regulations on a quarterly basis. The Q1 2021 data has been requested and returns are due back by Friday 14 May.

Wastewater Treatment

122. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he plans to provide Ministerial consent for the Arklow Wastewater Plant to proceed; the process and a timeframe for the delivery of the plant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24954/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I refer to the reply to Question No. 785 of 21 April 2021 which sets out the position in this matter.

Question No. 123 answered with Question No. 114.

Housing Policy

124. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he is considering increasing funding to local authorities to aid housing adaptation grants for older persons and persons with a disability applicants to meet the extra costs in circumstances in which the maximum grant available for available falls considerably short of rising construction costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24990/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Funding of €75 million is available nationally in 2021 for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability Scheme. This funding has increased year on year since 2014. As part of the annual budgetary process, consideration will be given to this funding in future years in line with the Programme for Government commitments and the Policy Statement on Housing Options for Our Ageing Population, which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ea33c1-housing-options-for-our-ageing-population-policy-statement/>

Officials from my Department will begin a review of the existing grant limits and income thresholds applicable to the grants this year.

Housing Policy

125. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the details of his engagements with members and plans for houses with an association (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that loans on these properties will mature in five years; and if a handover or option to purchase will be considered by him. [24991/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The approved housing body referred to delivered new build social homes through the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme. This funding model involves local authorities accessing loan finance from the Housing Finance Agency to support approved housing bodies to deliver homes

for social use. The funding arrangement is secured by way of a mortgage agreement between the relevant local authority and the approved housing body. My Department supports the local authorities in the repayment of the loan finance to the Housing Finance Agency.

Part 3 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, allows local authorities to sell local authority owned dwellings to existing social housing tenants. The Scheme only provides for the purchase of houses owned by the relevant local authorities and does not extend to houses owned by approved housing bodies as the ownership of these properties remains with them.

If a property is owned outright by an approved housing body and it is not subject to public funding, the approved housing body may choose to sell that property, once this is allowed for in their constitution. It should be noted that approved housing body must have, as their primary objectives, the relief of housing needs, and the provision and management of housing included within their memorandum of association or registered rules, as the case may be.

Irish Water

126. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he is taking in response to concerns from local authority staff who wish to remain in the employment of the relevant local authority rather than being transferred to Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25137/21]

127. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, standalone, regulated utility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25138/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 127 together.

The Programme for Government provides that the Government will retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, standalone, regulated utility.

The realisation of this commitment will complete the broad policy and legislative reforms which have seen the public water system embark on a journey of transformation, from a structure based on locally-organised water services authorities, towards a single, national, water utility. This has been a complex and challenging process for key stakeholders, notably the workers, who include approximately 3,200 local authority water services staff who are subject to service level agreement arrangements with Irish Water as well as a smaller number of staff employed directly by Irish Water and Ervia, together with their trade union representatives, the local government sector, and Ervia/Irish Water.

In keeping with the Programme for Government commitment, the Government recently approved a Policy Paper entitled Irish Water - Towards a national, publicly-owned, regulated water services utility which is now available on my Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/06326-water-sector-transformation-policy-paper/>. The Policy Paper sets out the Government's expectations and views in relation to the next phase of the Water Sector Transformation Programme, including those matters raised in the questions.

By setting out its views and expectations in this way, the Government is enabling stakeholders to engage meaningfully in the change process which will give them the strongest possible say in determining their own future working arrangements. On this basis I have written to the Workplace Relations Commission on 3 March 2021 asking them to contact the parties to ar-

range to re-commence engagement which had previously been underway on a Framework for the future delivery of water services.

The Workplace Relations Commission has confirmed that it is in a position to recommence engagement and is currently in contact with the parties to the transformation process on this basis.

The Government believes it will be possible to reach a collective agreement which addresses the interests and concerns of all parties.

Water Services

128. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to support take-up of Irish Water's Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020-2024 which will provide water and wastewater growth capacity in smaller settlements which would not otherwise be provided for in Irish Water's capital investment plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25139/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I refer to the reply to Question No. 346 of 11 May 2021 which sets out the position in this matter.

Departmental Reviews

129. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the progress made by his Department to date in conducting the review of the revised well water grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25142/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Under the Housing (Private Water Supply Financial Assistance) Regulations 2020, the grant scheme to support improvement works for a private water supply was revised. The revised scheme forms part of the funding investment under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021.

The revised scheme, which opened for applications on 04 June 2020, brought into effect the following changes:

- A maximum grant for rehabilitation works of €3,000, an increase of 47% on the previous maximum grant level of €2,031.

- A maximum grant of €5,000 was introduced, in cases where the local authority agrees that the most appropriate solution is to provide a new well.

- The maximum percentage of approved costs was increased from 75% to 85%, subject to the total maximum costs of either €3,000 for well rehabilitation or €5,000 for a new well.

In addition, in recognition of the role of the grant in improving quality, the water quality treatment element (typically filtration and UV treatment) qualifies for 100% funding, up to a maximum of €1,000. This grant can be claimed on its own or in addition to either the grant for rehabilitation works or the grant for a new well.

In implementing the revised arrangements, my Department has undertaken to conduct a

review of the grant scheme after one year of operation to ensure its alignment with policy objectives.

Registration of Births

130. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the reason for a delay in processing the foreign birth registration of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24726/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The processing of Foreign Births Registration (FBR) applications has been temporarily paused as a result of COVID-19 related restrictions.

Prior to this pause, it took twelve to eighteen months to process applications. This was due to pressures on the FBR service, the complex nature of FBR applications, the high volume of applications due to Brexit as well as the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

The FBR application referenced was registered on 25 February 2020, and is currently waiting to be processed. All documentation submitted is being stored in a secure environment.

The Passport Service is examining how to optimally address the FBR applications on hand, and any delays that have been experienced by a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are regretted. We expect to have an update on this later in the summer.

Covid-19 Pandemic

131. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide a letter to allow a person (details supplied) to return home on compassionate grounds. [24738/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm to the Deputy that the Embassy of Ireland in Bangkok is providing all possible consular advice and support to the citizen, including in relation to his welfare as well as regarding local requirements in terms of visa and immigration procedures.

As the Deputy will be aware, restrictions on travel to Ireland in the context of COVID-19 are a matter for the Department of Health. I can confirm that all passengers travelling to Ireland must provide evidence that they have a negative or 'not detected' result from a COVID-19 Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test carried out no more than 72 hours before arrival in Ireland, or have evidence that they are exempt from this legal requirement.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Health in providing appropriate advice and support to our citizens overseas, line with public health requirements in Ireland.

Passport Services

132. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if additional personnel will be put in place in the Passport Office to deal with the backlog of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24764/21]

133. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the current number of all passport applications that have not been processed. [24806/21]

134. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the specific measures being put in place to eliminate the backlog of outstanding passport applications. [24807/21]

135. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on whether it is correct that persons are not able to have their passport applications processed in view of the fact that passports are considered one of the most important documents in a person's possession and the fact that passports are not always required for travel but are needed for other purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24850/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 to 135, inclusive, together.

The Passport Service scaled up to more normal operational levels on 4 May 2021, in line with the phased easing of restrictions set out in "COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 – The Plan Ahead".

During Level 5 restrictions, the Passport Service processed more than 40,000 or just over one third of the total number of applications received this year, comprising of approximately 3,000 in response to urgent requests and 37,000 non-urgent applications for adults renewing their passport. Customer Service Information was also provided to over 40,000 citizens via our Webchat service during this time.

The Passport Service is now processing all Passport Online applications. It is expected that the 89,000 applications on hand at the end of April will be processed by the end of June. Significant progress has been made thus far with over 16,000 applications processed since 4 May.

Passport Online will continue to be the priority given the efficiencies that are in-built into the system for both the applicant and the Passport Service. The processing of an online application is four times as fast as a paper application. In addition, the use of Passport Online can facilitate social distancing, given that a renewal application for an adult does not require the signature of a witness.

Passport Online can be accessed by first time applicants, both children and adults, in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Europe, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. All Irish citizens, including children, can use the online system to renew their passports from anywhere in the world.

At present, there are approximately 106,000 Passport Online applications in the system. This figure includes the approximately 17,000 new applications received by the Passport Service during the first week of scaled-up services. The Passport Service has a great deal of experience in dealing with peaks in demand, and we are 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 paper based applications such as Passport Express and Northern Ireland Passport Express once online applications have been processed. There are currently approximately 1,600 paper based applications in the system.

I am satisfied that there is no requirement, at this time, to allocate additional staff to the Passport Service. Similar to all work places, social distancing is required so this limits the occupation of buildings but my Department has been working closely with the Office of Public Works on this matter.

Question No. 134 answered with Question No. 132.

Question No. 135 answered with Question No. 132.

Asylum Seekers

136. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his plans to alleviate the unbearable conditions endured by refugees in the Moria camp and other refugee camps on the island of Lesbos; his views on the way the EU has been active in addressing the situation that refugees find themselves in; the contacts he has had with the UN Security Council on the matter; the contacts he has had with the EU on the matter; if he plans to take in more refugees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24915/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have consistently ensured that Ireland voices its support for EU efforts to put in place more effective and humane arrangements to manage the migratory pressures which the EU continues to face. The EU Commission's "New Pact on Migration and Asylum" represents an opportunity to renew efforts to put in place such arrangements. Discussions on the Pact are continuing within the Justice and Home Affairs Council though progress to date has been limited. For its part, Ireland has been clear in urging compromise and solidarity with frontline states as well as support for EU efforts to deal with migration in a comprehensive and holistic manner, including through resettlement and increased legal pathways for migration; addressing root causes of migration and reforming the Common European Asylum System.

In regard to the specific situation in Lesbos, in 2019 there were 42,000 people hosted in camps on the Greek islands, in conditions that were extremely difficult. That number is now 14,000, with under 8000 on Lesbos. While this is still too high, and conditions are still a clear issue, strong efforts are being made to further improve the situation. The European Commission has dedicated over €155 million to building new reception centres on Lesbos and Chios, and a further €121 million for smaller centres on Samos, Kos and Leros. These new centres, when finished, will help address the problem of overcrowding.

In December, Ireland also provided UNICEF Greece with a contribution of €225,000 in respect of the response to the Moria fire on Lesbos. This contribution complements the considerable Irish Aid humanitarian support to refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

The situation of refugees on the Greek Islands does not arise directly on the UN Security Council agenda. However, Ireland uses all available opportunities to highlight humanitarian and human rights issues, including the plight of refugees worldwide, through the UN's structures and in other multilateral formats.

Concerning plans to take in refugees, on 1 October 2020, Minister McEntee announced that Ireland would accept 50 refugees in family groups from Lesbos. Ireland also has an existing commitment to accept 36 unaccompanied minors from Greece. Eight of these minors arrived in Ireland last June. Staff from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, along with staff from Túsla and An Garda Síochána, will travel to Greece in the coming weeks to interview 25 unaccompanied minors and 50 people in family groups, with a view to arranging their relocation to Ireland.

Covid-19 Pandemic

137. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the approach Ireland is taking to supporting India as it deals with a surge in Covid-19 cases; the engagements he has had on the waiving of intellectual property rights to Covid-19 vaccines; his views on such a waiver; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24916/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): India's health system continues to battle the surging caseload in the country. Further to an earlier donation of 700 oxygen concentrators, the Government has donated a further 500 concentrators, 2 oxygen generators, and other vital materials to India. This additional donation arrived in Delhi Airport on Tuesday 4 May.

These donations formed part of the coordinated effort by EU Member States to provide a collaborative response to the situation in India and maximise our collective impact in the fight against the virus.

Ireland quadrupled our funding to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2020, and is fully engaged in efforts by the international community to ensure fair and equitable access to vaccines for all. My Department has provided €5 million in Irish Aid funding so far in 2021 to enable developing countries to access vaccines. The majority of this funding is going to the COVAX facility, the global UN-led mechanism for pooling procurement and fair distribution of vaccines.

The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment leads on Intellectual Property Rights and World Trade Organisation (WTO) matters, including on the current discussion on the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement. International Trade is a competence of the EU under the Treaties and the President of the EU Commission has responded to the U.S. announcement by indicating its readiness to discuss the U.S. proposal for a waiver on intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines at the WTO.

Ireland will engage with the European Commission and other member states on the EU position for the WTO discussions, including discussions on how the U.S. proposal for a waiver on intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines can help to resolve the crisis.

My Department, in consideration with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and other relevant Departments, are also giving consideration to Ireland's potential participation in technology-pooling mechanisms such as the C-TAP initiative. My Department continues to liaise with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on this and a number of related matters, on an ongoing basis.

Departmental Expenditure

138. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24929/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has incurred no expenditure on external advertising in relation to Covid-19. My Department has made extensive use of our online resources in the dissemination of information and advice, particularly in regard to international travel and the provision of consular assistance. This has included a major overhaul of the travel advice section of the dfa.ie website and those of our Missions abroad. My Department also provides regular input to the central Government led Covid-19

communications campaign and to the Covid-19 information hub on the gov.ie website.

Trade Relations

139. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will contact the Egyptian Government to register concern for cargo bound for Ireland on a ship (details supplied) that has been detained at Suez Port; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24984/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am not aware of the specific matter referred to in the details supplied. Issues relating to international trade are a matter for an Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Passport Services

140. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport will issue to a person (details supplied) for college registration purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25018/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service scaled up to more normal operational levels on 4 May 2021, in line with the phased easing of restrictions set out in “COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 – The Plan Ahead”.

Passport Online will continue to be the priority channel given the efficiencies that are in-built into the system for both the applicant and the Passport Service. The processing of an on-line application is up to four times as fast as a paper application. In addition, the use of Passport Online can facilitate social distancing, given that a renewal application for an adult does not require the signature of a witness.

Passport Online can be accessed by first time applicants, both children and adults, in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Europe, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. All Irish citizens, including children, can use the online system to renew their passports from anywhere in the world.

The Passport Service has a great deal of experience in dealing with peaks in demand, and we are confident, taking into account measures to ensure a safe workplace, that the Passport Online applications on hand can be cleared in six to eight weeks.

With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service was in contact with the applicant on 10 May 2021 to provide an update on the status of the passport application.

Departmental Expenditure

141. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Defence the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24924/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has incurred no expendi-

ture on advertising and awareness raising initiatives in relation to Covid-19 in any media outlet from March 2020 to date 2021.

Land Transfers

142. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Defence the status of the proposed transfer of lands at Rockbrae House, Bray, County Wicklow to Wicklow County Council; the discussions that have taken place with the council; the purpose of the transfer; the timeframe for the transfer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24953/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The property in question is surplus to military requirements and, in line with Government policy, the intention is to dispose of the property by way of transfer to Wicklow County Council, in order to support the provision of housing by that Local Authority.

Officials from my Department are currently liaising with the Chief State's Solicitors Office on the necessary legal matters with regard to finalising contracts and the intention is to conclude the transfer as soon as possible, subject to the normal exigencies of the conveyancing process.

Vaccination Programme

143. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel present on UN duty who were offered a Covid-19 vaccination through the UN since December 2020; the number that received it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25053/21]

144. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Defence the details of UN arrangements for vaccinations of peacekeepers; if the Defence Forces were part of those arrangements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25054/21]

145. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel on UN duty who received a Covid-19 vaccination from the host country from December 2020 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25055/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 143 to 145, inclusive, together.

The COVID-19 vaccine Allocation Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and the Department of Health, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government on 8 December 2020 (updated 30 April 2021). It sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination.

The Defence Forces has established vaccine prioritisation which is in line with this national allocation strategy. Initial Vaccination priority is for Defence Force personnel who are providing front line support to the HSE and National Ambulance Service in the national effort to combat COVID 19.

Personnel selected for deployment to overseas missions fall into a prioritised grouping and they are vaccinated against COVID-19 prior to deployment, subject to availability of the vaccine which is coordinated through the HSE. This approach is in line with UN guidelines which requests Member States to vaccinate troops prior to deployment where feasible.

There may, however, be a small number of Defence Force personnel who, for a variety of reasons, will not be vaccinated against Covid 19 prior to their deployment and planning is ongoing in relation to facilitating the vaccination of these personnel at the earliest possible opportunity.

Most peacekeeping personnel deployed to UN missions from member states should receive the COVID-19 vaccine through their own national or host country vaccination programmes and according to the timelines and prioritisation guidelines of those programmes. The UN Department of Operational Support (DOS) is working to ensure alternative arrangements are put in place for personnel who deploy to UN missions not fully vaccinated.

With regard to the vaccination of Defence Force personnel in theatre to date, I am advised by the military authorities that the following is the position:

- Twelve (12) Defence Force personnel have received vaccines organised by UNIFIL headquarters;

- 26 personnel deployed in the UNDOF mission and six (6) personnel deployed with UNTSO have received a COVID-19 vaccination on the ALPHA (Israeli) side through the Israeli administered programme; and

- eleven (11) personnel deployed in the MINUSMA mission in MALI have received a vaccination through the German contingent in the Mission area.

Question No. 144 answered with Question No. 143.

Question No. 145 answered with Question No. 143.

Defence Forces

146. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Defence the number of females who were recruited to the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service in 2020 and to date in 2021; the number of females currently in training in each branch of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25124/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The table following details the number of females inducted into the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service in 2020 and in 2021, in addition to those in training as at 31st March 2021.

	Inductions 2020	Inductions 2021*	In Training 2021**
Army	32	5	9
Air Corps	3	0	3
Naval Service	7	1	3
Total	42	6	15

*As at 30 April 2021; **As at 31 March 2021

Of the 42 women inducted in 2020, 32 were General Service Recruits, 6 were Cadets, 2 were Air Corps Apprentices and 2 were re-enlisting personnel.

The 6 women inducted by the end of March 2021 were General Service Recruits. Further inductions will take place throughout the year as recruitment continues. The Air Corps Apprentice competition, closed in March 2021, attracted 663 applications and these are currently being processed. General Service recruitment is ongoing and the Cadet competition was launched re-

cently. This is in addition to the 9 current Direct Entry competitions and the Re-commissioning and Re-enlistment schemes.

Defence Forces

147. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Defence his views on the Defence Forces proposal that the Air Corps takes over some maritime search-and-rescue operations; the implications for the current service provider; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25166/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is currently a project ongoing under the remit of the Department of Transport, to consider, develop and bring to fruition a new Marine Search and Rescue aviation contract for future service provision.

The current contract for the SAR Helicopter service is between the Minister of Transport and a civil helicopter operator, CHC Ireland DAC. The contract commenced on 1st July 2012 for a period of 10 years, with an option to extend for a further 3 years. The existing contract has been extended for one year to 2023 to facilitate the lengthy procurement process and ensure compliance with the Public Spending Code.

