

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 14, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 15 to 27, inclusive, resubmitted.*

### Cabinet Committees

28. **Deputy Ivana Bacik** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on housing will next meet. [17875/22]

**The Taoiseach:** The next meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Housing is scheduled to take place on Thursday, 12th of May.

This Committee works to ensure a coordinated approach to the implementation of Housing for All and the delivery of Programme for Government commitments regarding housing and related matters.

Progress of Housing for All is overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Housing and Government, with progress reports published quarterly. The latest progress report for Q1 2022 was published on April 7th.

*Questions Nos. 29 to 56, inclusive, resubmitted.*

### Industrial Relations

57. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if it is his intention to support the industrial relations provisions in respect of pension entitlements referral of the retired workers 2021 (amendment) Bill at the relevant committee after the public consultation on the Bill is complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21349/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English):** The consultation process on the Retired Workers Access to industrial relations mechanisms for pension related issues which was conducted by my Department has concluded in recent days.

The purpose of this was to seek views on the proposals arising from the Private Members Bill and to establish whether there is the potential for new or enhanced methods of consultation through the introduction of alternative systems, networks or for a which might assist retired workers in engaging more fully on pension related issues.

My Department officials will commence the examination of submissions received shortly and when this examination is completed, we will then determine the position which will be taken in relation to the matter.

### **Inland Fisheries**

58. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the commission on all moneys collected by fishing licence distributors will be reviewed; and if he will consider a 10% minimum increase on the existing commission on all moneys collected in 2022. [21307/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The salmon and seatrout licence duty comprises a conservation element which is 50% of the total duty and is ring-fenced for salmon and sea trout conservation work. The remaining 50% is the licence payment in respect of which Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) pay commission at a rate of 10%.

The commission payable to distributors is an operational matter for IFI in which I or the Department have no role. IFI has established a specific email address for queries from Oireachtas members so that queries can be addressed promptly, in line with IFI's objective to deliver services to the highest standards. The email address is [oireachtas@fisheriesireland.ie](mailto:oireachtas@fisheriesireland.ie).

### **Inland Fisheries**

59. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason the salmon licence one-day charge now stands at €36, which is one of the highest charges in Europe and acts as a deterrent to the fishing rod tourism sector. [21308/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Angling licences attract a statutory duty and a wide range of licensing options at various duty rates is available. In relation to tourist/visiting anglers, the 21-day licence available at a duty of €50 is particularly popular. Based on the recommendations of the Board of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), and with reference to the Consumer Price Index, the duty for certain categories of angling licences, which were reduced in the prevailing economic circumstances in 2010, were restored to 2008 levels for the current angling season. The duty for a one-day licence was restored to the 2008 level of €36. Licensing duties in Ireland are relatively consistent with similar costs internationally. In addition, unlike other countries angling licences in Ireland are required only for salmon and sea-trout over 40 cms and angling for all other species does not require a licence or attract a duty.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

60. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will undertake a study into all the renewable energy options available to Ireland to examine the infrastructure development that is required and that can be achieved to help Ireland achieve the climate action goals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21325/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Climate Action Plan 2021 includes a suite of actions to realise the full potential of Ireland's

onshore and offshore renewable energy resources including a commitment to the achievement of up to 8GW of installed onshore wind, up to 2.5GW of solar, and 5GW of installed offshore wind capacity by 2030. Additionally, there is a further commitment to develop a longer-term plan to harness the estimated potential of at least 30GW of offshore floating wind power in our Atlantic waters. The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) is one of the major Government policies to help deliver on the ambition in the Climate Action Plan 2021 of up to 80% renewable electricity by 2030. The RESS is an auction-based support scheme which invites grid-scale renewable electricity generation projects to compete to receive a guaranteed price for the electricity they generate.

Over 1GW of new wind and solar generation was secured in the first RESS auction in 2020, and projects are expected to reach commercial operation before the end of 2023. A significant volume of new renewable generation is expected to be secured in the second RESS auction which will take place next month. Alongside this, my Department is drafting the terms and conditions for offshore wind-specific RESS auctions. At least three offshore RESS auctions are currently planned for this decade.

Achieving the target of up to 80% of electricity coming from renewable sources will entail investment of tens of billions of euro, including in the installation and maintenance of generation assets, and associated infrastructure and services, as well as in the development of supply chains and port infrastructure. In particular, significant grid infrastructure projects will be required at both transmission and distribution level. In this context, EirGrid have committed to updating their 'Shaping our Electricity Future' roadmap to assess the infrastructure required to meet Ireland's up to 80% renewable electricity target and deliver on our climate ambition.

### **Post Office Network**

61. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the actions that have been taken to tackle the staff shortages and delays experienced by An Post (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21333/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** Operational matters relating to An Post, including staffing issues, are a matter for the Board and management of An Post and not one in which I, as Minister, have a role.