A strategic assessment and preliminary appraisal document in line with the Public Service Code was brought by the Department of Transport to Government for information in July last year. The preliminary appraisal included an appraisal of various service delivery options, including where the state assumed full responsibility for the service, either through the Air Corps or a dedicated Irish Coast Guard Aviation Branch. Both were ruled out for a variety of reasons but notably the risks to the state and questions around potential affordability and deliverability. I agree with the strategic assessment and preliminary appraisal mentioned above and I do not see the Air Corps taking full responsibility for SAR services in Ireland's search and rescue domain.

I have acknowledged previously that I would like to explore further the option of the Air Corps providing some element of the SAR aviation service, given their historical role in this area. In this context, late last year, I asked my officials to engage further with the Department of Transport to explore the option of the Air Corps providing some element of the next generation SAR aviation service while at the same time ensuring that the service meets domestic and international obligations for SAR and represents value for money for the State. This process is currently ongoing.

Ultimately, decisions on the scope, nature and procurement strategy for the next SAR marine aviation service will be a matter for Government once the detailed appraisal and business case has been finalised by the Department of Transport.

Special Educational Needs

148. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Education the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused a grant for assistive technology by her Department following an appeal even though it is deemed necessary by the person's teachers and occupational therapist; the reason the decision was taken without requesting a copy of a professional occupational therapist report or any other supporting documentation relating to the student; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24723/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The purpose of my Department's Assistive Technology Scheme, as set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013, is to provide

grant-aid to schools to allow them to purchase the type of specialist equipment which has been recommended by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) as being essential for students who have been diagnosed as having a serious physical disability and/or sensory or communicative disability to the extent that their ability to communicate through the medium of speech or writing is materially curtailed.

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

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

Although equipment is sanctioned under the Assistive Technology scheme for use by particular students, it is the property of the school, and the school's management authority is responsible for maintenance, repair, and insurance of the equipment.

I can confirm that an application for assistive technology from the school named by the deputy was received in my Department on 13th January 2021.

This application was not sanctioned to the school, on the basis that the SENO did not recommend that the application met the criteria for provision of equipment as no new evidence was furnished.

This decision was appealed by the school on 23rd February. On revising the application, the appeal was not granted as the qualifying criteria set out in Circular 0010/2013, and the documentation which has been submitted in support of the application, did not meet the criteria for the allocation of support under the Assistive Technology scheme for the following reasons:

- It is not clear from the professional report that the equipment is essential to allow the pupil to access education. The professional reports received to date do not clearly illustrate how, when and in what way the equipment will be used to access education throughout the school day.

- While it is acknowledged that the pupil in question is using technology in the special class, there is little information on what type of technology, how or when it is being used, or what technology is available in the special class throughout the school day

- Equipment currently available in the school can meet the needs as outlined in the report – The School's information has not provided a case to the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) why the current technology available in the school and the special class is insufficient to meet the pupil's educational needs.

Should additional information become available, which provides further clarification regarding the requirement for assistive technology for the pupil in question, in accordance with the terms of the scheme, it will be open to the school to resubmit an application for consideration.

149. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education if a placement will be secured for a person (details supplied) at a school. [24737/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): It is the responsibility of my Department to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. Parents/guardians can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to draft, publish and implement a school admission policy in accordance with the Education Acts 1998 to 2018. In schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in their school of first choice.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 provided for changes to the school admissions process which aim to give parents greater confidence that school admissions process are fair and transparent and provides that schools are legally required to accept all applicants where they have places.

The admission policy, including the selection criteria to be used where the school is over-subscribed, must comply with the Education Acts 1998 to 2018, be non-discriminatory and be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

Where a board of management make a decision to refuse admission, a parent/guardian can appeal that decision under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998, and an independent appeals committee will be appointed to consider the appeal. A section 29 appeal must be made no later than 63 calendar days from the date of the school's decision to refuse admission.

This Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a student, except in circumstances where an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 has been allowed and the appeals committee directs that the school admit the child concerned.

Full details on the section 29 appeals process are available on my Department's website at the link below:

www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Appeals.html

In addition, Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) the Educational Welfare Service is the legal body which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school placement for their child.

National Educational Psychological Service

150. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education when an assessment will be carried out for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24741/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): By way of context, it is important to note that in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) of my Department has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring.

Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maxi-

mise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

I have made enquiries in the matter of the individual raised in the Deputy's question and can inform him that NEPS first began to work with this student over four years ago. During his time in primary school, the student had a full psychological assessment and review completed by the school's NEPS psychologist and was also the subject of ongoing consultations.

On the student's transfer to post primary school the NEPS service continued to provide consultative support to the school advising on how best to promote positive outcomes for this student. As is always the case, and in line with the NEPS model of service, the assigned psychologist is available to the school to discuss this student's needs and indeed the merit of further formal assessment. I would advise therefore that if his parents have concerns in relation to his educational, social or emotional development these should be raised by the parents, in the first instance, with the Principal of the school he is attending, with a view to discussing the situation with the school's assigned NEPS psychologist.

Schools Amalgamation

151. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to a proposed amalgamation of schools (details supplied) in Cork City. [24750/21]

152. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Education the recourse available to parents who disagree with proposed major changes to the school their child attends or will attend. [24751/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 152 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving an application from the schools in question in relation to a proposed amalgamation.

As the decision-making authority for any amalgamation is the patron/trustees of the schools concerned, it is open to any patron to submit proposals to the Department for consideration.

Any proposed change involves extensive negotiations at local level and must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of students, parents, teachers, local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system.

Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 151.

School Catchment Areas

153. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Education her views on whether it is acceptable that there could be no all-girls school in a large area of Cork city particularly given the vulnerability of certain young girls and the need for same to attend a same-sex school. [24752/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): As the Deputy may be aware, there are ten non-fee paying all-girls post primary schools in Cork City. The decision-making authority

in respect of the status of existing schools, including whether they are single or mixed gender, belongs to the Patron, subject to the agreement of my Department.

New schools are established by my Department to meet demographic need and, generally, such new school provision (primary and post-primary) is mixed gender in nature. Co-educational schools provide greater flexibility than single sex schools in terms of meeting demographic and school accommodation requirements in an area. Single-gender provision may, however, be made if there is an identified imbalance between the capacities of single-gender schools in the area.

All schools are required to have procedures in place to ensure the safety of all students, irrespective of gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. These requirements include the provision of Social, Personal and Health Education (including Relationships and Sexuality Education) at primary level, and at post-primary level, the provision of Social, Personal and Health Education ; Civic, Social and Political Education; and Relationships and Sexuality Education. In addition, schools are required to comply with the provisions of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017* , a fundamental principle of which is that all schools must keep pupils/students safe from harm while attending the school or while participating in school activities. My Department has also put in place a range of oversight measures to help ensure that all schools comply with these procedures.

Special Educational Needs

154. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education when the 2021-2022 SNA allocations will be announced. [24766/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In light of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the new Frontloaded Allocation Model for Special Needs Assistants for students in mainstream classes in primary and post -primary schools is to be deferred for a further year to the beginning of the 2022/23 school year.

The disruption prevented the delivery of the necessary training and information workshops to support the roll out of the new allocation model which had been planned for earlier this year.

The training and workshops are designed to help school leaders and teachers in their in-school planning for the new model and their engagement with parents. These sessions will now be rescheduled to take place during the 2021/22 school year. Further information will be issued by the NCSE in due course.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 school year will be based on the actual number of SNAs employed by a school on 30 April 2021 and the allocation on that date will be rolled over into 2021/22. No school will receive a reduced allocation.

As in previous years, there will be provision for schools to apply to the NCSE for additionality where exceptional circumstances give rise to new care needs that cannot be catered for within existing allocations. These posts will be met from within the existing Budget 2021 allocation.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 will be published later this month as in previous years.

SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

My Department will also be publishing a circular this month to advise schools of the arrangements for the allocation of SNAs for the 2021/22 school year.

School Accommodation

155. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education the current status of construction of the permanent accommodation for a school (details supplied); the cause of delay in installing temporary accommodation on the site; and if a commitment will be given to provide temporary accommodation on site for the coming academic year. [24808/21]

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 & Build programme.

The new school building project is in architectural planning stage. A pre-planning meeting with the local authority has taken place and developed design work is ongoing. 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.

My Department is preparing a planning application for interim accommodation for the school on its permanent site for this September. There has been some delay involved in obtaining a necessary legal consent from an adjacent landowner but this is now being finalised and the planning application will be lodged as soon as possible thereafter.

In the interim, instructions have issued to the Project Manager overseeing the delivery of the interim accommodation to proceed with the procurement arrangements under my Department's new Modular Buildings Framework.

My Department is also considering contingency arrangements and would hope to be in a position to fully brief the school and the Patron on these in the coming weeks.

Special Educational Needs

156. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Education the reason there is currently no procedure at present to apply for SNA support for new pupils; and when the new circular from her Department will be issued to address the ongoing and deep concern this situation has created for parents, pupils and principals. [24817/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In light of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the new Frontloaded Allocation Model for Special Needs Assistants for students in mainstream classes in primary and post-primary schools is to be deferred for a further year to the beginning of the 2022/23 school year.

The disruption prevented the delivery of the necessary training and information workshops to support the roll out of the new allocation model which had been planned for earlier this year.

The training and workshops are designed to help school leaders and teachers in their in-school planning for the new model and their engagement with parents. These sessions will now be rescheduled to take place during the 2021/22 school year. Further information will be issued by the NCSE in due course.

12 May 2021

SNA allocations for 2021/22 school year will be based on the actual number of SNAs employed by a school on 30 April 2021 and the allocation on that date will be rolled over into 2021/22. No school will receive a reduced allocation.

As in previous years, there will be provision for schools to apply to the NCSE for additionality where exceptional circumstances give rise to new care needs that cannot be catered for within existing allocations. These posts will be met from within the existing Budget 2021 allocation.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 will be published later this month as in previous years.

SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

My Department will also be publishing a circular this month to advise schools of the arrangements for the allocation of SNAs for the 2021/22 school year.

School Staff

157. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Education the schools in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Donegal that can access substitute teachers specifically through one of the 115 substitute teacher supply panels; the percentage of schools that cannot access the substitute teacher supply panels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24829/21]

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.

Of the 370 primary schools in Counties Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Donegal, 264 are involved in Supply Panels.

These substitute Supply Panels are not the sole means whereby schools source substitutes but are set up to work alongside the existing methods of sourcing substitute teachers in accordance with Department Circular 45/2020, such as through a school's own panel of regular substitutes or the national substitution portal service "*Sub Seeker*", operated by IPPN. Sub Seeker has over 6,000 teachers currently registered. It is anticipated that this number will increase in the coming weeks through additional PME student teachers registering with the Teaching Council under Route 3, following a recent awareness raising campaign by the Teaching Council with HEIS and students, and subsequently registering their availability on *Sub Seeker*.

Special Educational Needs

158. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education if an application for a special needs assistant will be reviewed for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24837/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In December 2019, Government approved the national roll out of a new frontloading model for the allocation of SNAs support to primary and post-primary schools for students in mainstream

classes, as part of the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM).

In light of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the new Frontloaded Allocation Model for Special Needs Assistants for students in mainstream classes in primary and post-primary schools is to be deferred for a further year to the beginning of the 2022/23 school year.

The disruption prevented the delivery of the necessary training and information workshops to support the roll out of the new allocation model which had been planned for earlier this year.

The training and workshops are designed to help school leaders and teachers in their in-school planning for the new model and their engagement with parents. These sessions will now be rescheduled to take place during the 2021/22 school year. Further information will be issued by the NCSE in due course.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 school year will be based on the actual number of SNAs employed by a school on 30 April 2021 and the allocation on that date will be rolled over into 2021/22. No school will receive a reduced allocation.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 will be published later this month as in previous years.

My Department will also be publishing a circular this month to advise schools of the arrangements for the allocation of SNAs for the 2021/22 school year.

Providing access to SNA support continues to be based on primary care needs as outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014. SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

The NCSE has responsibility for planning and coordinating school supports for children with special educational needs including the allocation of SNAs and reviews. My Department does not have a role in making individual school determinations.

As in previous years, where schools consider their SNA allocation to be inadequate to meet its needs for the 2020/21 school year, the school can seek a review by making an application to the NCSE which is available to schools throughout the current school year.

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

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

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

School Accommodation

159. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education if a permanent site will be sourced for a school (details supplied) within the assigned catchment area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24863/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm that a permanent site option for the new Killester/Raheny/Clontarf ETNS has been identified and it is in the school planning area. Due to the sensitive nature of site acquisitions in general, it is not possible to give further details at this time.

It is difficult to indicate a timeframe for any site acquisition as each process is unique and in some instances complex issues can arise which can cause delays.

Nevertheless, the Department is committed to delivering a permanent site for Killester/Raheny/Clontarf ETNS and are treating this as a priority.

State Examinations

160. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education the steps she is taking to ensure that there is a leaving certificate examination in 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1472/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): On 17 February, I confirmed that Leaving Certificate 2021 examinations will proceed and students will also have the alternative option of applying for grades accredited by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), to be known as SEC-Accredited Grades. This decision was taken to provide choice and clarity for students.

Putting in place both the examinations and a corresponding measure of SEC-Accredited Grades is essential to ensuring a fair system, having regard to the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic and the loss of learning that has occurred for this group of students due to the interruption of in-person teaching and learning during the periods of school closure.

This decision followed intensive engagement with education stakeholders bilaterally and through the Advisory Group on Planning for State Examinations 2021 and ensures for every student a method to assess their learning and attainment at the end of their post-primary education and to progress to higher and further education, and the world of work.

Students have registered for the traditional examinations and/or to receive SEC-Accredited Grades on a subject-by-subject basis on the Candidate Self-Service Portal. In any subject where a student sits the examination and opts to receive Accredited Grades, they will be automatically credited with the better of the two results.

Those opting for the traditional examinations have completed orals and music practical examinations over Easter and the LCVP Link Module examination last weekend. Proficiency Assessments for candidates seeking an Accredited Grade in respect of non-curricular languages were also held last weekend. Leaving Certificate Applied oral examinations started on 3 May.

My Department and the State Examinations Commission has published a series of guides for both students and schools regarding the processes for the 2021 Leaving Certificate. This includes *A Guide to State Examinations and Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021* as well as detailed guides on the Accredited Grades processes for schools. These guides, and further information, are available on www.gov.ie/leavingcertificate.

On 25 March, I announced details of the additional supports that are being provided to schools to support the running of the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied Examinations and the Accredited Grades process.

Schools can appoint a Leaving Certificate Aide to support school management in the planning, preparations for and running of the examinations, and the work involved in the Accredited

Grades process including work related to providing estimated marks for out of school learners and students studying subjects outside of school.

The measures are designed to support schools and ensure that essential work for Leaving Certificate 2021 can take place. The arrangements recognise that certain work is required to be carried out outside the normal time in which such work is undertaken.

Schools are able to appoint an Aide from within the school, to conduct the planning and organisation work associated with the oral examinations and to assist with the administration of the June examinations and the Accredited Grades process. The number of days available ranges from 50 to 60 days depending on the number of candidates in the school and the range of activities that are required to meet the needs of candidates in that school.

Full details of these arrangements have been advised to schools by the State Examinations Commission Circular 15/2021.

My Department is also supporting school leaders, teachers and other school personnel, tutors, parents and students through a dedicated phone-line and e-mail service for queries on the Accredited Grades process.

In the coming days, the SEC will be issuing further guidance for the conduct of the written examinations to schools that is in line with public health advice and which will ensure that the examinations can proceed safely.

The most current information on all matters relating to Leaving Certificate examinations and the Accredited Grades process will be available on an ongoing basis on gov.ie/LeavingCertificate.

Covid-19 Pandemic

161. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education the steps she is taking to support teachers in delivering the required syllabus through remote learning due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1473/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic my Department has issued extensive guidance material to assist schools and teachers with the continuity of learning. This guidance was developed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders including teachers, parents and learners. The guidance included provision to support the continuity of teaching and learning in response to the Covid-19 restrictions for those learners unable to engage with online learning. This guidance is available at gov.ie.

As part of the €210m investment programme underpinning the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools, my Department provided €100m in grant funding to schools to address their ICT needs during 2020. In the context of the current public health crisis this funding can be focussed on assisting schools to address ICT needs including devices, software and other ICT solutions to support the provision of remote learning. This can include the purchase of ICT devices, such as laptops that can be shared through loan arrangements with students and teachers who do not have access to devices, essential learning platforms and other ICT infrastructure to support the provision of remote learning.

Information Note TC 0013/2021 which was recently published, sets out the working arrangements for the 'Very High Risk' and also pregnant teachers/SNAs for the remainder of the current school year and the 2021/22 school year. For the remainder of the 2020/21 school year,

a teacher or SNA who has been categorised by the Occupational Health Service (OHS) as in the ‘Very High Risk’ group (including those who have been fully vaccinated), should continue to work remotely i.e. work from home. Similarly, a pregnant teacher or SNA is advised by my Department to continue to work remotely i.e. work from home, for the remainder of the 2020/21 school year.

Extensive support and advice for teachers and schools to provide remote learning has been, and continues to be made available through my Department’s support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and its Technology in Education team at www.pdst-technologyineducation.ie. The information on this website includes a link to a dedicated PDST portal <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning> aimed at supporting teachers and schools in the remote learning environment. This resource includes information on popular communication and learning platforms, digital tools and resources, video conferencing, webinars to support and inspire teachers to identify good practice and a dedicated online course for teachers for remote learning. The Department funded referral and repository www.scoilnet.ie also contains a wealth of curriculum tagged resources that can be used by teachers, students and parents to support the continuity of learning in the remote environment.

Schools can also apply to www.pdst.ie/schoolsupport for the assistance of a PDST advisor for tailored school support in all subject areas at Primary and Post-Primary levels including those pertaining to the use of Digital Technologies to support remote teaching, learning and assessment practices. The PDST Leadership team will also be available to support school leaders in leading remote teaching and learning process through school support, national programmes and localised networks

Departmental Expenditure

162. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education the amount expended by her Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24925/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Department’s spending on advertising and awareness raising in relation to Covid-19 for the period 1 March 2020 to date in 2021 is outlined in the attached spreadsheet.