### **Departmental Consultations**

62. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment; Climate and Communications if a response will issue to the concerns raised by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21343/22]

**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 and it is longstanding Government policy that postal services will not be directly subsidised by the taxpayer. An Post has statutory responsibility for the State's postal service and the post office network. In addition, Irish post offices are typically independent businesses that are run by postmasters. 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. The Government is committed to a sustainable An Post and post office network as a key component of the economic and social infrastructure throughout

Ireland. The company fully understands the Government position and a sustainable, viable and customer-focused post office network is a key strategic priority for the company.

The transformation programme that was agreed with the Irish Postmasters Union in 2018, was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. An Post introduced the pandemic recovery fund in 2021, which was worth €8.5 million over an 18-month period. This commenced on 1 July 2021 and will continue until the end of this year. The Government recognises the importance of the high value and high quality post office network to our citizens right across the country, as well as the central and trusted role of postmasters in our communities. An Post, including through the post office network provides important services to its customers and it is contracted to provide key Government services to citizens.

The work of the interdepartmental group, which was established to consider the feasibility of the new Government services, is being considered at present and the report of the Group will be brought to Government when all options have been considered. While decisions relating to the network are matters for the board and the management of the company, they continue to engage with the IPU on operational matters. The Government is committed to ensuring that An Post continues to play a vital role.

Officials in my Department have ongoing engagement with the company, with other Departments and with key stakeholders to explore all options, in line with this commitment.

### **Turf Cutting**

63. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if clarification will be provided regarding proposed regulations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21464/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I remain committed to introducing new regulations on the sale of solid fuels for domestic heating in Ireland this Autumn. They will introduce minimum standards that will apply across all solid fuels, to ensure that the most polluting can no longer be made available on the Irish market and to assist the public in transitioning to less polluting alternatives. New measures are required to improve air quality and protect public health. It is estimated that each year, some 1,300 people die prematurely in Ireland due to air pollution from solid fuel burning and that there are over 16,200 life years lost. In addition, many people also experience a poor quality of life due to the associated short-term and long-term health impacts of this form of pollution. The regulations are a critical element of addressing this public health and environmental challenge and will serve to improve the quality of the air that we breathe, and the health of the public that we serve. The primary focus of these regulations is on the large-scale commercial sale of turf. I recognise that turf cutting by citizens for use in their own homes is a traditional activity across many peatland areas and the intention is to preserve customary practices in this regard. Final regulations will be agreed by Government in due course reflecting the ongoing consultation as to their exact content. We will ensure that while measures are introduced to enhance the quality of our air, they will not impinge upon traditional local practices associated with sod peat.

### **Bus Services**

64. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Transport the timeframe for the reopening of the restaurant and other facilities at Cavan bus station that have been closed to the public since the beginning of the pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21302/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport; however, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised by the Deputy in relation to the timeframe for reopening of facilities at Cavan bus station is an operational matter for Bus Éireann.

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

### **Bus Services**

65. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Transport the number of members of the design team for BusConnects Cork who have experience of living in Cork; the number of visits they took to Cork; and the number of times they travelled each of the proposed routes. [21303/22]

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

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

### **National Car Test**

66. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Transport the action proposed to be taken by his Department to reduce the waiting times for cars to be assessed for NCT tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21344/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The operation of the National Car Test (NCT) service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority and I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply.

I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

### **National Car Test**

67. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Transport the mechanisms that can be put in place to assist car dealers who are trading second-hand cars to help them have NCT tests carried out within a 14-day timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21345/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The Deputy may wish to note that roadworthiness testing is not automatically required at the point of sale of a vehicle. Upon registration of new or second-hand vehicles by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, vehicle data is added to

the National Driver and Vehicles File (NVDF) and relevant vehicles are notified to the NCT Service.

The applicable dates for roadworthiness testing are set out under the Road Traffic (National Car Test) Regulations 2017, as amended (S.I. 415 of 2017). Once vehicles have reached the applicable age, they must have a valid roadworthiness certificate in order to be driven on Irish roads. In general, passenger cars that are over 4 years old are required to present for testing from the anniversary of their registration date.

There are no current plans to amend the Regulations to mandate roadworthiness testing at point of sale and correspondingly it is not intended to prioritise any particular cohort of vehicle owners.

### **Driver Test**

68. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport if a driving test will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21346/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** Under legislation, the Road Safety Authority is responsible for the Driver Testing Service. I have therefore referred this question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

### **Driver Licences**

69. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport if driving licence records can be retrieved from the relevant local authority for information in relation to a licence, as in the case of a person (details supplied). [21388/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** All enquires relating to driver licensing are handled by the National Driver Licence Service, the provision of which I have delegated to the Road Safety Authority (RSA) under the relevant legislation. My Department does not have access to individual applications.

I have forwarded the Deputy's query to the RSA for direct reply. If he has not heard from them in 10 working days I would ask that he contact my office directly.

### **Electric Vehicles**

70. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport the number of electric vehicle charging points that have been installed by Cork County Council over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21404/22]

71. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport if additional funding streams for electric vehicle charging points and docking stations will be made in 2022; if funding will be made available for additional electric vehicle charging points and docking stations in public car parks in Thurles, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21419/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and



71 together.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 set a target of 945,000 EVs by 2030. The Deputies will be aware that the Government is fully committed to supporting a significant expansion and modernisation of the electric vehicle charging network over the coming years, to facilitate the expansion of EVs in the Irish car fleet. A draft National Charging Infrastructure Strategy has been published for public consultation which sets out a pathway for the provision of charging infrastructure to stay ahead of demand. The Consultation is open until the end of May 2021.

There is a need for a seamless public charging network that will provide for situations or instances where home charging is not possible such as on-street and residential charging, destination charging, and workplace charging.

My Department is developing a number of new schemes which will support the installation of destination charge points in these locations and will help provide critical links in the overall network for public charging.

The Strategy proposes a new Residential charging scheme that will replace the existing Public Points scheme. It is envisaged that this new scheme will provide significant co-funding of 75% to Local Authorities to support the design of local area charging networks, as well as the delivery and installation of these networks which are intended to comprise both on-street charging in areas where residents do not have access to home charging solutions, and destination charge points.

I anticipate that the Residential Charging Scheme and Destination Charging Scheme will be open to applications for funding later this year.

I would welcome applications from both Cork County Council for funding under these new schemes. While the SEAI has not yet received a completed application from Cork County Council for EV charge point funding, I can confirm that Cork County Council requested an application form under the Public Charge Point Scheme in 2021.

Other supports that are available for EV charging infrastructure include the Home Charger Grant.

The EV Home Charger Grant Scheme has been in operation since January 2018 to support the installation of home chargers for purchasers of new and second-hand BEVs and PHEVs. The grant provides generous support towards the full cost of installation of a home charger up to a maximum of €600. Work is currently being progressed to expand the EV home charger grant to include multi-unit dwellings. This scheme will be launched shortly.

€10 million was also committed from the Climate Action Fund to support ESB investment in the charging network and this has leveraged a further €10 million investment from ESB, with the infrastructure to be in place by the end of 2022. This intervention alone will result in:

- 90 additional high power chargers, each capable of charging two vehicles - Seventeen high-power chargers distributed across 14 multi-vehicle hubs have been delivered as part of the programme to date.

- 52 additional fast chargers, which may replace existing standard chargers - This work is completed at 36 locations.

- 264 replacement standard chargers with more modern technology and with each consisting of two charge points - This work is substantially complete. 258 of the chargers have now been successfully replaced.

Further details on the progression of this project can be found at [esb.ie/ecars/our-network/network-upgrades](https://esb.ie/ecars/our-network/network-upgrades).

To coordinate the provision of EV supports and grants and the delivery of charging infrastructure, the Government will establish an office of Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland (ZEVl) within the Department of Transport in Summer 2022. ZEVl will coordinate and support the development and roll-out of publicly accessible charging infrastructure.

*Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 70.*

### **Local Authorities**

72. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Transport when the repayment of moneys owing to a county council (details supplied) will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21429/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** This matter is being investigated by Department officials. A response is not possible at this time - we will revert as soon as possible.

### **Tax Data**

73. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Finance when he will publish the 2022 Research and Development Tax Credit Statistics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21353/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Revenue publishes detailed statistics on the Research & Development (R&D) tax credit on an annual basis. These publications are available at: [www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/r-and-d-tax-credits.aspx](https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/r-and-d-tax-credits.aspx).

I am advised by Revenue that Corporation Tax returns for the tax year 2020 were due to be filed during 2021. The data from these are currently being collated and analysed by Revenue and the R&D credit statistics for 2020 will be published at the above link in the coming weeks.

### **Tax Reliefs**

74. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer on an annual basis of the tuition tax relief for undergraduate courses in public higher institutes of education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21355/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 473A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for income tax relief in respect of qualifying tuition fees paid by an individual for a third level education course, including a postgraduate course. The relief is granted at the standard rate of income tax (currently 20%), where an individual pays tuition fees for an approved course, whether on his or her own behalf or on behalf of another individual. The relief is restricted to tuition fees and excludes other education costs such as administration fees, examination fees, capitation fees and any element of the fees met by a grant, scholarship or employer contribution.



All courses provided by publicly funded universities, colleges and institutes of higher education in Ireland are approved for the purposes of the relief. All courses provided by publicly funded or accredited universities and institutions in other EU Member States or in the UK are also approved for the purposes of the relief. This includes courses provided by colleges or institutions through distance education into Ireland. Private colleges in Ireland and private distance education colleges based in the EU or the UK must operate in accordance with a code of standards which has been approved by the Minister for Education and Skills.

I am advised by Revenue that the annual cost of tax relief on approved training courses or third level education fees are set out in Revenue's Cost of Tax Expenditures Publication, which is available at: [www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx](http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx) (See 'Approved Training Courses/Third Level Education Fees').

The information included in the statistics at present is for 2004 to 2018. Tax returns for 2019 were filed in late 2020 and the data from these are now being processed and statistics will be updated shortly at the above link.