Supplier Name	Total Amount	Details of service	Classification 1	Classification 2
Beacon Studios	€1,937.25	Voiceover work for Back to school advertising	Advertising	Covid
Phd Media	€185,857.70	Radio, Press, Broadcast and Internet advertisement for school reopening	Advertising	Covid
TBWA	€9,138.90	Schools Reopening radio communications	Advertising	Covid
The Lisa Richards Agency	€2,355.45	Back To School Advertising	Advertising	Covid
Zero-G	€3,444.00	Covid-19 Communication Advertising	Advertising	Covid
The Smart Group	€18,605.50	Schools Reopening Campaign Design Work	Design	Covid

Schools Building Projects

163. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education when a decision will be made on an application made by a school under the summer works programme 2016 for improved and safer outdoor playground areas at a school (details supplied); the reason for the delay with the decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24957/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I would like to inform the Deputy that the school in question applied for funding under the Summer Works Scheme in 2016, Category 10 (External Environment) for the provision of improved access to the school and additional off road parking with particular reference to the school bus. No application has been submitted by the school authority in relation to improved playground facilities.

The school subsequently applied for funding in 2019, under the Summer Works Scheme 2020 for Category 1 (Life Safety Systems) for which they were approved.

As per Circular 0027/2019, only 1 Summer Works Scheme application is permissible at a time therefore the most recent application made in 2019 supersedes the application made in 2016. If the school authority wish to have an application considered for improved playground facilities, then they may do so by reapplying under the Summer Works Scheme when it next reopens for applications.

Disadvantaged Status

164. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education further to Parliamentary Question No. 578 of 28 April 2021, if the schools (details supplied) are eligible for consideration for DEIS status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25030/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): A key part of the DEIS Plan was the introduction of a new DEIS identification process based on an objective, statistics based model. In terms of the further extension of the DEIS Programme to more schools, an extensive body of work is being undertaken in terms of the refinement of this model, including data analysis and consultation with education partners. All schools will be considered under this new refined model, including those referred to by the Deputy.

Until this work is complete, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools.

Special Educational Needs

165. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education the process for the allocation of SNAs for 2021-2022; when the guidance circular is due to be issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25040/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In light of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the new Frontloaded Allocation Model for Special Needs Assistants for students in mainstream classes in primary and post -primary schools is to be deferred for a further year to the beginning of the 2022/23 school year.

The disruption prevented the delivery of the necessary training and information workshops to support the roll out of the new allocation model which had been planned for earlier this year.

The training and workshops are designed to help school leaders and teachers in their in-school planning for the new model and their engagement with parents. These sessions will now be rescheduled to take place during the 2021/22 school year. Further information will be issued by the NCSE in due course.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 school year will be based on the actual number of SNAs em-

ployed by a school on 30 April 2021 and the allocation on that date will be rolled over into 2021/22. No school will receive a reduced allocation.

As in previous years, there will be provision for schools to apply to the NCSE for additionality where exceptional circumstances give rise to new care needs that cannot be catered for within existing allocations. These posts will be met from within the existing Budget 2021 allocation.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 will be published later this month as in previous years.

SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

My Department will also be publishing a circular this month to advise schools of the arrangements for the allocation of SNAs for the 2021/22 school year.

Special Educational Needs

166. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Education the supports available to a student (details supplied) who is not in receipt of guidance for SNA support; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25041/21]

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

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

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

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

In December 2019, Government approved the national roll out of a new frontloading model for the allocation of SNAs support to primary and post-primary schools for students in mainstream classes, as part of the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model (SIM).

In light of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the new Frontloaded Allocation Model for Special Needs Assistants for students in mainstream classes in primary and post -primary schools is to be deferred for a further year to the beginning of the 2022/23 school year.

The disruption prevented the delivery of the necessary training and information workshops to support the roll out of the new allocation model which had been planned for earlier this year.

The training and workshops are designed to help school leaders and teachers in their in-

school planning for the new model and their engagement with parents. These sessions will now be rescheduled to take place during the 2021/22 school year. Further information will be issued by the NCSE in due course.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 school year will be based on the actual number of SNAs employed by a school on 30 April 2021 and the allocation on that date will be rolled over into 2021/22. No school will receive a reduced allocation.

SNA allocations for 2021/22 will be published later this month as in previous years.

My Department will also be publishing a circular this month to advise schools of the arrangements for the allocation of SNAs for the 2021/22 school year.

Providing access to SNA support continues to be based on primary care needs as outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014.

SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

As in previous years, where schools consider their SNA allocation to be inadequate to meet its needs for the 2021/22 school year, the school can seek a review by making an application to the NCSE which is available to schools throughout the current school year.

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

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

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

Special Educational Needs

167. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education further to Parliamentary Question No. 173 of 18 February 2021, her plans to carry out a review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004; the timeline for the review; the person or body that will carry out the review; the terms of reference for the review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25104/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): A number of sections of the Education for Persons with Special Needs (EPSN) Act 2004 have been commenced. The commenced provisions include those establishing the NCSE and those providing for an inclusive approach to the education of children with SEN.

The remaining sections of the Act have yet to be commenced. The Sections of the EPSN Act which have not been implemented are those which would have conferred a statutory entitlement to –

- an educational assessment for all children with special educational needs.

- consequent development of a statutory individual educational plan (IEP).
- the delivery of detailed educational services on foot of this plan.
- an independent appeals process.

Since EPSEN was enacted, the Department's policy on supporting children with special educational needs has changed and evolved on foot of evidence based policy advice from the NCSE which takes account of international perspectives.

Significantly, the focus of special needs education provision has changed from a model that is diagnosis led to one which is driven by the needs of the child. This is a substantially different view to the one underlying the EPSEN Act. The levels of investment by Government in special education has increased to facilitate the underlying reforms required to implement and embed the needs based approach.

It is therefore appropriate that a review of the EPSN Act should now take place.

As Minister for Special Education and Inclusion, I have indicated that one of my priorities is:

Updating our Laws: Reviewing and updating the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act

The review of the Act will take into account the extent of additional investment which has been made in special educational services since 2004, with some €2bn per year now being spent of special educational supports.

It will also take into account the range of reforms which have taken place in recent years including the development of new allocation models which are not based primarily on a response to assessment as policy advice has indicated that requirement of diagnosis can create a risk of children being diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocation purposes, rather than for health reasons. Also, that as there is a spectrum of ability and disability within every special education disability category, account must be taken of need, as well as diagnosis.

The terms of reference for this review are currently being established, following which, the group or body which will carry out the review, and the timeline for the review, will also be agreed.

Education Policy

168. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education if further consideration will be given to the provision of new supports for students at primary and second-level (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25126/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Department's approach to supporting wellbeing is set out in its Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice first published in 2018 and refreshed in 2019. The approach proposed is a whole school and preventative approach which has multiple components that include providing children and young people with opportunities to build core social and emotional skills and competencies, experience supportive relationships within the school setting, be part of a school environment and culture that feels both physically and psychologically safe, in which they feel a sense of belonging and connectedness, that their voice is heard, and they feel supported. Schools are encouraged to use a reflective, school self-evaluation approach to identify and prioritise the needs of its own

school community in relation to the promotion of wellbeing and mental health, and to respond to meeting those needs. This approach to supporting wellbeing has been found internationally to produce a wide range of educational and social benefits for individual children and young people, including increased inclusion, greater social cohesion, increased social capital and improvements in mental health. Embedded in the whole-school approach is the recognition that members of the school community may have different needs at different times and that a continuum of support in relation to wellbeing should be made available. A broad range of supports, resources and professional learning opportunities are being provided to support schools to promote and support wellbeing and resilience. The services support schools to provide strong universal support at the level of whole school and classroom, more targeted support for some children and young people who may be at risk, and more individualised support for those with greatest need. Support is provided to primary and post-primary school staff through the following services and supports:

- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Guidance Counselling service/provision
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) Wellbeing Team
- Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) Support Service
- Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI)

At post primary level, a Student Support Team is a student-focused mechanism put in place by a school in order to co-ordinate the support available for students in the school and to facilitate links to the community and other non-school support services. NEPS provides support to post primary schools in the setting up or review of Student Support Teams. Also 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. Guidance allocations for all schools were increased in the 2020/21 school year. The Guidance Counsellor also identifies and supports the referral of students to external counselling agencies and professionals, as required. Each post primary school currently receives an allocation in respect of guidance provision, calculated by reference to the approved enrolment. The total number of guidance counsellor posts in the school year 2020/21 is 852.

Separately, the Department of Health has responsibility for the provision of counselling services in Ireland, and through HSE Primary Care Psychology and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provides clinical support to children and young people with mental health needs. In addition, the HSE and its funded providers, provide e-mental health services that offer online text and telephone supports to people seeking mental health information and advice. These include services provided by the Samaritans, Pieta House, MyMind, Turn2Me, Aware, Crisis Text Ireland, Shine, BeLongTo, LGBT Ireland, Jigsaw, spunout, Bodywhys and Childline.

My Department – through NEPS, Student Support Teams, Guidance Counsellors and other services - will continue to signpost schools and students to the HSE/HSE-funded e-mental health services. The Department has built strong links with the Department of Health and both Departments are exploring ways to improve supports for young people, including around increased awareness, promoting help-seeking behaviour and sign-posting to the wide range of available services. We will continue to collectively explore ways of improving supports for children and young people.

Local Development Companies

169. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans for local development companies that unlike private entities provide a complete wrap-around service for their communities and work on a non for profit basis (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24716/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As part of the July jobs stimulus, the Government committed to increase resources dedicated to the delivery of employment services and to expand the coverage of the local employment type services to areas not currently covered by existing providers. My Department now intends to issue a Request for Tender (RFT) to expand local employment type services into some geographical areas where a Local Employment Service does not currently exist.

The forthcoming RFT will have no impact on the contracts of existing local employment service providers in other areas, including the Wexford Local Employment Service, and it is expected that the tender will prove attractive to local community-based organisations, including the Local Development Companies. My Department has obtained legal advice that employment assistance and advice services must be procured through open competitive procurement processes in line with EU and national procurement rules.

Separately, the current contracts for all contracted Public Employment Service (PES) provision, including the Wexford Local Employment Service, expire at the end of 2021 and my Department is therefore developing RFTs to ensure that sufficient high-quality employment services are procured in a manner that is compatible with EU and national procurement rules.

Organisations, including the Local Development Companies, with strong experience in the delivery of similar services at a community and local level, will be in a strong position to respond to the RFTs when they issue.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

170. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Social Protection if full-time employees over the age of 66 that were working full-time and were required to self-isolate due to testing positive or being a close contact of a person with Covid-19 are eligible for enhanced illness benefit; if not, the reason they being treated differently to a full-time employee under 66 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24735/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Illness Benefit is paid only to people below State pension age, which is currently 66. This is set out in the legislative provisions of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 governing entitlement to the benefit. Amongst other conditions, Section 40 (1) states that a person is only entitled to illness benefit where “(a) the person is under pensionable age on the day for which the benefit is claimed”.

The rules governing eligibility for the enhanced Illness Benefit payment for people diagnosed with Covid-19 are the same as for standard Illness Benefit payment in respect of age, and employees over the age of 66 are therefore not entitled to Illness Benefit or the enhanced Illness Benefit.

A person who is not eligible for Illness Benefit and who is unable to work may be eligible for other payments depending on their circumstances. Supplementary Welfare Allowance is available to people who are ill, who do not qualify for other payments and who have insufficient

means to meet their needs. A person over 66 may qualify for or be in receipt of a State pension contributory or non-contributory.

The Department may also make an exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet from their weekly income. This is administered by this Department's Community Welfare Service and can be accessed by customers through their local Intreo office.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Social Welfare Payments

171. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an underpayment to a person (details supplied) will be examined and the matter clarified. [24768/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The person concerned is in receipt of a mixed insurance pro rata State pension (contributory). Payment of the outstanding amount referred to will issue with their weekly pension on 14 May 2021.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

School Costs

172. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated costs associated with extending the school meals programme to cover early years settings and after-school programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24776/21]

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.

In recent years entry to the School Meals Scheme has been confined to DEIS schools in addition to schools identified as having levels of concentrated disadvantage that would benefit from access to the School Meals Programme.

Prior to the introduction of DEIS in 2005, all schools and organisations that were part of one of a number of Department of Education and Skills' initiatives for disadvantaged schools were eligible to participate in the programme, which included Breaking the Cycle, Giving Children an Even Break, the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme. These schools and organisations have continued to remain in the scheme.

The funding currently provided by the Department to early years settings and after-school programmes is provided in table 1 of the Appendix. The Department does not have a role in terms of oversight of the programmes referred to by the deputy and overall participant numbers would need to be established to calculate the cost of an extension to these programmes.

Any decision to extend the current provision would need to be considered in a budgetary context.

12 May 2021

I trust that this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Total allocation to early year's settings and after-school programmes in 2020/2021

Organisation type	Number of organisations funded	Children benefitting	Total allocation
Crèche / childcare/pre-school	257	9,778	€1,195,074
Afterschool services	10	291	€56,291
Schools and Organisations funded for Afterschool Clubs	243	7,390	€690,555

Social Welfare Benefits

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for supplementary welfare allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24816/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The person concerned made an application for a Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment on 07/05/2021. Unfortunately the application form had to be returned to the person concerned on the same day as it had not been fully completed. When the fully completed application form has been returned with 3 months up-to-date bank statements for all financial accounts held, the application will be assessed and the person concerned will be advised of the outcome.

The rate of Illness Benefit (IB) paid is based on a person's earnings in the second last complete tax year prior to the application date. As the earnings for the person concerned were less than €150 per week in 2019, she qualified for IB at a weekly rate of €91.10. IB was awarded with effect from 22/02/2021 and is currently in payment. The person concerned is certified unfit for work until the 28/05/2021.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Departmental Expenditure

174. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount expended by her Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24935/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department delivered 21 public information campaigns related to COVID-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021. The aim of these campaigns was to increase public awareness of the available income supports and the Department's relevant schemes and services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 public information campaigns in 2020 and 2021 included national and regional print publications, national and regional radio, as well as targeted digital and social media advertising.

The full cost of COVID-19 related public information campaigns from March 2020 to date was €2,165,169.06, excluding VAT, ASAI, agency fees and creative/design costs.

One of these public information campaigns is currently running and has not yet been invoiced.

All public information campaigns are developed and targeted carefully in collaboration with our media buyer using the best mix of media formats to ensure that the Department's messages reach members of the public effectively, while ensuring value for money.

The Department works with a media buying agency, appointed under an OGP framework, in order to plan and buy advertising effectively and has contracted two companies to provide this service during 2020 and 2021: MEC/Wavemaker Global and Mediavest Ltd. t/a Sparkfoundry.

During the period March 2020 to October 2020 MEC/Wavemaker Global was contracted to provide this service and €1,588,330.93 was the amount provided for COVID-19 campaigns.

From October 2020 Spark Foundry is contracted to provide this service and to date €576,838.13 is the amount provided for COVID-19 campaigns.

The figures outlined above are excluding VAT, ASAI, and agency fees and are those which have been invoiced to date 10 May 2021. Additional invoices are still due on one ongoing campaign.

Social Welfare Benefits

175. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount spent in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021 on housing assistance payments, rent supplements and any other payment related to housing or rent in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24955/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Rent supplement continues to play a key role in supporting families and individuals in private rented accommodation, with the scheme currently supporting 19,570 active recipients.

The scheme provides short-term income support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. The scheme ensures that those who were renting, but whose circumstances have changed due to temporary loss of employment or income, can continue to meet their rental commitments

Since the introduction of HAP, rent supplement continues to revert to its original role of providing short-term support to those who have become temporarily unemployed and require income support to meet their tenancy cost whilst they seek alternative employment.

Under the SWA scheme, my Department can make a single Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The ENP 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.

The tabular statement attached provides a summary of Department of Social Protection expenditure, as requested, for the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021.

My department does not have any role to the Housing Assistance Payment which is administered by Local Authorities.

Expenditure 2018-2020 and to date in 2021.

	Rent Supplement	Exceptional Needs Payment – Housing
2018	€175.0m	€20.0m
2019	€125.2m	€27.5m
2020	€133.1m	€27.9m
2021 Jan-April	€48.5m	€10.3m

Note: ENP Housing expenditure captured in the above tabular statement covers ENPs related to: Rent Deposits, Rent in Advance, Household Appliances, Bedding, Flooring, Furniture, Repairs and Maintenance, and ‘New Accommodation Kit Outs’.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

176. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when pandemic unemployment payment arrears will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25019/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that calculation of the customer’s arrears has recently been completed and payment of €1,200 will be made to the person concerned on May 18.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

177. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider extending end dates for persons in receipt of the back to enterprise allowance in view of the fact that such persons’ businesses have been closed and non-operational during the Covid-19 pandemic and for persons whose allowance runs out in 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25020/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme offers support for people who are long-term unemployed and who are interested in self-employment as a route to entering the labour market. The scheme plays a vital role in supporting the development of new enterprises for the long term unemployed. The BTWEA is payable to self-employed individuals for up to 24 months from the commencement of their new business.

Those in self-employment may have other income support options available from the Department depending on their circumstances. A BTWEA participant, whose 24 month payment comes to an end while their business continues to be impacted by current trading conditions, may continue to be entitled to the Pandemic Unemployment Payment or the means-tested Job-seeker’s Allowance payment.

If there is a particular case that the Deputy has a concern about, my officials would be happy to examine it and advise of the options available.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

State Pensions

178. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for a State pension by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [25127/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The person concerned reached pension age on 9 January 2021. An application for State pension (contributory) has not been received to date.

On receipt of an application the person's State pension (contributory) entitlement will be examined by a Deciding Officer and they will be notified of the outcome. Determination of pension eligibility depends on the individual nature of an applicant's circumstances.

Current social welfare legislation on late claims stipulates that claims may only be backdated for a maximum of 6 months. If eligibility is determined, this aspect will then be considered by the Deciding Officer.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

International Agreements

179. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if or when the second optional protocol on the UNCRC which includes the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography will be ratified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24819/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): My Department made a comprehensive submission to the Attorney General's Office in 2019 seeking confirmation as to whether Ireland was in a position to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The advice received from the AGO stated that while Ireland is largely compliant with the terms of the Protocol, there are some outstanding issues that need to be resolved before the State can proceed to ratification.

My Department has been liaising closely with the Department of Justice and Equality as the outstanding issues identified by the AGO fall within their remit.

We hope to resolve these issues as soon as possible and I will subsequently seek Government approval for ratification at the earliest opportunity.

Children in Care

180. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of young persons in care who have had complaints filed against them by the agency or the residential in which they reside; the number of young persons in care who have been charged with criminal damage relating to their placement; and if Tusla has policies in place to assist social workers and social care managers in relation to charging young persons in care that assault staff or damage units. [24762/21]

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.