This data is summarised below.

Year	Cost (€m)
2004	11.1
2005	14.3
2006	15.7
2007	18.1
2008	19.9
2009	20.6
2010	19.4
2011	14.5
2012	13.5
2013	12.5
2014	12.7
2015	12.9
2016	13.9
2017	15.2
2018	17.2

I am further advised by Revenue that a breakdown of claims for tax relief on tuition fees by private colleges, public colleges, undergraduate courses and postgraduate courses are not available, as this information is not captured separately on tax returns.

### Tax Code

75. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale behind the current tax regime for exchange-traded funds in Ireland including the higher than previous tax rate applied to gains and the approach to deemed disposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21370/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The term "Exchange Traded Fund" or "ETF" is a general investment industry term that refers to a wide range of investments. ETF investments can take many different legal and regulatory forms even where they are established

within the same jurisdiction.

An ETF is an investment fund that is traded on a regulated stock exchange. A typical ETF can be compared to a tracker fund in that it will seek to replicate a particular index.

There is no separate taxation regime specifically for ETFs. Being collective investment funds, they generally come within the regimes set out in the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 for such funds. The domicile of the ETF will generally determine the applicable fund regime, specifically whether the ETF falls within the domestic fund regime or the offshore fund regime.

Where the domestic fund regime applies, a 'gross roll-up' applies such that there is no annual tax on income or gains arising to a fund but the fund has responsibility to deduct an exit tax in respect of payments made to certain unit holders in that fund. To prevent indefinite or long-term deferral of this exit tax, a disposal is deemed to occur every 8 years. Where the offshore fund regime applies, the applicable tax treatment depends on the location and nature of the fund.

Income and gains arising from investments into Irish and EU domiciled ETFs are subject to income tax at a rate of 41% on a self-assessment basis. Such income and gains are not subject to Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) or Universal Social Charge (USC) liabilities. This charge to tax does not apply in the case of unit holders who are non-resident. In the case of non-resident investors, liability to tax on gains from the fund will be determined in their home jurisdiction.

To assist taxpayers in determining the appropriate tax treatment for investments in ETFs, Revenue has published guidance which is available at [www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-27/27-01a-03.pdf](http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-27/27-01a-03.pdf).

There are currently no plans to review the taxation of Exchange Traded Funds.

### **Inflation Rate**

**76. Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated level of inflation for 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21377/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Inflation picked up sharply over the course of the last year and in March stood at 6.9 per cent. Almost every advanced country in the world is in the same position, with inflation rates of 8, 7 and 7.4 per cent recorded in the US, UK and euro area respectively in March.

The rise in wholesale energy prices is the key contributor and reflects the rapid rebound in global demand and, more recently, the war in Ukraine. Price spikes have been seen in a range of other commodities as well, including food, fertilisers and metals. Global supply chain disruptions, including the availability of inputs and transport bottlenecks, have also added to inflationary pressures. Domestically, the speed and strength of the economic recovery has led to an imbalance between demand and supply and put additional upward pressure on both wages and prices.

Looking ahead, energy prices increases will continue to be a key driver over the coming months. Inflation is now expected to peak at around 6¾ per cent in the second quarter and average 6¼ per cent for the year as a whole. Pass-through price effects are expected in other sectors such as food (via higher fuel/fertiliser costs) and consumer goods and services (due to higher energy inputs), and will add to core inflation, which excludes energy and unprocessed food, this year. Core inflation is expected to average 3.9 per cent for 2022 as a whole.

The Government is acutely aware of the impact of rising prices on citizens and businesses and has introduced a series of measures in recent months at a cost of over €2 billion to help address the rising cost of living. This included a reduction in the VAT rate to 9 per cent for electricity and gas to end-October, an additional once-off lump sum payment in respect of the fuel allowance, a reduction in the PSO levy, an extension of the reduction in excise duty to mid-October and a €200 electricity credit to all households. However, it must be stressed that expenditure resources are limited, the priority is to

minimise the impact on those who are most affected. The Government can help, but cannot fully insulate all from the burden of higher energy prices.

Given the current dynamics at play, we must remain prudent in our approach – conscious that broad fiscal measures at this point in time could lead to further inflationary pressure which would be counterproductive in nature. My Department will continue to monitor the inflation situation closely and take appropriate actions when necessary.

### **Tax Reliefs**

**77. Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 49 of 22 February 2022, the status of the review of the disabled drivers and passengers' scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21416/22]

**78. Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 49 of 22 February 2022, if the National Disability Inclusion Strategy working group has convened a meeting since 26 January 2022 to discuss the review of the disabled drivers and passengers' scheme; if so, the proposals that were brought forward for consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21417/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 78 together.

The Disabled Drivers & Disabled Passengers Scheme (DDS) provides relief from VRT and VAT on the purchase and use of an adapted car, as well as an exemption from motor tax and an annual fuel grant.

The Scheme is open to severely and permanently disabled persons who also meet one of six specified medical criteria, as a driver or as a passenger and also to certain organisations. In order to qualify for relief, the applicant must hold a Primary Medical Certificate issued by the relevant Senior Area Medical Officer (SAMO) or a Board Medical Certificate issued by the Disabled Driver Medical Board of Appeal. Certain other qualifying criteria apply in relation to the vehicle, in particular that it must be specially constructed or adapted for use by the applicant. In the event that a PMC is not granted by the relevant Senior Area Medical Officer an appeal may be made to the independent Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal (DDMBA) who operate out of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire.

I gave a commitment to the House that a comprehensive review of the scheme, to include a broader review of mobility supports for persons with disabilities, would be undertaken. In this context I have been working with my Government colleague, Roderic O'Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. We are both agreed that the review should be brought within a wider review under the auspices of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, to examine transport supports encompassing all Government funded transport and mobility schemes for people with disabilities.

This the most appropriate forum to meet mutual objectives in respect of transport solutions/mobility supports for those with a disability.

The NDIS working group, chaired by Minister Anne Rabbitte, with officials from both my Department and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth as well as others, held its first meeting on the 26th January 2022. My officials will continue to work closely with officials from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, to progress this review, and on foot of that will bring forward proposals for consideration.

The arrangements for further meetings of and timeline for progression of the review by the NDIS working group is a matter for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. I cannot comment on any possible changes in advance of proposals arising from the review.

*Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 77.*

### **Rental Sector**

**79. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered implementing a scheme to counter the increase in rent to supplement those who are struggling due to the recent surge in the cost of living; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21444/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As outlined in the ‘Housing for All’ strategy, the Government’s primary response to mitigating residential price inflation is to increase supply. The strategy outlines the plan to increase affordability and housing supply by committed to, amongst other things, an average of 2,000 new ‘cost rental’ homes every year, with targets of rents being at least 25 per cent below market level. Additionally, in respect of properties in rent pressure zones, since 11 December 2021 annual rent increases are limited to 2 per cent per annum or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower.

With that said, as Minister for Finance I can only answer the Deputy’s question in respect of taxation measures as any direct expenditure measures in this area are a matter in the first instance for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Tax relief in respect of rent paid was previously available to those paying for private rented accommodation, including rent paid for flats, apartments or houses. It did not include rent paid to local authorities. This relief was abolished in Budget 2011 following a recommendation in the 2009 report by the Commission on Taxation. As such, it is no longer available to those that commenced renting for the first time from 08 December 2010.

The view of the independent Commission was that, in the same manner in which mortgage interest relief increases the cost of housing, rent relief increases the cost of private rented accommodation. Accordingly, the result of reintroducing this relief would very likely be a transfer of Exchequer funding directly to landlords, which would not have the intended effect of reducing the cost pressure on tenants.

At the time of its abolition, the rental tax relief cost the Exchequer up to €97m per annum and it is likely that this figure would be even higher today were a similar scheme to be put in place.

Having regard to the foregoing, I have no plans at present to reintroduce a tax-based support for those in private rental accommodation.

## Public Sector Pensions

80. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has considered cutting contributory public service pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21298/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** As the Deputy may be aware, there are two separate pension increase arrangements applying to public service pensions depending when individuals joined their relevant pension scheme. These are as follows:

### 1. Single Scheme:

This the mandatory pension Scheme for all new-joiner pensionable public servants since 2013. The Scheme's rules are set out in legislation and are outlined in the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012. Section 40 of that Act specifically provides for pension increases to be applied to pensions in payment in line with increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

### 2. Pre-Existing Schemes

There is a separate policy applying to those public service pension schemes which predate the Single Scheme. It is important to note that the grant of increases for members of these schemes is a discretionary power of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform under section 29(2) of the Pension Increase Act 1964.

Under the current pension increase policy for pre-existing public service pension schemes, an individual's pension is eligible for an increase to the extent that this will ensure alignment with the pay of serving staff. This means that the majority of retired members generally receive pension increases in line with the pay increases due to their peers in employment.

The current policy has been in place since 2017 and was introduced as an equitable approach to deal with the differences between cohorts of pensioners depending on when they retired (i.e. those who retired post February 2012 did so on reduced pensions). These complexities were caused by the introduction of FEMPI arrangements and their subsequent unwinding.

The policy is outlined in detail in my Department's Circular 10/2021, which is available here: [www.gov.ie/en/circular/e3bc7-instruction-on-the-pension-increase-policy-in-the-public-service-until-end-2022/](http://www.gov.ie/en/circular/e3bc7-instruction-on-the-pension-increase-policy-in-the-public-service-until-end-2022/)

In summary, the pension increase policy for all new members of the public service since 2013 is linked to inflation consistent with the relevant legislation and is the default arrangement for all new members of the public service. The existing pension increase policy for the members of pre-existing schemes remains in place for the period up until the end of 2022, in advance of which I will give due consideration to the policy approach going forward.