Childcare Services

181. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if his attention has been drawn to the particular vulnerability of childcare services that provide afterschool care owing to a continuing reduction in income caused by Covid-19 restrictions and remote working by parents; and if his Department will draw up an urgent plan to ensure the sustainability of these essential services. [24774/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I am aware of the challenges facing school-age childcare, as well as early learning and care services, caused by the ongoing pandemic. Support is available to concerned services through Case Management. My Department oversees a Case Management process through which local CCCs and Pobal work together to assess and provide support to early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) services experiencing difficulties. Pobal co-ordinate the overall case management process with the CCC administering on-the-ground case management assistance. This can include help with completing and interpreting analysis of staff ratios, fee setting and cash flow, as well as more specialised advice and support appropriate to individual circumstances.

Financial supports, which may also be accessed through the Case Management process, are available for community services presenting with sustainability issues following a financial assessment by Pobal.

Normally, financial supports are only available for community services. However, there is a COVID-19 Impact Support funding strand available in 2021, which is for both Community and Private services. The funding will be available on a rolling basis throughout 2021 for eligible ELC and SAC services that require further financial assistance in addition to current support measures available and others that may be announced throughout the year.

The CCC should be the first point of contact for any service seeking support; I would therefore urge any SAC or ELC service in difficulty to contact their local CCC as soon as possible if they have not done so already.

Direct Provision System

182. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the engagement he has had with the Minister for Health on healthcare workers ordinarily residing in direct provision and who are availing of the temporary accommodation scheme being requested to move to unsuitable accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24836/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): As the Deputy may be aware, the closure or otherwise of temporary accommodation premises for the housing of frontline healthcare workers operated by the HSE is entirely a matter for the HSE.

The Social Inclusion Office of the HSE has assured the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) of my Department that there are no plans to discontinue its accom-

modation scheme and has further agreed with the IPAS to inform them of any changes to, or cessation of, the HSE accommodation scheme which may necessitate the return of international protection applicants to IPAS accommodation. IPAS will continue to engage with the HSE to ensure that arrangements to re-accommodate applicants in their original IPAS accommodation, or as close to it as possible, can be made in advance.

Since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, IPAS has made every effort to retain accommodation for residents who chose to avail of the HSE temporary accommodation scheme or who decided to move to other temporary accommodation during the pandemic. However, it has not been possible in every case to retain the original accommodation. For instance, where the accommodation premises is no longer retained under contract with my Department or where a centre has been re-profiled in terms of its room make-up to meet changing demands, the accommodation may no longer be available.

Another issue that has arisen is that IPAS has not always been made aware that a resident who left their IPAS accommodation centre was working in the healthcare sector and left to take up accommodation in temporary HSE accommodation. In such cases, the resident's original accommodation may not have been retained. In these circumstances, the healthcare workers would be required to re-apply for IPAS accommodation.

In such circumstances, IPAS will endeavour to ensure that alternative like-for-like accommodation is provided as close as possible to their previous accommodation. Persons who wish to return to their IPAS accommodation should engage with the IPAS as soon as possible to ensure that the most appropriate accommodation available is provided. Any resident returning to IPAS accommodation must quarantine in an IPAS isolation facility for a period of 14 days prior to moving to IPAS accommodation. This is to reduce the risk of Covid infection within accommodation centres.

Departmental Expenditure

183. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the time-frame concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24923/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The following are the amounts expended by the Department on advertising and awareness-raising initiatives directly on foot of COVID-19, from March 2020 to-date.

Department Initiative	Media Organisation	Total Spend
Reopening of Childcare	Inventive Marketing Ltd t/a KICK Communications	€2,804
Reopening of Childcare	Mindshare Media Ireland	€54,679
First 5 Resources	Inventive Marketing Ltd t/a KICK Communications	€873
Early Years	Inventive Marketing Ltd t/a KICK Communications	€57,958
Let’s Get Ready	Mindshare Media Ireland	€4,059
Supporting Children	Mindshare Media Ireland	€202,784

Childcare Services

184. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of childcare providers by county; and the current capacity of

same by county in tabular form. [25026/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The supply of, and demand for, ELC and SAC places is currently monitored annually through the Early Years Sector Profile report. This survey is conducted by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Data from the 2018/2019 programme year, indicates that existing childcare provision, in general, meets current demand nationwide in terms of capacity, whilst recognising that small pockets of under supply may exist within this.

In 2018/2019, 4,598 services were contracted to deliver at least one (then DCYA) funded programme.

The Early Years Sector Profile report also provides numbers of services at a Local Authority level.

The breakdown can be seen in Table 1.

Capacity within the sector is calculated using figures reported by the services on the number of children enrolled and vacant places (capacity is the sum of children enrolled and vacant places).

The overall reported capacity of the sector in 2018/19 was 188,705. The Early Years Sector Profile report 2018/2019 had a response rate of 85%. This can then be extrapolated to a national capacity of 218,745, a 2% increase on the previous year.

The Early Years Sector Profile report also provides reported capacity at a Local Authority level. These figures are not extrapolated. These figures can be found in Table 2.

My Department continues to monitor the data from the Early Years Sector Profile report closely to inform policy going forward. The Pobal Early Years Sector Profile can be found at <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/Annual-Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-AEYSPR-2018-19.pdf>. The 2019/2020 report is due to be published this summer.

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 ELC and SAC. 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 ELC and SAC 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 ELC and SAC also seeks to address issues of accessibility.

More information can be found at: <https://first5.gov.ie/>

Table 1

Questions - Written Answers

County	Number of Providers
Carlow	54
Cavan	67
Clare	138
Cork City	96
Cork County	388
Donegal	154
Dublin-Dublin City	445
Dublin-Dun-Laoghaire-Rathdown	185
Dublin –Fingal	326
Dublin- South Dublin	255
Galway	288
Kerry	138
Kildare	201
Kilkenny	100
Laois	85
Leitrim	37
Limerick	201
Longford	36
Louth	120
Mayo	136
Meath	196
Monaghan	61
Offaly	71
Roscommon	58
Sligo	76
Tipperary	180
Waterford	95
Westmeath	89
Wexford	146
Wicklow	176

Table 2

County	Current capacity per county (enrolled and vacant places)
Carlow	2608
Cavan	3536
Clare	4798
Cork City	4435
Cork County	16411
Donegal	7859
Dublin-Dublin City	16732
Dublin-Dun-Laoghaire-Rathdown	7196
Dublin –Fingal	11678
Dublin- South Dublin	9742
Galway	11428
Kerry	5792

County	Current capacity per county (enrolled and vacant places)
Kildare	9731
Kilkenny	4033
Laois	3540
Leitrim	1654
Limerick	7920
Longford	1787
Louth	5164
Mayo	4500
Meath	7976
Monaghan	4068
Offaly	2979
Roscommon	2843
Sligo	3687
Tipperary	7207
Waterford	4723
Westmeath	3835
Wexford	5994
Wicklow	4849

Childcare Services

185. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of childcare providers in County Kildare; the current capacity of each in tabular form; and his plans to increase provision of childcare services in the county in view of the expanding population and development in the county. [25027/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The supply of, and demand for, ELC and SAC places is currently monitored annually through the Early Years Sector Profile report. This survey is conducted by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Data from the 2018/2019 programme year, indicates that existing childcare provision, in general, meets current demand nationwide in terms of capacity, whilst recognising that small pockets of under supply may exist within this.

In 2018/2019, 4,598 services were contracted to deliver at least one (then DCYA) funded programme. The Early Years Sector Profile report also provides numbers of services at a Local Authority level. In 2018/19 services 201 services were recorded in Kildare. My Department cannot disclose service level data.

Capacity within the sector is calculated using figures reported by the services on the number of children enrolled and vacant places (capacity is the sum of children enrolled and vacant places). The overall reported capacity of the sector in 2018/19 was 188,705. The Early Years Sector Profile report 2018/2019 had a response rate of 85%. This can then be extrapolated to a national capacity of 218,745, a 2% increase on the previous year. The Early Years Sector Profile report also provides reported capacity at a Local Authority level. These figures are not extrapolated. The reported capacity for County Kildare in 2018/2019 was 9731.

My Department continues to monitor the data from the Early Years Sector Profile report closely to inform policy. The Pobal Early Years Sector Profile can be found at <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/Annual-Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-AEYSPR-2018-19.pdf>. The 2019/2020 report is due to be published this summer.

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 ELC and SAC. 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 underway, including an update of the National Planning Guidelines for the development of ELC and SAC 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 ELC and SAC also seeks to address issues of accessibility.

More information can be found at: <https://first5.gov.ie/>

Childcare Services

186. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of facilities in north County Kildare in receipt of ECCE funds and the other childcare schemes supported by his Department. [25028/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): My Department funds numerous childcare schemes to help parents’ access quality childcare at a more affordable cost, these include:

- The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) which launched in November 2019 and replaced a number of pre-existing childcare support programmes and the universal childcare subsidy with a single scheme to help parents meet the cost of quality childcare,

- Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) programme helps parents on lower incomes to access childcare at a reduced cost in participating privately owned childcare services,

- The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme is a universal free preschool programme available to all children for up to 2 years before starting primary school.

As of 10th May 2021, there were 184 services in Kildare with one or more children registered on NCS, ECCE and/or CCSP/U.

Pobal records service data by county and not by electoral division, therefore data specific to North Kildare is not available.

Early Childhood Care and Education

187. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if his Department’s initiative for the early learning and school age care sector (details supplied) will be completed or at an advanced stage in time for budget 2022

negotiations; if it will provide the basis for an increase in investment in childcare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25093/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): *First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families*, published in November 2018, sets out an ambitious programme of work across Government Departments to improve the experiences and outcomes of children in Ireland from birth to age 5 across all aspects of their lives in the coming ten years. Included in *First 5* is a commitment to designing a new Funding Model to improve the affordability, accessibility and quality of early learning and care and school-age childcare.

In September 2019, my predecessor announced the establishment of an Expert Group to develop the new Funding Model. The Expert Group is tasked with examining the current model of funding and its effectiveness in delivering quality, affordable, sustainable and inclusive services. The group is considering how additional resourcing can be delivered for the sector to achieve these objectives, drawing on international practice in this area. Since their first meeting in November 2019, the Expert Group has met fifteen times and they have made significant progress in their work.

To support the Expert Group’s work, Frontier Economics was selected to deliver a significant programme of research to the Expert Group. Frontier Economics has delivered eight research papers to inform the Expert Group’s work, covering international comparisons and funding approaches, staffing, affordability mechanisms, access and inclusion, quality, and collaboration.

The Expert Group is also undertaking consultation and engagement with stakeholders. Phase 1 of this consultation and engagement took place between August and December 2020, comprising a call for submissions, a parental poll, two webinars and focused discussions with providers, practitioners and parents. Phases 2 and 3 of consultation and engagement is ongoing, involving a series of facilitated events that bring together different perspectives to engage deeply in the conversation about how the various issues of affordability, sustainability, quality and inclusion interact and how the new Funding Model can best support these objectives.

Work also continues to progress on the development of a Workforce Development Plan (WDP) for the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector. The first phase of the WDP concluded in late 2020. A report on phase one of the WDP is being finalised before publication in the near future.

Phase two of the WDP, which began in February 2021, involves the preparation of detailed policy proposals to be prepared by five working groups during 2021. These working groups will submit final reports in July 2021 for consideration by the Steering and Stakeholder Groups of the Workforce Development Plan, before a final WDP report is published at the end of 2021.

It is expected that a report on the Expert Group’s recommendations on the new Funding Model will be submitted to me in November 2021 for consideration before submission to wider Government. I anticipate that both the work of the Expert Group and Workforce Development Plan will contribute to informing the Budget 2022 process. *First 5* commits to at least doubling investment in early learning and care and school-age childcare by 2028 and the new Funding Model will be a key vehicle to ensure that such significant additional investment delivers for children, families and the State.

Material relating to the Funding Model, including meeting papers, research papers, and reports, is available on a dedicated website, www.first5fundingmodel.ie.

Questions - Written Answers
Ombudsman for Children

188. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his response to the finding (details supplied) in the Ombudsman for Children's report Safety and Welfare of Children in Direct Provision. [25165/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): I welcome the Report of the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) "Safety and Welfare of Children in Direct Provision" and my Department accepts its recommendations in full.

The International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) of my Department has embarked upon a series of actions, planned for the short to medium term which will build upon existing work to ensure the recommendations of the OCO will be implemented as quickly as possible.

IPAS and Tusla have committed to increased collaboration and coordination in the coming period. IPAS will continue to work with Tusla during 2021 to develop interagency protocols and operating procedures that will support the sharing of case information between Tusla and IPAS and to track and monitor referrals and cases from beginning to end.

A new Resident Welfare Team has recently been established within IPAS to case-manage individual families, and single residents, identified as having special reception needs and to ensure that those needs continue to be identified and addressed in the most appropriate way possible. The Resident Welfare Team will be a multi-disciplinary team with experts from the fields of education, health and childcare seconded. Additional resources have been sanctioned to support the work of this team and recruitment is underway.

All existing centres and all new centres are required to develop a child safeguarding statement. IPAS will work with Tusla to ensure compliance with child safeguarding statements and Children First legislation. An IPAS Audit of compliance will also take place this year in cooperation with Tusla. IPAS will be ensuring that child safeguarding statements are translated and made available to all residents. Additional child safety training will also be rolled out to all centre managers as COVID restrictions allow.

I note the discrepancy in the figures mentioned in the report referenced by the Deputy. The difference between the number of cases recorded by IPAS as referred to Tusla and the number of cases recorded by Tusla relating to children resident in IPAS accommodation between April 2017 and July 2020 arises because the Child and Family Services unit of IPAS is only notified of referrals that have originated from IPAS dedicated and temporary accommodation centres and from the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) for Programme Refugees. IPAS is not notified of individual referrals made to Tusla by schools, hospitals, sports clubs and members of the public as IPAS is not the designated authority to which such reports should be made. Nor is it appropriate for IPAS officials or centre management to be party to details of such family matters where it has no legislative authority.

Since the recent publication of the report, Tusla has committed to publishing its Direct Provision Policy for 2021 for all staff working with children and families living in Direct Provision accommodation. The Policy states that each Direct Provision accommodation centre will have a named point of contact within the relevant Tusla area.

In addition, Tusla is reviewing its IT system to plan for the next stage of the development of the National Child Care Information System (NCCIS) and consideration will be given to enable referrals for children living in IPAS accommodation, along with other specified groups of

children, to be tracked on a national basis.

Student Accommodation

189. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the status of progress towards the objectives of the student accommodation strategy in view of the disruption to the construction sector over 2020 and to date in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25143/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Student Accommodation Strategy (NSAS) was published in 2017 and is designed to support the delivery of an increased level of supply of purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) by reducing planning barriers for public and private sector developers of student accommodation and seeking to address financing barriers for our higher education institutions. The aim is to reduce the cost to the student by ensuring that there is a sufficient level of accommodation to meet future demand. The target as set out in *Rebuilding Ireland* and the NSAS is the provision of 7,000 bed spaces by end 2019 and a total of 21,000 additional PBSA beds by 2024. The 2019 target was surpassed, with 8,346 bed spaces completed by the end of the year. As of the end of 2020 more than 10,000 bed spaces have been completed.

However there has been a slowdown in construction in the student accommodation sector, as there has been throughout the construction industry, due to the impact of COVID-19. As Ireland continues to progress with the re-opening of the economy, it would be expected that the number of student accommodation projects being completed or moving on-site would once again increase. My Department will continue to carefully monitor the situation in order to ensure a strong supply pipeline for student accommodation. As the Deputy is aware, my position is the current policy needs reflecting on and I am working with colleagues across Government on this.

Third Level Education

190. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will advise on a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); if it is possible for student to elect to graduate early with a level 7 BA degree instead of continuing for a further year during a level 8 BA Hons course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24805/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): Waterford Institute of Technology is autonomous within the meaning the Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006. Under this legislation WIT is independent and is entitled to regulate its own academic affairs and administrative processes, including in relation to the awarding of degrees. It is not within my remit to intervene in these matters.

WIT is a prescribed public body under the remit of the Office of the Ombudsman and as such the Ombudsman may examine complaints from members of the public who believe that they have been unfairly treated by certain prescribed bodies. If a student feels that they have been unfairly treated by or are not satisfied with a higher education institution's decision, it is open to them to contact the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about administrative actions or procedures as well as undue delays or inaction. The Ombudsman provides an impartial, independent and free dispute resolution service.

Departmental Contracts

191. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24930/21]

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department expended €13,032.86 to date 2021 in respect of the “Covid-19 and young people” campaign, and €6251.24 in support of the “Keep it Small, Keep it Safe, Keep your Distance” social media campaign in 2020.

These were social media campaigns and were serviced on behalf of the department by PHD media.

No further spend on either campaign is currently envisaged by the department.

Departmental Data

192. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 147 of 6 May 2021, if his Department or an agency under his aegis monitors the price of Safepass courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24940/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): SafePass training is delivered by private training organisations which have been approved by SOLAS to deliver training. Course fees are determined by these Approved Training Organisations (ATOs) and the Department and SOLAS have no role in the setting of fees for SafePass courses or in influencing pricing structure within the market place. As such, the prices of courses are not monitored on an ongoing basis.

SafePass courses are currently being delivered in compliance with strict COVID-19 measures which include a reduction in maximum numbers of learners who may physically attend a course. In a number of cases this has led to a temporary increase in course costs for individual learners.

Housing Issues

193. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice the steps that can be taken to prevent management companies from imposing significant increases in management fees on residents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24822/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 was enacted with the primary purposes of reforming the law relating to the ownership and management of common areas of multi-unit developments and facilitating the fair, efficient and effective management of owners’ management companies (OMCs). These are companies registered under the Companies Acts, the members of which are the owners of residential units within the development, which are established for the purposes of ownership and management of such common areas.

In relation to annual service charges, it is a matter for each individual OMC to determine the amount of the service charge on an annual basis. Section 18 of the Act requires OMCs to establish and maintain a scheme of annual service charges from which they may discharge expenditure incurred on the provision of common or shared services to the owners and occupiers of residential units in the development, including insurance, waste management and security services. The Act sets out clearly that the service charge must be calculated on a transparent basis, and be equitably apportioned between the residential unit owners. In order to ensure transparency and accountability, both the annual service charge and the services to be provided must be approved by a general meeting of the members of the OMC.

Section 24 of the Act contains provisions for the resolution of disputes relating to multi-unit developments. It provides that a person, including any member of an OMC, may apply to the Circuit Court for an Order to enforce any rights conferred or obligations imposed by the Act. The Court, if satisfied that a right has been infringed or an obligation has not been discharged, may make such remedial order as it deems appropriate in the circumstances with a view to ensuring the effective enforcement of the right or the effective discharge of the obligation. The Act also contains provisions which encourage the resolution of disputes that may arise between parties by means of mediation rather than recourse to court proceedings.