## Legislative Measures

81. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeline for all the Financial Emergency Measures in Public Interests legislation restoration dates over the remainder of 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21454/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** The process



of unwinding the Financial Emergency (FEMPI) legislation commenced under the Lansdowne Road Agreement 2016-2018, with the remainder of the process largely completed under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA). This will continue under 'Building Momentum: A New Public Service Agreement, 2021-2022'.

At this point, salary rates up to €150,000, which account for 99% of the Public Service, have been fully restored. Section 20 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 sets out that public servants with annualised basic salaries above €150,000 should be restored by a date no later than 1 July, 2022.

As the Deputy may be aware, I have established an Independent Review Panel into the recruitment and pay determination processes for Senior Public Service posts.

In addition, each year, under the terms of the FEMPI Act 2013, I am obliged to carry out an annual review of the operation, effectiveness and impact of the FEMPI Acts, having regard to the overall economic conditions in the State and national competitiveness. In this annual review, I am also to consider whether or not any of the provision of the relevant Acts continue to be necessary having regard to the purposes of those Acts, the revenues of the State and State commitments in respect of public service pay and pensions.

The 2021 annual review, a written report of which was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on the 25 June, 2021, recommended the continuation of the unwinding of the FEMPI measures in line with the provisions enacted in the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act, 2017.

## **Wind Energy Generation**

82. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the persons and companies that have received licences for potential offshore wind development, specifically the relevant projects; the dates on which the original licences were issued; the dates on which the rights to develop granted under these licences to develop offshore energy prior to the passing of any recent legislation; the changes to the ownership of the licences of which his Department has been notified of; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21305/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** A foreshore licence issued under section 3 the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended, is generally granted for short-term, temporary activities which do not require exclusive occupation of the Foreshore. Activities which are the subject of a foreshore licence application generally relate to site investigations, dredging and sporting events or developments such as pipes and cables. Where exclusive use of the foreshore is required for a proposed development a foreshore lease is the appropriate consent under section 2 of the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended. A foreshore licence granted to a developer for the purposes of conducting site investigation activities to inform the proposed development of an offshore windfarm does not permit a developer to construct an offshore wind farm. The benefit of such a licence is personal to the licensee and not assignable and the rights given thereunder may only be exercised by the licensee within the conditions of the license itself.

Details of the applications and determinations made in respect of foreshore licenses, including those linked to "relevant projects" or Phase 1 offshore renewable energy projects which qualify to make an application to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications for a Maritime Area Consent as part of the transition provisions in the Maritime Area Planning ACT 2001 (MAP Act 2021), can be viewed on my Department's website [www.housing.gov.ie](http://www.housing.gov.ie). Details of historic licences issued for site investigation activities are not readily available as



these were granted when the foreshore consenting function came under a different Department and records from this time generally exist in hard copy format only.

Under the MAP Act 2021 a new development management system for the maritime area has been introduced to replace the current regime as operated under the Foreshore Acts. This new marine planning system will incorporate consenting for the occupation of the maritime area (Maritime Area Consents) by a new agency, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, and a new planning consenting regime, to be implemented by coastal local authorities and An Bord Pleanála.

### Housing Schemes

83. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of local authority home loan applications that have been received by all local authorities since the scheme was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21321/22]

84. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of local authority home loan applications that have been approved by all local authorities since the scheme was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21322/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 83 and 84 together.

The Local Authority Home Loan has been available nationwide from local authorities since 4 January 2022.

The Housing Agency provides a central support service that assesses applications for the Local Authority Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications. Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the final decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

The most recent figures provided by the Agency on the numbers of applications that it has assessed for each local authority, from January up to the end of March are set out in the below table:

Local Authority	Applications Underwritten	Recommended to Approve
Carlow County Council	2	1
Cavan County Council	1	1
Clare County Council	8	5
Cork City Council	2	0
Cork County Council	64	24
Donegal County Council	3	2
Dublin City Council	40	29
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	3	2
Fingal County Council	11	9
Galway City Council	3	2

Local Authority	Applications Underwritten	Recommended to Approve
Galway County Council	13	6
Kerry County Council	8	3
Kildare County Council	14	6
Kilkenny County Council	8	6
Laois County Council	4	2
Leitrim County Council	5	1
Limerick City & County Council	17	9
Longford County Council	9	5
Louth County Council	0	0
Mayo County Council	6	3
Meath County Council	27	17
Monaghan County Council	14	5
Offaly County Council	0	0
Roscommon County Council	5	2
Sligo County Council	6	1
South Dublin County Council	22	13
Tipperary County Council	6	6
Waterford City & County Council	5	0
Westmeath County Council	4	3
Wexford County Council	23	11
Wicklow County Council	11	5
Total	344	179

My Department regularly publishes information on the number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Local authority approval means that an official letter of offer has been sent to a borrower (and therefore relates to a specific property and loan amount).

Information on Local Authority drawdowns, approvals, average drawdowns, and average approvals is available at the following link, under the folder name 'Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan 2018 to date'.

[www.gov.ie/en/collection/42d2f-local-authority-loan-activity/#local-authority-loans-approvedpaid](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/42d2f-local-authority-loan-activity/#local-authority-loans-approvedpaid)

As the Local Authority Home Loan is only for applications since 4 January, data on drawdowns is not yet available for this loan type. This link will be updated when information on the Local Authority Home Loan becomes available.

*Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 83.*

### Homeless Accommodation

85. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if there is a national policy on whether those staying in a hostel have a right to notice of eviction in relation to privately run homeless hostels; if not, the reason therefor and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21342/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at the local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

Specifically under Section 10 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 local authorities are responsible for the provision of housing supports to households for the purposes of meeting their accommodation needs, including services provided to homeless persons under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. The matter referred to in the Question is an operational issue which is a matter for the relevant housing authority.

### **Housing Schemes**

86. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when it is envisaged that the required regulations setting out the detailed criteria of the local authority affordable purchase scheme will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21350/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Part 2 of the Affordable Housing Act 2021, which I commenced on 3 September 2021, lays the foundation for the Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme, which allows all Local Authorities to make available affordable homes for purchase. This is a key element in the Government's Housing For All strategy and will enable home ownership through an equity share model, in which eligible purchasers are able to buy the homes at prices significantly below open market value and in return the Local Authority takes a percentage equity interest in the home.

On 13 April 2022 I signed two sets of Regulations to govern the implementation of this scheme by Local Authorities, both of which came into effect that day and which were announced in Iris Oifigiúil on 19 April. The Affordable Housing Regulations 2022 set out the eligibility criteria for the scheme, including the specific gross income limit calculated with reference to the market value of each affordable home. The Affordable Housing (No. 2) Regulations 2022 provide for a number of other matters, including the process by which Local Authorities will advertise homes, receive and assess applications, and operate a Scheme of Priority. These Regulations has been circulated to Local Authorities along with an Explanatory Note and an Income Assessment Policy. The texts of Regulations are available online on the Irish Statute Book website at:

[www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/si/183/made/en/print](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/si/183/made/en/print)

[www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/si/184/made/en/print](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/si/184/made/en/print)

### **Housing Schemes**

87. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if a Tenant Incremental Purchase Scheme application can be considered a joint application under a discretionary process considering the practicalities in such a circumstance further to the recent changes announced to the Tenant Incremental Purchase Scheme in which the applicants are married since 2008 but only one of the applicants is on the tenancy agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21352/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme.

The scheme was reviewed in line with Programme for Government and Housing for All commitments in 2021, with amendments to these criteria subsequently approved by Government. The amendments came into effect on 1st February 2022.

A tenant is defined in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 as any person to whom a housing authority has let a house under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014 or Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. An application by a spouse to become a joint tenant must be made to the relevant local authority. It is a matter for each local authority, as part of its housing management functions, to determine the conditions in relation to joint tenancies in its administrative area.

### **Housing Policy**

88. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he will publish his review of the income limits for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21375/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 343 of 22 March 2022 which sets out the position in the matter.

### **State Bodies**

89. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he is satisfied with the performance of all of the members of the Board of An Bord Pleanála; if he is satisfied that they have all satisfied their statutory requirements under ethics and planning legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21398/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** In relation to the questions posed, I can inform the deputy that I am aware of allegations which have been made in relation to a Board member of An Bord Pleanála and understand that those allegations are denied by the Board member concerned. A Senior Counsel is being appointed to provide a report to inform my consideration of the matter.

I also understand that the Office of the Planning Regulator has independently written to the Chairperson of An Bord Pleanála requesting him to outline the systems and procedures that An Bord Pleanála has in place to ensure effective compliance with the statutory duties provided for in Section 147 and 148 of the Act, and any other information he considers relevant.

An Bord Pleanála is independent in the performance of its functions under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Pending the outcome of these considerations, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

### **Traveller Accommodation**

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which moneys earmarked for housing expenditure for the Travelling community have been expended to date in 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21456/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 provides that housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The following table outlines the 2022 allocation and expenditure to date under the Traveller accommodation programme. Expenditure to date is broadly in line with profiles indicating increasing expenditure arising in the second half of the year.

-	Annual Budget 2022 €	Expenditure to week ending 22 April 2022 €
Capital	18,000,000	3,030,040
Current	6,500,000	2,005,869

### Passport Services

91. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of passport applications currently with the Passport Office from persons from Cork. [21299/22]

92. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of passport applications waiting over one month in Cork. [21300/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 92 together.

There are currently 8,300 online applications in the Passport Service system from applicants living in Cork. Over 90% of passport applicants apply using Passport Online. It is not possible to obtain the number of paper-based applications currently in the system from applicants living in Cork,

Of the number of online applications from persons from Cork, 4,800 (58%) are fully complete and are being processed by the Passport Service. The other 3,500 (42%) are incomplete, which means the Passport Service is waiting for the applicant to submit the necessary documents required. While the Passport Service makes every effort to contact the applicants in such circumstances, their experience is that many applicants take weeks and sometimes months to send in the necessary documents.