Housing Issues

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice if it will be ensured that buyers and prospective buyers who have paid their deposit and signed contracts for houses at Mullen Park, Maynooth, County Kildare are not affected or impeded by investment companies who might seek to increase the price of the houses by various means; if it will be ensured that those seeking to provide a home for themselves can expect to have their rights vindicated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25029/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A “Contract of sale” for those buying and selling a property specifies exactly what is being sold and the terms and conditions of a sale. A contract, once signed by both parties, binds the parties to the completion of the transaction. Disputes regarding contracts are a matter for the law and the courts.

“Gazumping” occurs where there has been an oral pre-contract agreement between a buyer and a seller, including the payment of an initial “booking deposit”, for the sale of property at a particular price and, subsequently, the seller either:

- Refuses to execute a formal contract of sale to the buyer in question and sells to someone else for a higher price; or
- Refuses to execute a formal contract of sale to the buyer in question unless the buyer agrees to pay a higher price.

The non-enforceable relationship between the original parties is preserved by use of the term “subject to contract”.

The problems associated with gazumping were examined in detail by the Law Reform Commission in its 1999 “Report on Gazumping” (LRC 59-1999). The Commission noted that delays arising between the conclusion of negotiations and completion of the formal contract were usually for the benefit of the intending purchaser, for example, to ensure the availability of funding for that property, or to ascertain if there were any legal difficulties in relation to the title. The Commission concluded that the only practicable reforms were to improve the information available to intending purchasers and to regulate the terms according to which booking deposits

are paid and accepted. It did not recommend any specific legislative reforms to the legal framework within which gazumping occurs.

There are no plans at present to introduce or amend legislation in this area. However, as with other policy and legislative reforms, interested parties are welcome to make submissions on this matter.

The Property Services Regulatory Authority, which was established under the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011, published a detailed “Guide for Users of Property Services Providers in Ireland” which explains the legal position in relation to gazumping and related matters such as payment of deposits and signing of contracts. The Guide is available on the Authority’s website at: *www.psr.ie*.

Visa Applications

195. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice the alternative arrangements that have been put in place to allow persons (details supplied) applying for a GNIB card for the first time to submit an application while the Burgh Quay Registration Office is closed. [24722/21]

196. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice when the Burgh Quay Registration Office will reopen for appointments. [24734/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 196 together.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Burgh Quay Registration Office reopened earlier this week on Monday, 10 May 2021.

Customers who had their appointments cancelled when the Office closed in December under Level 5 restrictions are being contacted directly by the Immigration Service of my Department to arrange a new appointment date.

All other first time registrations will be carried out by appointment only and the online appointments system opened to accept bookings from last Thursday, 6 May 2021, at: <https://burghquayregistrationoffice.inis.gov.ie>.

It is not possible to complete first time registrations online because customers need to have their photograph and fingerprints taken during the registration process. However, while waiting to register in the Dublin area, customers are covered by the extension of immigration permissions to 20 September 2021. This means that all those legally in the State in March 2020 when the pandemic began can remain in the State until 20 September 2021.

Registrations outside of the Dublin area are processed by the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) through the Garda Station network.

Further details can be found on the Immigration Service website *www.inis.gov.ie* along with a Frequently Asked Questions document.

Question No. 196 answered with Question No. 195.

Asylum Applications

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the procedure to be fol-

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lowed to regularise status in the case of a person (details supplied); if recent updates regarding work references have been taken into account in determination of a conclusion on the case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24753/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): For reasons of maintaining full confidentiality, it is not my Department's practice to comment on whether an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State. An applicant for such protection status, or their legal representative, should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted: by email to info@ipo.gov.ie; by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

The IPAT may be contacted either: by email to info@protectionappeals.ie; by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

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.

Departmental Data

198. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice further to Parliamentary Question No. 638 of 10 February 2021, if the further information requested from An Garda Síochána in relation to localised data is now available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24791/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from An Garda Síochána, but unfortunately I have yet to received the desired data. I will write to the Deputy as soon as the required information is to hand.

Departmental Data

199. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the number of fixed charge notices issued by An Garda Síochána in each of the years 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021 by Garda district and division to learner drivers for the offence of driving unaccompanied by a qualified driver; the number of drivers that failed to pay the fixed charge notice in each year; the number of drivers summoned to court for failure to pay; the number of drivers convicted each year by district court and penalties imposed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24793/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Courts Service and An Garda Síochána, but I have not received this information in time. I will write to the Deputy as soon as the information is to hand.

Departmental Data

200. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the number of drivers issued with a fixed charge notice for driving while holding a mobile phone by Garda division in each of the years 2018 to 2020; the number of drivers per year that failed to pay the fixed charge notice; the number of drivers that were summoned to court for failure to pay by District Court in each of the years 2018 to 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24795/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities on the information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of drivers issued with a fixed charge notice for driving while holding a mobile phone by Garda division in each of the years 2018 to 2020; and the number of drivers per year that failed to pay the fixed charge notice. Unfortunately, this report was not available in time and I will write to the Deputy once the report is to hand.

As the Deputy will be aware, there are no summons issued for the failure to pay a Fixed Charge Notice within the statutory payment window. Rather, a person who chooses to exercise their right to not pay the Fixed Charge Penalty will be summonsed to Court for the offence for which the Fixed Charge Notice was originally issued - in the case of the information requested, the offence of driving whilst holding a mobile phone.

I have contacted the Courts Service and have been advised that the following table shows the number of persons before the courts and finalised for the offence of driving while holding a mobile phone by District Court for the periods Jan – Dec 2018, Jan – Dec 2019, Jan - Dec 2020 and Jan – 31 March 2021.

It should be noted that a defendant may be listed in more than one Court Area for each year and such defendants would be displayed more than once in this report:

Court Area	Jan - Dec 2018 No. of persons	Jan - Dec 2019No. of persons	Jan - Dec 2020No. of Persons	Jan - 31 Mar 2021No. of Persons
ACAILL	-	0	0	1
AN CLOCHAN LIATH	-	3	1	0
AN DAINGEAN	1	1	0	0
AN FAL CARRACH	-	1	0	1
ARDEE	25	36	12	0
ARKLOW	13	24	11	0
ATHLONE	40	42	25	3
ATHY	12	20	10	3
BALLAGHADER-REEN	5	2	0	1
BALLINA	11	43	34	7
BALLINASLOE	15	19	20	13
BALLYSHANNON	14	4	6	3
BANDON	73	46	27	13
BANTRY	9	10	6	2
BEAL AN MHUIRT-HEAD	3	5	1	1
BRAY	43	78	44	4
BUNCRANA	20	32	31	5
CAHIRCIVEEN	-	3	4	0
CARLOW	59	93	104	49
CARNDONAGH	6	3	3	0
CARRICK ON SHANNON	19	36	19	8

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Court Area	Jan - Dec 2018 No. of persons	Jan - Dec 2019No. of persons	Jan - Dec 2020No. of Persons	Jan - 31 Mar 2021No. of Persons
CARRICK ON SUIR	6	5	1	7
CARRICKMACROSS	100	81	31	8
CASHEL	58	39	22	8
CASTLEBAR	37	65	90	8
CASTLEREA	4	4	1	0
CAVAN	48	65	44	12
CLIFDEN	3	4	4	1
CLONAKILTY	13	15	8	0
CLONMEL	33	18	16	10
CORK CITY	303	371	190	97
DOIRE AN FHEICH	2	2	5	0
DONEGAL	10	9	3	1
DROGHEDA	57	45	41	3
DUBLIN METROPOLITAN DISTRICT	1211	1,431	821	228
DUNDALK	35	50	35	3
DUNGARVAN	16	39	17	15
ENNIS	145	109	51	25
FERMOY	54	45	20	8
GALWAY	349	272	176	30
GOREY	69	147	61	33
GORT	69	32	13	0
KILCOCK	31	23	0	0
KILKENNY	106	121	55	42
KILLALOE	14	11	4	5
KILLARNEY	68	69	26	1
KILLORGLIN	9	2	1	0
KILRUSH	7	15	7	3
LETTERKENNY	23	31	49	12
LIMERICK	525	430	295	33
LISMORE	6	9	4	1
LISTOWEL	38	15	17	2
LONGFORD	30	55	40	13
LOUGHREA	54	43	20	11
MACROOM	95	44	17	2
MALLOW	73	56	61	25
MANORHAMILTON	1	2	0	0
MEATH	97	114	78	45
MIDLETON	59	94	68	1
MONAGHAN	25	19	12	4
MULLINGAR	38	23	8	1
NA GLEANNTA	-		1	0
NAAS	207	340	157	49
NENAGH	7	26	26	14
NEWCASTLE WEST	120	93	53	13
PORTLAOISE	99	198	66	46
ROSCOMMON	26	32	19	6
SKIBBEREEN	4	1	1	0
SLIGO	48	106	42	0
STROKESTOWN	15	6	3	0
THURLES	35	48	26	17
TIPPERARY	33	24	9	6
TRALEE	91	121	96	5

Questions - Written Answers

Court Area	Jan - Dec 2018 No. of persons	Jan - Dec 2019No. of persons	Jan - Dec 2020No. of Persons	Jan - 31 Mar 2021No. of Persons
TUAM	22	51	27	3
TUBBERCURRY	14	15	13	0
TULLAMORE	46	64	38	20
VIRGINIA	20	41	31	18
WATERFORD CITY	93	176	112	23
WESTPORT	15	5	0	0
WEXFORD	117	166	115	56
WICKLOW	21	37	28	1
YOUGHAL	5	6	2	0
Total no of Persons	5,327	6,081	3,635	1,089

Departmental Data

201. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if PULSE was updated in 2019 providing a field whereby gardaí must report the reason a vehicle was seized under section 41 of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018 to include the offence of driving while disqualified; if data can now be provided through this avenue to give the number of vehicles and drivers who had their vehicles seized for driving while disqualified as a result of being stopped by gardaí; the number seized in each of the years 2018 to 2020 by Garda district; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24796/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from An Garda Síochána, but I have not received the response in time. I will write to the Deputy as soon as the required information is to hand.

Visa Applications

202. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice the position regarding visa applications by South African nationals to come to Ireland during the current Covid-19 restrictions; when normal visa application services will resume; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24861/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): As part of Government efforts to tackle the pandemic, in January 2021 new visa requirements on passport holders from a number of South American countries and South Africa were introduced and the Immigration Service of my Department also took the decision to temporarily cease accepting new visa/preclearance applications from all countries, with the exception of the Priority/Emergency case types listed below.

Priority/emergency cases from all nationalities will continue to be accepted/processed and these include the following:

- Workers or self-employed persons exercising critical occupations including healthcare workers, frontier and posted workers as well as seasonal workers as referred to in the Guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers during the COVID-19 outbreak;
- transport workers or transport service providers, including drivers of freight vehicles carrying goods for use in the territory as well as those merely transiting;
- patients travelling for imperative medical reasons;

- pupils, students and trainees who travel abroad on a daily basis and Third-country nationals travelling for the purpose of 3rd level study;
- persons travelling for imperative family or business reasons;
- diplomats, staff of international organisations and people invited by international organisations whose physical presence is required for the well-functioning of these organisations, military personnel and police officers, and humanitarian aid workers and civil protection personnel in the exercise of their functions;
- passengers in transit;
- seafarers;
- journalists, when performing their duties.

If a person's application falls into one of these categories, they can apply on-line in the usual way. However, before proceeding with an on-line application, they should check with their local Embassy/Honorary Consulate/Visa Office to confirm that their application meets the priority/emergency criteria as outlined.

These measures are designed to support our current public health restrictions on movement, including into and out of Ireland. The increased travel restrictions, along with the mandatory hotel quarantine measures introduced as part of the Government's efforts to interrupt the transmission of COVID-19, means that travel may not be possible and even if possible is not advisable unless absolutely essential.

When making such decisions, the Government considers the expert public health advices of NPHET to tackle the disease. The situation will continue to be reviewed in consultation with the relevant authorities in the coming weeks.

Antisocial Behaviour

203. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice her plans to amend the Children (Amendment) Act 2021, the Criminal Justice Act 2006 and the Children (Amendment) Act 2015 with a view to lowering the age definition of a child from 18 years in order to make children involved in serious and violent incidents of antisocial behaviour more accountable for their actions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24870/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): I am very conscious of how the impact of anti-social behaviour affects the quality of life for local communities. Preventing children getting involved in criminality, as well as diverting children away from it when they have already become involved, is a key priority for my Department. Both the Programme for Government and the Justice Plan 2021 contain a number of commitments with regard to tackling anti-social behaviour.

In line with a commitment in the Programme for Government, I have established a special expert forum on antisocial behaviour, which is considering the effectiveness of existing legislation and looking at potential new ways forward, including new powers for An Garda Síochána and additional interventions to support parenting of offenders. A subgroup of this forum has already examined the issue of misuse of scramblers and quadbikes and this work has informed the development of a new scheme aimed at tackling this issue in local areas.

As the Deputy may be aware, I also launched a new Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 on 15

April. Youth crime, including anti-social behaviour, can have a major impact on our communities and poses significant challenges for An Garda Síochána, as well as other Justice agencies. The factors which underlie youth crime have significant implications across a range of policy and service provisions, including Child and Family Services, Health, Education and local authority functions.

This new Strategy will respond collaboratively to the situation of vulnerable children and youngpeople, with a strong focus on diverting them away from offending, prevention and early intervention and family support, through to court processes and facilities, supervision of offenders, detention and reintegration and support post release.

Separately, as the Deputy will be aware, my Department has been developing a new community safety policy to reflect the findings and recommendations contained in the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. The Commission found that community safety requires a whole of Government approach in partnership with local communities. This new policy will be given a statutory basis in a new Policing, Security and Community Safety Bill, the General Scheme of which was recently approved by Government. To support and inform the policy, three Local Community Safety Partnerships are being piloted in Dublin's North Inner City, Waterford and Longford and will run for the next two years. The Partnerships will allow local communities to identify issues of particular concern within their area and work with the relevant State services to develop a local Community Safety Plan to specifically tackle these issues.

There are no plans at this time to amend the Children (Amendment) Act 2021, the Criminal Justice Act 2006 or the Children (Amendment) Act 2015 in the manner referred to by the Deputy.

Departmental Data

204. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Justice the number of community policing gardaí by rank attached to each station in County Louth in each of the past five years, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24945/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 (as amended), the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is made in light of identified operational demands. This includes deployment of personnel among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter. I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of policing priorities and crime trends, to ensure their optimum use.

To date, the official categorisation as a Community Garda has simply referred to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society including giving talks to schools, community groups and others. However, it is important to note that community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána and that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. Indeed, this has never been more evident than in the work carried out by all members of the Gardaí as we have tackled the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the below table, which has been provided to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of Community Gardaí attached to stations in County Louth in each of the past five years:

Louth Community Gardaí			
Community Garda @ 31/12/2017			
Station	Sergeant	Garda	Total
Drogheda	1	5	6
Dundalk	1	5	6
Total	2	10	12
Community Garda @31/12/2018			
Station	Sergeant	Garda	Total
Drogheda	1	5	6
Dundalk	1	6	7
Total	2	11	13
Community Garda @ 31/12/2019			
Station	Sergeant	Garda	Total
Drogheda	1	5	6
Dundalk	1	4	5
Total	2	9	11
Community Garda @ 31/12/2020			
Station	Sergeant	Garda	Total
Drogheda	1	8	9
Dundalk	1	5	6
Total	2	13	15
Community Garda @ 31/03/2021			
Station	Sergeant	Garda	Total
Drogheda	1	8	9
Dundalk	1	5	6
Total	2	13	15

Detailed information in relation to Community Garda numbers is available on my Department's website. This information is updated every month with the latest data provided by An Garda Síochána at the following link: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures

Departmental Data

205. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Justice the number of gardaí by rank attached to the Louth divisional drugs unit in each of the past five years, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24946/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is, by law, responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána, including personnel matters and deployment of resources. As Minister, I have no responsibility for these matters. I am assured however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

The table below, as provided to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of Gardaí by rank attached to the Louth divisional drugs unit in each of the past five years

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	March 2021
Sergeant	0	0	1	2	2
Garda	5	2	3	11	12
Total	5	2	4	13	14

I understand that there are now 316 Garda personnel in Divisional Drugs Units, as of 31 March 2021, assigned to tackle drug related crime on a local basis throughout the country. This represents an increase of over 37% since 31 December 2019 when there were 231 Gardaí assigned to Divisional Drugs units nationwide. These members are supported, as needed, by the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau which has 95 Gardaí attached to it as of 31 March 2021.

Parole Boards

206. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice the number of recommendations of the Parole Board that have been sent to her Department for decision that have not yet been decided; the delay between receipt of recommendations from the Parole Board and decisions; the number of cases in which this delay is more than a month; the reason for this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24948/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): As the Deputy will be aware, the existing Parole Board is a non-statutory body that makes informed recommendations to the Minister for Justice about the management of a given prisoner's sentence, based on such factors as the prisoner's progress to date in dealing with their offending behaviour, the degree to which the prisoner has engaged with the various therapeutic services and how best to proceed with the future administration of the sentence. The Board reviews the cases of prisoners sentenced to determinate sentences of eight years or more and life sentenced prisoners who have reached the seven year point in their sentence.

The process continues over many years and throughout the term of imprisonment of the prisoner. The process is not simply concerned with recommendations to release but rather recommendations which build towards enhancing the prospects of rehabilitation.

The final decision regarding the recommendations of the Parole Board lies with the Minister for Justice, who can accept them in their entirety, in part or reject them.

Decisions have been made and notified to relevant prisoners on all recommendations up to January 2021. The position in relation to the recommendations received since then is set out in the table beneath.

Date of Recommendations	Nos.
Recommendations received from the Parole Board from 16 March – 7 May 2021	41
Number of recommendations decided from 16 March – 7 May 2021	11
Number of recommendations outstanding more than one month Recommendations received 16 March 2021 Recommendations received 9 April 2021	97
Recommendations received 15 April 2021	1
Recommendations received 7 May 2021	13

Following receipt of recommendations from the Parole Board, detailed submissions based on the reports received with those recommendations are prepared for the Minister's consideration. The remaining recommendations will be finalised as soon as possible.

Departmental Data

207. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice the plans to refurbish the vacant Wicklow District Court in Wicklow town; and the engagement with the OPW to carry out any demolition works at the site. [24951/21]

208. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice the status of the transfer of the old vacant courthouse on the Boghall Road, Bray, County Wicklow to Wicklow County Council; the details of the engagement with the council; and if a timeframe for the transfer will be provided. [24952/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 and 208 together.

Under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in its functions. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made regarding Wicklow Courthouses and the Courts Service has provided me with the following update on this matter.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 includes a number of courthouse development projects, including for Wicklow Town.

The Courts Service advises that its highest priority at present is the Hammond Lane Family Law complex, for which they are currently finalising the business case, as required under the public spending code. The five regional city and county town venues listed in the NDP including Wicklow are currently the next highest priorities for the Courts Service after Hammond Lane.

Specifically in relation to Wicklow, the Courts Service advises that a courthouse comprising four courtrooms and related facilities (e.g. consultation rooms, custody facilities, facilities for juries and vulnerable witnesses, legal practitioner's suites, etc.) is envisaged as being required to meet current and future demand in Wicklow. This will require a building significantly larger than the existing two courtroom building. The Courts Service proposes to refurbish and extend the courthouse to provide the required accommodation and has acquired a number of adjoining properties that were in council ownership so as to have available a larger site capable of accommodating a courthouse building on the scale envisaged. Facilitating works envisaged for the refurbishment and extension of Wicklow courthouse include the demolition of the 1940s extension/annex to the rear of the courthouse. In view of the fact that dry rot has spread extensively throughout the extension, the Courts Service proposes to bring this element of the facilitating works forward rather than incur the cost of treating the dry rot only to demolish the extension at a later date as part of the overall development. The Courts Service will need to go through the Part IX planning process in advance of this work. The Courts Service has been in contact with the Office of Public Works (OPW) about these works and it is intended that they will proceed subject to funding being available and the OPW's resource availability. However, at this time the Courts Service is not in a position to indicate when these demolition works will begin.

The former courthouse on Boghall Road in Bray has been vacant since 2006, when court sittings and services were relocated to alternative accommodation in the town centre. While the National Development Plan provides for the construction of county town type court facilities at various locations including Bray, the Boghall Road site is considered unsuitable in terms of both size and location. The Courts Service has no plans for this building at present and it is considered to be surplus to its requirements. The Courts Service is willing to explore a trans-

fer of the property to Wicklow County Council for alternative public use. The Courts Service has been in contact with Wicklow County Council in this regard and the building has been inspected by engineers acting on behalf of the Council to determine its overall condition and to identify any concerns.

The Government is committed to ensuring adequate resources for the courts in order to maintain access to justice for all citizens. This commitment was reinforced recently with the highest ever budgetary allocation for the Justice sector including €158.8 million for the Courts Service.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 207.

An Teanga Gaeilge

209. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den an Aire Dlí agus Cirt an ndéanfaidh sí an taifead iomlán de Dhaonáireamh Speisialta na Gaeltachta a rinne An Garda Síochána sa bhliain 1925 a fhoilsiú go luath agus muid ag teacht suas go dtí céad bliain ó tugadh aitheantas Stáit don Ghaeltacht; cá bhfuil na taifid sin lonnaithe; agus an bhfuil aon chaomhnú, digitíú nó staidéar á dhéanamh ar na sonraí ann cheana féin. [25101/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Tá tuarascáil maidir leis an bhfaisnéis atá á lorg ag an Teachta iarrtha agam ar an nGarda Síochána ach, ar an drochuair, ní raibh an tuarascáil sin ar fáil in am. Scríobhfaidh mé chuig an Teachta a luaithe a bheidh an tuarascáil ar fáil.

Vaccination Programme

210. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have commenced the vaccine recruitment process; the average length of time from completion of the vaccinator recruitment form to allocation to a vaccinator position; the numbers of persons recruited through the recruitment process that have now have their first vaccine; the number of HSE personnel that have been diverted from HSE roles to vaccinator roles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24727/21]

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.

Medical Cards

211. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to amend the entitlements for a medical card under EU rules (details supplied) currently held by Irish residents who have previously lived and worked in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24739/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the EU and the UK provides for a continuation of healthcare rights for pensioners resident in a State covered by the Agreement. UK pensioners for whom the UK is competent will, therefore, if they are ordinarily resident in this State, and meet the criteria, continue to have eligibility for a non-means tested medical card issued under the EU/UK TCA.

In addition, under the terms of the EU UK Withdrawal Agreement (W/A), UK pensioners for whom the UK is competent, and who were resident in another EU Member State before the end of the transition period on 31st December 2020, continue to have their healthcare rights maintained. Such persons will, therefore, if they remain ordinarily resident in this State, and meet the criteria, continue to have eligibility for a non-means tested medical card issued under the EU/UK Withdrawal Agreement.

Medical Cards

212. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is correct to include damages settlements paid to individuals by the State as a result of legal proceedings taken by their families following life altering personal injury in the medical card financial assessment process; his further views on whether such monies are solely for the future well-being of the patient in recompense for the personal injuries they sustained at the hands of the HSE and should therefore be exempted from the means assessment process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24740/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Eligibility for a medical card is determined primarily on means by the HSE. I understand that in certain instances, where an infant is born with a catastrophic injury, such as HIE – Hypoxic Ischaemic Encephalopathy – and the infant is subsequently eligible for a Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) payment by the Department of Social Protection, the infant is automatically eligible for a medical card which is issued by the HSE. The individual concerned retains this card irrespective of a change in means, once in receipt of a DCA payment.

As part of the settlement negotiations between parties and the State Claims Agency, decisions on eligibility for a medical card are often dealt with on a case by case basis.

The State Claims Agency has informed me that, where relevant, the Agency attempts, in catastrophic injury cases managed by it, to exclude from the special damages assessment those services which are already provided for in the medical card so that there is no double payment, thus allowing the child and his/her family to retain the medical card and the services it provides. In such circumstances, the State Claims Agency will formally notify the HSE that services which are already provided for in the medical card are not part of the settlement and should continue.

The principle underlying the payment of damages in personal injury cases, such as those described above, is known as the restitutio in integrum principle which means putting the injured person, in so far as is possible, in the position he/she would have been but for the event giving rise to the injury.

Health Service Executive

213. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24742/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

Health Service Executive

214. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for an assessment of needs by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each CHO in tabular form; and the length of time each age group is waiting. [24744/21]

217. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for assessment and first time intervention by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each CHO in tabular form; and the length of time that each age group is waiting. [24747/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 217 together.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Health Service Executive

215. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for speech and language assessment and first time intervention by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each CHO in tabular form; and the length of time each age group is waiting. [24745/21]

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 Service Executive

216. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for an occupational therapy assessment and first time intervention by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each CHO in tabular form; and the length of time each age group is waiting. [24746/21]

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.

Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 214.

Health Service Executive

218. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for an audiology assessment and first time intervention by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each CHO in tabular form; and the length of time each age group is waiting. [24748/21]

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 Service Executive

219. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for a physiotherapy assessment and first time intervention by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each CHO in tabular form; and the length of time each age group is waiting. [24749/21]

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 Service Executive

220. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health the current extent of public orthodontic services in County Kerry; and his future plans for same. [24753/21]

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 Service Executive

221. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health the public dental services that are available at the primary care centre in Listowel, County Kerry. [24755/21]

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 Service Executive

222. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding will be provided to help address service delays in the Covid-19 pandemic in public dental services in County Kerry. [24756/21]

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 Promotion

223. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national oral health policy; and his plans for its implementation. [24757/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Smile agus Sláinte, the National Oral Health Policy was published in April 2019 and is Government policy. It provides a framework to transform oral health services and will facilitate better oral healthcare for everyone.

Forty-one actions were identified within the Policy, which will be delivered over the next six to seven years. Nine priorities were identified for the first three years following publication of

the Policy. Despite the current public health emergency, work to prepare for implementation is being undertaken by my Department and progress is being made on the Priority Actions identified in the Policy in the areas within the Department's remit.

I look forward to progress being made by the HSE on the priority actions of the National Oral Health Policy for which it has responsibility but has been delayed due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. My Department has also been liaising with other agencies such as the Dental Council which have not been as adversely impacted by the pandemic.

Health Service Executive

224. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting scoliosis surgery in Galway University Hospital; the corresponding figure for adults; the dates on which children on the Saolta waiting list were referred to CHI, Crumlin for treatment since September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24760/21]

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

Health Service Executive

225. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting so long for an orthodontic appointment. [24767/21]

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

226. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to commence vaccination of pregnant women as recommended by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee; when pregnant women will start receiving the vaccine; if vaccines will be administered to those that are 36 weeks pregnant first rolling backwards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24769/21]

259. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the details of the plan for the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines for pregnant women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24862/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 226 and 259 together.

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

Departmental Advertising

227. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the amount expended by his De-

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partment excluding expenditure incurred by the HSE, on advertising related to Covid-19 awareness campaigns from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24770/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I can confirm that my Department has expended €483,818.20 on advertising through awareness campaigns under the criteria in question, a breakdown of which is in tabular form below.

Organisation	Campaign	Description	Date	Amount
TBWA	Public Information	Passenger locator form advert	19 May 2020	€6,842
PHD Media	Public Information	Passenger locator form advert	21 May 2020	€136,563.81
Open Communications	Public Information	COVID-19 booklet - five national newspapers	23 June 2020	€58,662.02
PHD Media	Public Information	COVID-19 media campaign on safe shopping	06 October 2020	€136,563.80
PHD Media	Public Information	National press ads for vaccine rollout	30 March 2021	€49,605.84
PHD Media	Public Information	National radio ads for vaccine rollout	30 March 2021	€91,007.59
TBWA	Public Information	Production of radio ad for vaccine rollout	06 April 2021	€4,573.14

Question Heading for question(s) 228

228. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting scoliosis surgery in each acute hospital; the average waiting time in each hospital; the corresponding figure for adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24771/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The information requested by the Deputy is being collated by Department officials and a deferred reply will be submitted within ten working days.

Vaccination Programme

229. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of immunocompromised patients vaccinated to date; and his views on whether this is a sufficient number to ensure the safety of this vulnerable group prior to the easing of restrictions. [24778/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Ireland's COVID-19 vaccination programme strategy is to distribute all available vaccine 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.

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

Alcohol Pricing

230. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce minimum unit pricing prior to the north; and the reason for moving away from an all-island approach to this policy. [24779/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The 2013 Government Decision which envisaged that minimum unit pricing of alcohol products would be introduced in Northern

Ireland and in the Republic simultaneously was revised by Government on 4 May 2021 at my request. I look forward to the implementation of this important public health measure to reduce the disease, disability and death associated with the harmful use of alcohol.

Medical Cards

231. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the rationale for differentiating between pensioners under 70 and those over 70 years of age for medical card eligibility. [24811/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Medical Card provision is primarily based on financial assessment. In accordance with the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The HSE assesses each application on a qualifying financial threshold. This is the amount of money that an individual can earn a week and still qualify for a card. It is specific to the individual's own financial circumstances. The HSE conducts a financial assessment based on an applicant's household income after tax; PRSI and the Universal Social Charge (USC) have been deducted. Certain expenses are also taken into account.

Regarding persons aged 70 or older, the medical card assessment is based on gross income. This assessment process was introduced following the enactment of the Health Act 2008 which gave effect to Government decisions to end automatic entitlement to a medical card, irrespective of income, for people aged 70 years and over. The new gross income arrangements provided for the vast majority of people aged 70 years and over to continue to hold medical cards under the new income thresholds. The weekly gross income thresholds for eligibility to a medical card for those aged 70 and over were recently increased in November 2020 and are currently €550 per week for a single person and €1050 for a couple.

It should also be noted that persons aged 70 or older may also have their eligibility assessed under the general means tested medical card scheme in the event that they face particularly high expenses, e.g. nursing home or medication costs.

Medical Cards

232. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person who has retired after being on disability allowance loses their eligibility for a medical card. [24812/21]

233. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health if a review will be carried in relation to the case of a person (details supplied) who was on disability allowance until being transferred to a pension subsequently losing their eligibility for the medical card. [24813/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 and 233 together.

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

Question No. 233 answered with Question No. 232.

Vaccination Programme

234. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have completed their mandatory hotel quarantine in a designated facility to date; the number of persons that pre-booked and pre-paid for their quarantine; the number of persons that pre-booked but did not prepay for quarantine; the number of walk-ins arriving without pre-booking quarantine; the total number requiring mandatory hotel quarantine; the number of these persons that have paid in full the costs of their stay in a quarantine facility; the number of persons that have sought a waiver of quarantine costs; the number that have sought a deferral of quarantine costs; the number of persons that have yet to pay their full costs for their stay in a quarantine facility, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24815/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Mandatory hotel quarantine has been introduced as one element of Ireland's public health measures to combat the transmission of COVID-19 variants of concern.

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. All applicable travellers must reserve and pay for a place in mandatory hotel quarantine. The Act identifies those who are exempt from mandatory hotel quarantine and a full list of exemptions can be accessed on gov.ie/quarantine.

The following table provides the statistics currently available.

Number of Persons that have completed their Mandatory Hotel Quarantine	2,310 people have completed their Mandatory Hotel Quarantine.
Number of Persons that pre-booked and pre-paid for their quarantine	In the last 7 days, 86% have pre-booked their stay in Mandatory Hotel Quarantine.
Number of Persons that pre-booked but did not pre-pay for quarantine	This information is not currently available.
The Number of Walk-ins arriving without pre-booking quarantine	624 people did not have a pre-booking.
The total number requiring mandatory hotel quarantine	976 people are currently in Mandatory Hotel Quarantine, and 2,310 have completed Mandatory Quarantine.
The Number of these Persons that have paid in full the costs of their stay in a quarantine facility	This information is not currently available.
The number of Persons that have sought a waiver of quarantine costs	This information is not currently available.
The Number that have sought a deferral of quarantine costs	121 Deferral of Payment Certificates have been issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs.
The Number of Persons that have yet to pay their full costs for their stay in a quarantine facility	This information is not currently available.

Vaccination Programme

235. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the ongoing pattern of significant drops in the number of vaccines administered over each weekend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24823/21]

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.

Departmental Bodies

236. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work of the women's health taskforce; the work carried out since its establishment; the priorities for 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24824/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Women's Health Taskforce was established in September 2019 with the aim of improving women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare. The members of the Taskforce meet regularly, with its tenth meeting held on April 14th 2021 and with regular updates provided through a dedicated webpage on the Department of Health's website at gov.ie/en/campaigns/-Womens-Health/

Budget 2021 has provided a dedicated €5 million 'Women's Health Fund' to progress a programme of actions arising from the work of the Women's Health Taskforce. This funding complements the additional significant investment delivered across women's health services in Budget 2021, including €12 million investment in delivering the National Maternity Strategy and improving gynaecology and fertility services and €10 million investment in Screening Services including Breast Check and Cervical Check.

The Taskforce has listened to, engaged with and worked with more than 1,000 individuals, and organisations representing women and girls across the country. Based on this consultation, and review of the evidence, the Taskforce has developed proposals to improve supports for gynaecological health, engagement with physical activity, supports for menopause and mental health. In 2021, the €5m Women's Health Fund will deliver a programme of actions arising from this work, along with, including improving mental health supports for women and girls. A national awareness and education campaign will also be delivered to provide a trusted source of information and help normalise discussions about women's health.

Following confirmation of the fund, discussions with the Department and the HSE took place to identify activity under the proposals which could be implemented in 2021 and funded through the Women's Health Fund. In April 2021, the first two areas to be funded under this fund were announced:

- Two community-based Ambulatory Gynaecology Services governed by two acute hospitals (Tallaght University Hospital, and University Maternity Hospital Limerick)

- Expansion of the endometriosis service at Tallaght University Hospital (TUH) to deliver a specialist endometriosis centre for the management and treatment of all forms of endometriosis, with particular focus on advanced and complex cases for which there is no ready access in Ireland.

A number of further proposals are currently being finalised with stakeholders. Following final internal review and approval, further actions supported by the fund will be announced in the coming weeks. Alongside this activity, work is also underway on a longer-term approach to women's health.

Hospital Services

237. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients at present in Clifden Hospital, County Galway; the present capacity of the hospital; the short-term plans to increase this capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24826/21]

239. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to provide a new nursing home in Clifden, Connemara, County Galway to replace both St. Anne's long-term care unit and Clifden Hospital; the progress made to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24828/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 239 together.

As these are operational matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Vaccination Programme

238. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide a Covid-19 vaccination clinic in a central location in Connemara, County Galway in view of the difficulty for many persons that live up to a 100 km from Galway getting to the east of the city and the lack of a comprehensive bus service in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24827/21]

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.

Question No. 239 answered with Question No. 237.

Departmental Data

240. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the number on waiting lists for access to CAMHS in each of the years 2015 to 2020, in tabular form; the waiting times involved to access these appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24830/21]

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.

Covid-19 Pandemic

241. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health when First Holy Communion will be permitted in churches under Covid-19 regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24833/21]

258. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if communions and confirmations are permitted to take place in May or June 2021 under public health restrictions. [24860/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 258 together.

There has been considerable progress in reducing infection levels since the peak of the wave of infection in late 2020/early 2021 because of the widespread commitment and adherence by the public to the public health measures in place. While there is still a high level of infection nationally, the situation is considered reasonably stable and significant progress is being made in relation to the roll-out of our vaccination programme.

In recognition of the improving situation, the Government announced a roadmap on the 29 April for the gradual lifting of some restrictions over the next two months, with a particular focus on allowing more outdoor activities. A range of measures will be eased in May, with a further easing of measures in June subject to the epidemiological situation at the time.

As part of these plans, in-person religious services can commence from 10th May, and the numbers attending funeral and wedding services can increase to 50. However, the public health

advice remains that other religious ceremonies such as communions and confirmations should not take place at this time.

It is important to note that while there is now scope to ease a range of public health measures, this approach must continue to be cautious, gradual and on a phased basis, with sufficient time between any easing of measures to assess the impact. This will be critical to ensuring the protection of the gains of recent months, the protection of those most vulnerable, and the protection of health and social care, education, and childcare services. NPHET advise that the current phased plan to reopening over the months of May and June can be considered low to medium risk. However, they also advise that a faster reopening involving a greater level of indoor mixing would be very high risk.

While a child's First Communion or Confirmation is a very important milestone in their lives, the health and safety of the child, their family and the wider community is the main priority for Government. It is important to acknowledge the significant engagement and solidarity from the Catholic Church and other Faiths at all stages throughout this pandemic to ensure the protection of individuals and communities from COVID-19 and this engagement will continue to form an important element of our response in the months ahead.

Significant progress has been made on suppressing the virus over recent months due to the huge effort of people across the country. By working together, we have saved lives and limited the impact of the disease on society in Ireland. We all must continue to do everything possible to continue to avoid the virus spreading and to support the safe reopening of activities over the coming months.

Home Help Service

242. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when home help will be increased for a person (details supplied) in view of their health situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24838/21]

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.

Departmental Data

243. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of unregistered designated residential centres in the context of the Health Act 2007 which may have been used from by the HSE to facilitate emergency accommodation for persons with disabilities; the number of persons placed in each of these centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24839/21]

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.

Proposed Legislation

244. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish legislation to amend the Health Act 2007 to provide for temporary registration of non-designated centres in emergency situations for accommodation for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24840/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My Department is working on the draft heads of a Bill to amend the Health Act 2007 to enable the registration of undesignated residential care centres opened temporarily to provide emergency accommodation to persons with a disability to be achieved as soon as possible. Work on the Bill is at an advanced stage and I expect to be in a position to bring the Bill before the Oireachtas by the end of 2021.

Departmental Data

245. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions on which the HSE and his Department have been notified by HIQA of regulatory non-compliance in HSE or HSE-funded designated centres in the context of the Health Act 2007; the number of instances in which regulatory non-compliance was resolved; the number of instances in which regulatory non-compliance may be ongoing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24841/21]

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.

Departmental Data

246. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of requests his Department or the HSE have received from designated centres in the context of the Health Act 2007 for funding to undertake capital works to address significant issues highlighted by HIQA in terms of regulatory non-compliance; the instances in which funding was given; the amount provided for HSE and non-HSE centres; the instances in which funding was not forthcoming for HSE and non-HSE centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24842/21]

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.

Departmental Data

247. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with

disabilities currently placed in unregistered designated centres in the context of the Health Act 2007 by age (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24843/21]

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

248. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of Covid-19 vaccines administered in each county to date by vaccination centre both nominal and per capita for both total county population and eligible county population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24844/21]

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

249. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of claims made to the CervicalCheck Tribunal to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24845/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The CervicalCheck Tribunal was established on 27 October 2020 under the CervicalCheck Tribunal Act 2019. Establishment of the Tribunal was finalised with the appointment of the nominated members to the Tribunal with effect from 1 December 2020.

The Tribunal has indicated to my Department that it has received three claims as at close of business on 10 May 2021.

The Tribunal is the most appropriate venue to hear and determine CervicalCheck claims. It has been specifically designed for that purpose. It is, of course, entirely up to eligible women as to whether or not they use it.

General Practitioner Services

250. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the assistance available to a family (details supplied); the actions being taken to assist others in similar situations to access general practitioner care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24846/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Where a GMS patient experiences difficulty in finding a GP to accept him/her as a patient, the person concerned having unsuccessfully applied to at least three GPs in the area can apply to the HSE National Medical Card Unit which has the power to assign that person to a GP's GMS patient list.

People who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card access GP services on a private basis and can make enquiries directly to any GP practice they wish to register with. As private

contractors, it is a matter for each individual GP to decide whether to accept additional private patients.

The Government is aware of the workforce issues currently facing general practice, including the limited access to GP services in certain areas, and has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice.

These measures include an increase in investment in general practice by approximately 40% (€210 million) between 2019 and 2023 under the terms of the 2019 GMS GP Agreement GP. The Agreement provides for increased support for GPs working in rural practices and for those in disadvantaged urban areas, and for improvements to maternity and paternity leave arrangements. In addition, the number of GPs entering training has been increased steadily over the past ten years, rising from 120 in 2009 to 213 in 2020, with a further increase foreseen in 2021. The ICGP noted a record number of applications for the 2021 GP training programme.

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 Pandemic

251. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the current position in relation to drive-through events such as bingo and charity events and so on; if they are currently permissible; if not, the reason, given that there is no health risk in circumstances in which participants are required to stay in their car and it is an important social outlet for persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24848/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): There has been considerable progress in reducing infection levels since the peak of the wave of infection in late 2020/early 2021 because of the widespread commitment and adherence by the public to the public health measures in place. While there is still a high level of infection nationally, the situation is considered reasonably stable and significant progress is being made in relation to the roll-out of our vaccination programme.

In recognition of the improving situation, the Government announced a roadmap on the 29 April for the gradual lifting of some restrictions over the next two months, with a particular focus on allowing more outdoor activities. A range of measures will be eased in May, with a further easing of measures in June subject to the epidemiological situation at the time. Further detail is available on Gov.ie: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/0bd80-new-public-health-measures-announced-the-path-ahead/>

Drive through events such as bingo and charity events are not permitted under current public health restrictions commencing on the 10 May. The level of restrictions will be kept under review by Government.

It is important to note that while there is now scope to ease a range of public health measures, this approach must continue to be cautious, gradual and on a phased basis, with sufficient time between any easing of measures to assess the impact. This will be critical to ensuring the protection of the gains of recent months, the protection of those most vulnerable, and the protection of health and social care, education, and childcare services. In this regard, the NPHET has advised that the current reopening plans can be considered low to medium risk. They also advise that a faster reopening would be very high risk.

Significant progress has been made on suppressing the virus over recent months due to the

huge effort of people across the country. By working together, we have saved lives and limited the impact of the disease on society in Ireland. We all must continue to do everything possible to continue to avoid the virus spreading and to support the safe reopening of activities over the coming months.

Health Services

252. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a request from an organisation (details supplied) in relation to the need for additional eye clinic liaison officers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24849/21]

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

253. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered allowing using risk assessment for the venue specific to the marriage to inform the number of guests that can attend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24851/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): There has been considerable progress in reducing infection levels since the peak of the wave of infection in late 2020/early 2021 because of the widespread commitment and adherence by the public to the public health measures in place. While there is still a high level of infection nationally, the situation is considered reasonably stable and significant progress is being made in relation to the roll-out of our vaccination programme.

In recognition of the improving situation, the Government announced a roadmap on the 29 April for the gradual lifting of some restrictions over the next two months, with a particular focus on allowing more outdoor activities. A range of measures will be eased in May, with a further easing of measures in June subject to the epidemiological situation at the time.

The recent announcement included the following changes to the measures applying to weddings: as of May 10, there can be an increase in the number of guests attending wedding services to 50 which brings this figure in line with the numbers permitted at religious services.

This increase to 50 guests relates to the service (both religious or civil) only. The number of guests attending a wedding celebration or reception should remain at 6 guests for indoor gatherings and 15 guests for outdoor gatherings. From 7 June, subject to the epidemiological situation at the time, it is envisaged that the numbers of guests attending a wedding celebration or reception will increase to 25. The Government has indicated that a further range of activities, including numbers attending indoor and outdoor events, will be considered at the end of June. Information in relation to the Government announcement is available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/0bd80-new-public-health-measures-announced-the-path-ahead/>

In line with the roadmap announced by the Government to gradually lift restrictions, Fáilte Ireland are in the process of updating their operational guidelines and these guidelines will be available online: <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/operational-guidelines/>

It is important to note that while there is now scope to ease a range of public health measures, this approach must continue to be cautious, gradual and on a phased basis, with sufficient time between any easing of measures to assess the impact. This will be critical to ensuring the

protection of the gains of recent months, the protection of those most vulnerable, and the protection of health and social care, education, and childcare services.

Significant progress has been made on suppressing the virus over recent months due to the huge effort of people across the country. By working together, we have saved lives and limited the impact of the disease on society in Ireland. We all must continue to do everything possible to continue to avoid the virus spreading and to support the safe reopening of activities over the coming months.

Covid-19 Pandemic

254. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health when a vaccination centre (details supplied) will open; the duration that the contract is in place for this vaccination centre as agreed with the service provider; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24852/21]

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.

Dental Services

255. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists registered and operating in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24855/21]

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.

Dental Services

256. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists signed up to the dental treatment service scheme as at 30 April 2021 in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24856/21]

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.

Dental Services

257. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists that have withdrawn from the dental treatment service scheme since January 2020 in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24857/21]

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.

Question No. 258 answered with Question No. 241.

Question No. 259 answered with Question No. 226.

260. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to establish a register for advance healthcare directives as part of the commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24866/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Part 8 of the Assisted Decision Making Capacity Act 2015 provides the legislative framework for Advanced Healthcare Directives, or AHDs. An AHD is a statement made by a person with capacity setting out their will and preferences in relation to treatment decisions that may arise in the future, when they no longer have capacity.

My Department remains committed to commencing these provisions as soon as possible, and work has been underway to develop a code of practice to accompany the AHD provisions. The AHD Multidisciplinary Working Group has developed a draft code of practice which has been submitted to the Decision Support Service and which will be submitted to me, for approval, once finalised.

The establishment of a Register for Advance Healthcare Directives is a complex undertaking. My Department recognises that for this to be both operable and meaningful, the further deployment of health identifiers across the wider health system will be required. We will consider making such Regulations when national Health Identifiers are deployed across the health system.

However, while Part 8 of the Act of 2015 allows for regulations for the Register of Advance Healthcare Directives, it should be noted that it does not require that this Register is established before the Act is commenced.

There are a number of other interdependencies which must be addressed before Part 8 can be commenced and work is continuing in respect of all outstanding matters. These also include commencing certain other provisions of the Act outside of Part 8 that fall under the remit of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Justice and Equality.

Covid-19 Pandemic

261. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health when outdoor commercial markets and stalls can resume following their closure due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24869/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): There has been considerable progress in reducing infection levels since the peak of the wave of infection in late 2020/early 2021 because of the widespread commitment and adherence by the public to the public health measures in place. While there is still a high level of infection nationally, the situation is considered reasonably stable and significant progress is being made in relation to the roll-out of our vaccination programme.

In recognition of the improving situation, the Government announced a roadmap on the 29 April for the gradual lifting of some restrictions over the next two months, with a particular focus on allowing more outdoor activities. A range of measures will be eased in May, with a further easing of measures in June subject to the epidemiological situation at the time.

As part of these plans, as of 10 May, all outlets that offer goods for sale or supply from a premises that is entirely outdoors may reopen.

Significant progress has been made on suppressing the virus over recent months due to the

huge effort of people across the country. By working together, we have saved lives and limited the impact of the disease on society in Ireland. We all must continue to do everything possible to continue to avoid the virus spreading and to support the safe reopening of activities over the coming months.

Mental Health Services

262. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the person or body responsible for the creation of an advertisement to attempt to recruit seven unpaid assistant psychologist roles within HSE services; the number of assistant psychologists currently working on a voluntary capacity within HSE services; the HSE's position on the recruitment of assistant psychologists in an unpaid capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24918/21]

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

Mental Health Services

263. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if the results following the review of the placement of a recent ad attempting to recruit seven unpaid assistant psychologist roles within HSE services will be made public; if the positions will be readvertised as paid positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24919/21]

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

Mental Health Services

264. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will make an announcement on whether the current national pilot assistant psychologist programme is to be extended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24920/21]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

265. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason front-line workers who are applicants for international protection in County Galway have been moved from self-catering accommodation to single hotel rooms with no individual catering facilities; the steps it is proposed to take to address this issue and find suitable accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24947/21]

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.

Nursing Education

266. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the decisions that have been taken to pay student nurses and midwives for work whilst on placement; the details of any decisions; and when students will receive any moneys due. [24950/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will be aware, 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 while on clinical placement. His report was submitted to me on 31 December 2020.

The key recommendation in the Report called for the introduction of an additional and exceptional Student Nurse/Midwife Pandemic Placement Grant (PPG) at a rate of €100 per week for each week spent on supernumerary clinical placement, to be introduced from January 2021, for the duration of the pandemic. I instructed that payment be backdated to the start of the academic year, i.e. 1 September 2020.

My Department recently instructed the HSE to process payment of the PPG and on 6 May 2021, the HSE issued a Memorandum to give effect to this and commence payment for all eligible student nurses and midwives to be complete by 1 June 2021.

Vaccination Programme

267. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when community pharmacists will be engaged in the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24958/21]

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.

Nursing Homes

268. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health his plans to put a complaint mechanism in place for residents of nursing homes and their families given that at present HIQA cannot investigate individual complaints. [24971/21]

269. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the procedures in place to deal with welfare concerns regarding vulnerable residents in nursing homes at weekends. [24979/21]

281. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the protocol in place in circumstances (details supplied). [25022/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I propose to take Questions Nos. 268, 269 and 281 together.

Where an issue arises with respect to an individual nursing home, the procedure in place and the best course of action is to engage with the nursing home itself, specifically through its complaints process. In accordance with Regulation 34 of S.I. No. 415/2013 - Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013, registered providers of nursing home care are obliged to provide an accessible and effective complaints procedure. The registered provider is required to make each resident and their family aware of the complaints procedure as soon as is practicable following admission. The Office of the Om-

budsman can examine complaints about the actions of a range of public bodies and complaints relating to the administrative actions of private nursing homes. The Office of the Ombudsman normally only deals with a complaint once the individual has engaged with the nursing homes' established complaint's procedure.

Individuals may also wish to raise their concerns with the Chief Inspector for Social Services in HIQA. As the independent regulator of nursing homes, the Chief Inspector has no formal legal role in examining individual complaints, however, they do take into account all information received, including complaints from the public, when carrying out inspections. If a concern is raised about a nursing home, the Chief Inspector reviews all information received to inform its on-going risk-based regulation activities.

In relation to the Deputy's question on consultation with families I would like to advise that under the Care and Welfare Regulations the person in charge is required to prepare a care plan for a resident. This should be formally reviewed, at intervals not exceeding 4 months, and where necessary, revised after consultation with the resident concerned and where appropriate that resident's family. In addition Regulation 23 requires that there is an annual review of the quality and safety of care delivered to residents in the designated centre and that this is prepared in consultation with residents and their families.

Regulation 25 (4) provides that a discharge shall be discussed, planned for and agreed with a resident and, where appropriate, with their family or carer, and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract agreed in accordance with Regulation 24.

Regulation 13 (1) provides that where a resident is approaching the end of his or her life, the person in charge shall ensure that where the resident indicates a preference as to his or her location (for example a preference to return home or for a private room), such preference shall be facilitated in so far as is reasonably practicable.

A registered provider shall also, in so far as is reasonably practical, ensure that a resident has access to independent advocacy services.

Question No. 269 answered with Question No. 268.

Disability Diagnoses

270. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of children diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum in County Donegal aged between 0 to 4, 4 to 12 and 12 to 18 years of age, respectively in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24994/21]

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.

Youth Services

271. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for occupational therapy services in County Donegal as part of children and youth services in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24995/21]

273. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for speech and language therapy services in County Donegal as part of children and youth services in tabular

form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24997/21]

274. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for Donegal intellectual disability support services in County Donegal as part of children and youth services in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24998/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271, 273 and 274 together.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Mental Health Services

272. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for psychology services in County Donegal as part of children and youth services in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24996/21]

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.

Question No. 273 answered with Question No. 271.

Question No. 274 answered with Question No. 271.

Disability Services

275. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to be admitted to the Sean O'Hare unit in Stranorlar, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24999/21]

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.

Health Services Staff

276. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when the vacant ophthalmic position will be filled to allow for the resumption of the diabetic ophthalmic clinic in Letterkenny, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25000/21]

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

277. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for a Covid-19 vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25001/21]

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 Appointments Status

278. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for an orthopaedic operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25002/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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.

Hospital Services

279. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if children with spina bifida born before 2008 under the care of St. Mary's Children's Hospital, Crumlin have equal access to multidisciplinary services in Temple Street Children's University Hospital as children born in 2009 and after who are under the care of the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25003/21]

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

280. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he will work in consultation with the HSE and other relevant institutions to ensure that educational psychology and counselling doctorates are brought in line with their equivalents, that is, clinical psychology and so on in terms of stipends and funding during studying. [25021/21]

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

Question No. 281 answered with Question No. 268.

Health Services

282. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in primary health-

care for a speech and language therapist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25032/21]

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

283. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in primary health-care for an occupational therapist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25033/21]

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

284. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in primary health-care for a psychologist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25034/21]

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

285. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in primary health-care for a physiotherapist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25035/21]

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.

Disability Services

286. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in disability care for a speech and language therapist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25036/21]

287. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in disability care for an occupational therapist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25037/21]

288. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in disability care for a psychologist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25038/21]

289. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time in disability care for a physiotherapist in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25039/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286, 287, 288 and 289 together.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Execu-

tive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Question No. 287 answered with Question No. 286.

Question No. 288 answered with Question No. 286.

Question No. 289 answered with Question No. 286.

Covid-19 Pandemic

290. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health when persons who are vaccinated will be able to travel freely throughout Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25100/21]

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’ to facilitate safe free movement inside the EU during the pandemic. The proposed regulation lays down a framework for the issuance, verification, and acceptance of interoperable certificates. The intention is for the digital green certificate to be a temporary measure.

The Government is keen to ensure that every effort should be made to achieve alignment across the EU in preparing for reopening of international travel for non-essential purposes as soon as it is safe to do so. An interdepartmental group of senior officials from relevant departments have been progressing policy work in respect of the proposed EU Digital Green Certificate and vaccination certificate.

Operational aspects for the interoperable certificate system are being progressed on a cross-Departmental basis.

Health Service Executive

291. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies for psychologists in CHO9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25102/21]

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

Vaccination Programme

292. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered using a vaccine (details supplied) to bolster supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25105/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): 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 vaccines can only be approved and used if they comply with all the requirements of quality, safety and efficacy set out in the EU pharmaceutical legislation. No vaccine will be used until Market authorisation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is obtained and any authorised vaccine will be subject to ongoing monitoring in Ireland by the Health Product Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

The delivery of vaccines under APAs that the Commission has negotiated on behalf of Member States are predicated upon a CMA being obtained from the Commission (on the basis of a positive recommendation being awarded by the EMA).

The awarding of a CMA provides a high level of assurance that a vaccine has undergone rigorous testing and has met the requirements of the independent regulatory process as regards demonstrating its quality, safety and efficacy.

The Sinopharm vaccine has not been awarded a CMA to date.

Hospital Staff

293. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will appoint a full-time consultant from University Hospital Limerick to the medical assessment unit in Nenagh Hospital as a matter of priority (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25125/21]

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

294. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the circumstances in relation to a person (details supplied) in mandatory hotel quarantine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25136/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It would not be appropriate for me to comment in relation to any individual's medical circumstances, but I can assure the Deputy that the case described was investigated fully by my Officials and followed up with the Service Provider, and my Department is satisfied that everything possible was done to accommodate this guest, and that all appropriate action was taken. The safety, wellbeing and comfort of all guests quarantining in a designated facility is a priority of the mandatory quarantine system, along with the ultimate goal of protecting public health by limiting the potential spread of COVID-19, particularly variants of concern.

All guests undergoing mandatory quarantine in a designated facility are being provided with access to a 24/7 on-site healthcare team, who are available to address any wellbeing concerns of guests via daily check-in calls, as well as through direct engagement as requested and required.

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Guests requiring any specific, urgent or emergency care which cannot be provided in the hotel will be referred to an appropriate medical facility by the on-site healthcare team.

All reasonable efforts will be made by both service provider staff and the on-site health team to facilitate a comfortable stay in a designated facility.

More information, including further detail on the services available in Mandatory Hotel Quarantine, can be accessed on www.gov.ie/quarantine.

Covid-19 Pandemic

295. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the way his Department is overseeing and engaging with the HSE in relation to the weekly risk assessments being carried out to inform the current restrictions in maternity care; and the details of these assessments. [25156/21]

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.

Agriculture Industry

296. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications made annually for licences to cultivate hemp; the number licences awarded in each county; the number of licences refused; the reasons for the refusal of licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25168/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) processes applications for licences to cultivate hemp on behalf of the Department of Health. The number of licences issued to cultivate hemp since 2018 is as follows:

2021 (as of 7th May): 13 licences

2020: 94 licences

2019: 74 licences

2018: 24 licences

All applicants who have submitted a complete application since 2018, detailing all the required information for a licence to cultivate hemp, have been issued with a licence. Each year there are a small number of applications that the HPRA is unable to progress as the applicants do not respond when requested to provide further information.

For example, in 2019 the HPRA received 85 applications for a licence to cultivate hemp. Of these, it was unable to progress 9 as the applicant did not respond. The remaining 76 applications were progressed and a licence issued in 2019 or early 2020. In 2018 the HPRA received 30 applications for a licence to cultivate hemp, of these it was unable to progress 6 as the applicant did not respond.

The number of licences issued to cultivate hemp in 2020, per county, is attached.

[Stats]

Covid-19 Pandemic

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that pregnant women and their partners have access to as much support as possible in respect of both prenatal and antenatal care given the ongoing situation with Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25192/21]

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.

Departmental Expenditure

298. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount expended by his Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24922/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): My Department has participated in, and contributed to, the whole-of-Government communications strategy and public information campaigns related to COVID-19.

My Department has provided information, as appropriate, via established channels of communication, including the Department's website, official social media accounts and stakeholder communications.

No additional expenditure has been incurred by my Department in relation to this.

Animal Diseases

299. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider setting up a permanent compensation fund in order to protect the poultry sector from losses due to ongoing disease outbreaks that have intensified over the past number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24941/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): My Department is continuing to engage with the Poultry Working Group (PWG) regarding its proposal for establishing a disease aid fund for the poultry sector. My officials met again with the PWG at the end of April and have proposed dates for further meetings with the PWG in May and June. The PWG is working hard on behalf of the sector and has been very pro-active in engaging with my Department on this matter.

I fully understand the sector's aim to seek mitigation, in so far as is possible, of the disease risks that their members face. I would like to highlight that some excellent supports are already in place for a number of important diseases for the sector, including High Pathogenic Avian Influenza and Salmonella.

Department officials continue to examine the additional measures that could potentially be utilised within the EU State Aid Regulations, to establish a funding support system for the sector in the face of poultry disease challenges.

The importance of improving biosecurity at farm level to prevent disease outbreaks in the

first place cannot be overlooked. The Department has made available, at no cost to the poultry producer, biosecurity risk assessments, which are delivered by Animal Health Ireland trained veterinary practitioners, for commercial broiler and layer units. The set of recommendations provided guides the producer on how to improve the standard of biosecurity on the farm and reduce the likelihood of disease incursion. “Prevention is better than cure” is a cornerstone of Animal Health Policy.

The Department has also expressed its support in principle for the establishment of a health programme for the poultry sector operated by Animal Health Ireland; this would operate in partnership with the poultry sector, and has excellent potential to improve the overall health of the national flock, as well as the standard of biosecurity on farms, thus reducing the risk of disease outbreaks.

Common Agricultural Policy

300. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers that have entitlements of value of 0 to €100, €100 to €200, €200 to €300, €300 to €400 and above €400, respectively; the average stocking density by the same intervals except for tillage farmers; if, in the forthcoming Common Agricultural Policy, there will be convergence of the rates of entitlements that are based on events that happened in 2002; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24949/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The table below illustrates the sets of payment entitlements held by farmers divided into ranges based on Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) payment entitlement unit values as requested by the Deputy. It is useful to note that farmers may hold more than one set of payment entitlements, each of which may fall into separate intervals as specified in the question. Therefore, this table shows the numbers of sets of entitlements under each interval. This data is as of 10th May 2021 but will not remain static as the payment entitlement sets evolve due to ongoing transfers of payment entitlements between farmers.

Range of Payment Entitlement Sets Unit Values	Number of Sets of Payment Entitlements
less than €100	0
€100 - €200	123,709
€200 - €300	45,142
€300 - €400	6,113
greater than €400	1,919

The total number of sets of payment entitlements ($n = 176,883$) is greater than the total number of farmers holding payment entitlements; as mentioned above this is due to the fact that farmers can have a number of sets of payment entitlements of varying values. To classify the data by farmer would require the payment entitlement unit values to be averaged and thus would skew the data. It is for this reason that the data cannot be mapped to stocking density as it would provide an imprecise representation.

All payment entitlements held under the BPS were subject to convergence. Convergence is a mandatory provision in the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) programme to redistribute funds between farmers. Over the period 2015-2019, those with higher value payment entitlements saw a reduction in their values while those with payment entitlements that had a value of less than 90% of the average value saw an increase. In 2019, all payment entitlement values reached a minimum of 60% of the national average.

The new legislative proposals for the CAP are ongoing with final agreement on convergence depending on the outcome of the trilogue process. Current indications are that the convergence of payment entitlements will continue under the new CAP.

The Department will continue to examine all the options presented during the negotiations in order to achieve the best possible outcome for Irish farmers.

Agriculture Schemes

301. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average amount paid in each tranche of REPS, AEOS and GLAS by county and year in tabular form. [25103/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Please find information as requested attached.

[<ahref="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-05-12_pq-301-12-05-2021_en.xlsx">Doc1]

[<ahref="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-05-12_pq301-12-5-21_en.xlsx">Doc2]

[<ahref="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-05-12_pq-301-12-05-21_en.xlsx">Doc3]

Environmental Policy

302. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to carry out a baseline biodiversity survey on every farm to inform future policy development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25149/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): As part of budget 2021, funding of €5 million has been dedicated to develop a pilot ‘Farm Environmental Study’ programme in 2021. The Pilot Farm Environmental Study Programme will begin the process of developing a national baseline database of farm scale habitat and biodiversity data along with additional environmental parameters. The Department is at an advanced stage in finalising the tender to implement this programme in 2021.

The Pilot Farm Environmental Study is an integral part of measures that were introduced as part of Budget 2021 and is central to delivering benefits for Biodiversity, Water and Climate in this country.

Environmental Policy

303. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to explore and develop potential opportunities for farmers from anaerobic digestion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25150/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Indig-

enous renewable energy plays a vital role in our domestic fuel mix and will become even more important in the context of reducing our reliance on imported fuels and in meeting our challenging renewable energy targets for 2020 and 2030 and decarbonising our energy systems by 2050.

The Department recognises the potential environmental benefits of using Anaerobic Digestion (AD), including climate mitigation, water quality and air quality and the potential as a diversification opportunity for farmers. While the potential for the growth of the AD sector in Ireland is strong it should be seen as a long term development. Research suggests that there is potential for a significant role for biogas / bio-methane in the decarbonisation of the heat and transport sectors with corresponding climate benefits.

Supports for anaerobic digestion heating systems are currently available under the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH). The SSRH supports the adoption of renewable heating systems by commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating and other non-domestic heat users. The Scheme, which is funded by the Department of Environment, Climate Action and Communications (DECC) and operated by the SEAI, supports the adoption of heating systems that use solid biomass fuels and heating systems that produce and use biogas via anaerobic digestion.

Biogas produced via anaerobic digestion can be upgraded and injected into the gas grid - at which point it is classified as biomethane. Ireland's National Energy & Climate Plan has set an indicative target of 1.6TWh of indigenous biomethane to be injected annually into the gas grid by 2030.

The plan also set out a number of measures that could support the development of biomethane including the potential for a new renewable energy obligation in the heat sector. The recently updated actions under the Climate Action Plan include a specific action to consider such a measure and publish a decision by the end of this year on whether an obligation should be introduced along with the planned timeframe and scope. DECC is working to deliver this action by the end of the year.

In addition, the Department supports research, development and demonstration in this particular area and has funded two projects through the European Innovation Partnerships Initiative (EIP) under the Rural Development Programme 2014- 2020. The Biorefinery Glas (small scale farmer-led green biorefineries) and Irish Bioenergy Association (IrBEA) small biogas demonstration programme have been awarded funding of over €900,000 each.

The Department continues to work closely with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), which is the lead Department in this area, to ensure that the supply of domestic fuels available in the forest and agriculture sectors are mobilised to support energy generation from a range of bioenergy technologies including Anaerobic Digestion.

Pesticide Use

304. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to review pesticide use across the agricultural sector while acknowledging the comparatively low level of pesticide use in Ireland and to provide supports to farmers who are undertaking practices to reduce their dependence on such chemicals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25151/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Department is carrying out the Programme for Government commitments through its implementation of the Sustainable Use Directive which includes a range of activities such as train-

ing, data gathering, registration of users, advisors and distributors of pesticides and testing of application equipment.

Pesticide use in Ireland is relatively low compared to many EU Member States, as evidenced by an estimated average application rate of 0.54 kg/ha of Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) compared to an EU average of 2.15 kg/ha UAA (based on an analysis of 2018 sales data). In order to continue to progress, it is necessary to have accurate data to understand the pattern of pesticide use in Ireland, and to ensure that measures based on robust scientific information are available to farmers to help them to further reduce use of pesticides where possible.

A number of measures are in place to review pesticide use across the agriculture sector. These include collection and analysis of pesticides sales data on an annual basis, a rolling programme of pesticide usage surveys, covering all main crops, and calculation of Harmonised Risk Indicators for assessing trends in risk from pesticide use. These indicators (HRI 1 and HRI 2) are specified under the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive. Further developments to improve the collection and use of pesticide statistics, including additional risk indicators, will occur as part of the implementation of the EU Farm to Fork Strategy.

Regarding measures to help farmers reduce use of pesticides, the key approach is full implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) by all farmers. Under this approach all alternatives to pesticides must be considered and pesticides should only be used where essential. Teagasc provides extensive advisory supports to farmers to help them implement IPM practices and also carries out a significant body of research work to ensure that advice is based on up-to-date and reliable information. It should be noted that the Department has provided funding for a number of IPM-related research projects.

The Department also provides various financial supports to farmers. Examples include payments for low-input grassland, and funding under the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) for equipment to reduce pesticide use, such as heavy rollers.

The measures outlined above, together with implementation and enforcement of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, are contributing to more sustainable use of pesticides in Ireland. The possibility for further measures will be considered as part of ongoing EU discussions on implementing the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Forestry Sector

305. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to incorporate afforestation into the new CAP to provide incentives for farmers to plant woodland on their farms acting as a carbon store, helping to promote wildlife corridors and providing a future fuel source for the household; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25152/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I am committed to a strong CAP Strategic Plan and to an ambitious successor to the Forestry Programme, both of which I would see as delivering for farmers, rural communities and for society as a whole. I also reiterate my commitment to better integration between both of these policies as envisaged in the Programme for Government and encourage all stakeholders to make their views known on these important processes as they progress.

In this regard, the Department is considering the inclusion of tree planting measures in the Agri Environment measure under the new CAP and the newly announced REAP scheme provides for tree planting to be considered as part of the project.

I should also point out that the current Forestry Programme provides for the planting of trees in different configurations, including agro forestry.

Programme for Government

306. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to develop climate action signpost farms to provide on-farm experience of the benefits of farming sustainably; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25153/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The signpost farm programme is a Teagasc-led initiative with a ‘whole-of-industry approach’ to support climate action by Irish farmers. Its main goals are to reduce gaseous emissions from Irish agriculture, while creating more profitable and sustainable farming enterprises.

In collaboration with industry, a nationwide network of demonstration farms representing all sectors is being established to showcase the science based technologies that can reduce agricultural emissions and where carbon sequestration in grassland and hedgerows can be examined.

This initiative is progressing with positive engagement from all stakeholders. This is an important commitment under the Programme for Government to support the industry in transitioning to a low carbon economy and is a key commitment in the Ag-Climatise roadmap for the Agriculture sector. I support this initiative.

The roadmap sets an ambitious vision for a ‘climate neutral agriculture sector by 2050’ and includes 29 actions with specific and challenging targets aimed at reducing the environmental footprint and further building on the strong credentials of Irish Agriculture.

Programme for Government

307. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to promote the introduction of constructive technical measures that promote sustainability, decrease by-catch and protect fish stocks for the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25154/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I can assure the Deputy that the Government is fully committed to the environmental objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The CFP provides the framework for the long-term conservation and sustainable management of fish stocks around our shores and is designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of fishing in Ireland’s 200 miles zone and throughout EU waters.

Technical measures are used to support sustainable fishing. Technical measures are rules on how, where and when fishers may fish and also include gear, catch composition and ways to deal with accidental catches. A revised and updated EU Regulation on conservation through technical measures was adopted by Council and Parliament on 20 June 2019 (EU Regulation 2019/1241). This Regulation sets the baseline standards for each sea basin.

The measures may include specifications for design and use of fishing gears including minimum mesh size for particular fisheries, more selective gears to avoid and reduce unwanted catches including juvenile fish, areas closed for restricted fishing seasons and minimum conser-

vation and landing sizes for fish.

EU Member States with a fisheries interest in a given sea basin can agree on regional technical measures, adapted to the specific regional circumstances. Such measures can then be adopted as EU secondary legislation, if confirmed by scientists to be consistent with the objectives of the common fisheries policy. Ireland works with Member States in the North West Waters region and are advised by stakeholders through the North West Waters Advisory Council and Pelagic Advisory Council to agree appropriate technical measures for the fisheries in which we participate.

My Department works closely with Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) to bring forward proposals at EU level for technical measures for the fisheries in which we operate that result in increased selectivity and provide increased protection to overfished and sensitive stocks. In that regard, a range of technical measures for the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and the North West area have been developed over recent years. BIM, working with the fishing industry, has developed and trialled many of these measures which have been designed to protect vulnerable stocks such as cod and whiting. For 2021, these measures have been included in Council Regulation 2021/92 - the TAC and quota Regulation. It is planned that these measures and any additional measures agreed through the regional procedures, will be given effect through an EU delegated act in accordance with Article 15(2) of Regulation 2019/1241 in recognition of the need to apply them on a stable basis.

BIM is continuing to work closely with the fishing industry to develop modification to fishing gears to increase further selectivity and to further avoid juvenile fish or vulnerable species. In addition BIM is carrying out trials on new gear options to also improve fuel efficiency and help reduce carbon emissions. I am pleased that the commitment of industry, working with BIM to develop improved fishing practices that will strengthen sustainability and conservation of fish stocks, is delivering positive outcomes.

Departmental Schemes

308. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of SICAP funding awarded for County Wexford to date under the 2018 to 2022 programme; the amount of SICAP funding granted to programmes in each of the County Wexford municipal district areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25056/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien): Under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), my Department provides funding to Local Development Companies to carry out work to tackle poverty and social exclusion at a local level. The work facilitates local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies.

SICAP is delivered in County Wexford by the Wexford Local Development Company, under the oversight of the Local Community Development Committee.

The total amount of SICAP funding provided to Wexford Local Development Company to complete work in County Wexford under SICAP 2018 – 2022 is outlined below. A breakdown by municipal district areas is not available as the information is not recorded in this format.

2018	€1,276,311*
2019	€1,701,748
2020	€1,752,800

2021

€1,752,800

*County Wexford was one of the area where the SICAP 2015 – 2017 programme was extended until 31st March 2018, so the 2018 allocation as stated above represents the allocation for the period 1st April – 31st December 2018 only. An allocation of €425,437 was made to County Wexford under SICAP 2015 – 2017 for the period 1st Jan 2018 – 31st March 2018.

Programme for Government

309. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the steps she is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to support the development of broadband connection points across the country and the development of digital hubs which can support remote working in as many of the broadband connection points as possible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25160/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Our Rural Future, the recently published rural development policy, recognises remote working hubs and Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) as being key economic assets for towns and villages throughout Ireland. By supporting sustainable economic activity and local job opportunities, hubs can help to drive both urban and rural regeneration and support the balanced regional development goals under Project Ireland 2040.

Initial access to broadband for many of our most remote rural communities will be provided through the rollout of approximately 300 community-based Broadband Connection Points. These publicly-accessible sites provide free Wi-Fi internet connectivity to remote rural locations, including many of our offshore islands. There are currently 164 BCPs connected and operating in towns and villages in every county in the country, with many others being connected in the coming months.

In 2021, the Rural Development Investment Programme's Town and Village Renewal Scheme includes a Connected Hubs Call. This call is intended to develop and leverage the capacity and quality of existing remote working facilities across the State in support of the National Hub Network initiative. The total indicative funding available for the Connected Hubs Call is €5 million. The fund will provide grants from €10,000, up to €250,000 for multi-hub applications.

My Department also continues to invest significantly in the provision of new Hub facilities across the country. I recently announced €75 million for 24 landmark projects under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. Many of the successful projects involve the regeneration of historic town centre buildings as Enterprise and Co-Working Hubs.

I have also established an Interdepartmental Working Group to oversee the creation of the National Hub Network. A key deliverable of the first phase of the National Hub Network project is to identify the size and capacity of Ireland's remote working infrastructure. This is a key action of *Making Remote Work: The national Remote Working Strategy* and *Our Rural Future*.

The development of the National Hub Network will support, co-ordinate and maximise the impact of the diverse and sizable ecosystem of hubs that already exist throughout the country, including the BCPs established under the National Broadband Plan.

A key support identified through my department's consultation with hub operators and other stakeholders is the online suite of hub support tools that the Western Development Commission are currently developing at my request– this will include an online booking engine, a Client

Relationship Management system and clients. These tools will, in particular, help to reduce the administrative burden on the smaller hubs. Further announcements on this will follow later in the year.

Departmental Expenditure

310. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount expended by her Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021; the print, online and broadcasting media organisations contracted to provide this service; the amount provided to each in the timeframe concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24934/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The table here provides the information requested by the Deputy of the amount expended by my Department on advertising and awareness raising initiatives related to Covid-19 from March 2020 to date in 2021.

Name Company contracted to provide service, (Print,online & broadcasting media organisations)	Service Provided	Amount Paid
Zinc Design	Production of advice leaflets for volunteers and vulnerable groups (Irish and English language)	€5,966
Europus	Translation Costs	€719
Pi Comm	Social media video re-edit	€1,094
Publicis	Advertising (Concept development)	€1,845
An Post	Postal charges for Community Call leaflet to all homes.	€98,400