Of the 4,800 fully complete applications from persons from Cork that are currently being processed by the Passport Service, just ten applications have been with the Passport Service for over one month.

*Question No. 92 answered with Question No. 91.*

### Passport Services

93. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of a passport application by a person (details supplied). [21317/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific applications about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has issued passports to the applicants.

### **Passport Services**

94. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport application by a person (details supplied) will be reviewed and expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21329/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service regrets that an email that should have been sent on 16 March 2022 did not reach the applicant and is working to expedite the application.

### **Passport Services**

95. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps that are being taken to reduce the delays in processing applications for passports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21386/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service is proactively managing the current demand for passports and has put in place resources and structures to address the estimated significant increase in demand for passports in 2022 in this essential citizen service.

The vast majority of applications are processed within the turnaround times outlined below:

- 10 working days for Simple Adult online renewals
- 15 working days for Complex or child online renewals
- 30 working days for First Time Applications on Passport Online
- 8 weeks for An Post’s mail-in “Passport Express” service

In addition, 45% of adult renewal online applications are issued within one working day of receipt.

Last week, the Passport Service reduced the average turnaround time for first time applications from 35 working days to 30 working days. This followed an initial reduction in processing time from 40 working days to 35 working days which was made in March, and is a direct result of the staffing and resources the Department has invested in the Passport Service.

There are currently over 167,000 applications in the Passport Service system. While there is a very high volume of applications, this does not represent a backlog. These applications are all being processed in the usual way, with a continuous stream of new applications and a continuous dispatch of completed passports happening every day.

Figures show that of the total number of applications in the system, 61% are fully complete



and are being processed by the Passport Service. The other 39% of applications in the system are incomplete, which means the Passport Service is waiting for the applicant to submit the necessary documentation required. While the Passport Service makes every effort to contact applicants in such circumstances, their experience is that many applicants take weeks and sometimes months to send in the necessary documents.

The Passport Service is currently experiencing high demand for first time passports, particularly for children. First time passport applications take longer to process than renewal applications and there are a number of reasons for this. First time applications are necessarily complex to process, since, in many cases, they are applications for Irish citizenship. The Passport Service must validate the identity of the applicant and take measures to confirm the applicant's entitlement to Irish citizenship. It is the statutory responsibility of the Passport Service to protect the integrity of the Irish passport. Accordingly, a rigorous analysis process is in place to verify the identity and citizenship status of first time applicants.

In the case of first time passport applications for children, the consent of guardians must also be thoroughly validated.

The Passport Service is taking a number steps to deal with increased demand on its services: The Passport Service has a comprehensive plan to ensure that adequate staff, accommodation and technology supports are in place to meet expected demand for passports in 2022. A major recruitment drive has been underway over the past several months, which has seen the number of Passport Service staff increase by over 300 since June 2021. The Passport Service is currently running its own recruitment competition for Temporary Clerical Officers. This recruitment effort will bring staffing numbers to over 900, which represents a doubling of staff compared to June 2021. Intensive training of new staff and upskilling of existing staff is underway to increase the resources that can process complex applications, such as first time child applications. The Passport Service is prioritising first time applications and directing increased resources to processing these complex applications with a view to reducing the current turnaround time. Passport Service staff are working targeted overtime in this regard.

The Urgent Appointment Service is available for customers who wish to renew their passport at short notice. Customers availing of this service can renew their passport within 1 or 4 days in Dublin, within 4 days in Cork and within 5 days in London. In February, the Passport Service increased the number of appointments at its public offices by 100%, providing an extra 170 Urgent Appointments per week. A new document management system was put in place at the beginning of March. This aims to improve the processing speed in the Passport Service offices, and subsequent turnaround times for the applicant. One particular feature of the new system improves the processing time for applicants who have been asked to submit additional documents. Once the additional documents are received, they are being prioritised and complete applications can then be processed in 3 weeks. This significantly reduces the processing time, particularly for first time applicants. Public information media campaigns reminding citizens to check and renew their passports will continue during this busy year.

There is an updated Department of Foreign Affairs website, which includes a new passport service section where applicants can easily find out what additional documents are required for their type of application. The Passport Service is also working on public education materials, including video tutorials, with a view to assisting applicants to complete their application correctly. These videos will be shared on social media and will include instructions on submitting consent forms for child applications properly. I am confident that the measures that have been implemented will help to reduce passport turnaround times in the course of 2022, particularly for first time applications, and will assist the Passport Service in meeting the high demand forecast for this year.

I strongly urge anyone who is considering travelling overseas this year, particularly families with young children, to check the validity of their passports before booking travel and to apply for their passports online in plenty of time.

### **Passport Services**

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if documents in relation to an application for a passport in the case of a person (details supplied) will be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21463/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has issued a passport to the applicant and supporting documents have been returned.

### **Departmental Contracts**

97. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department or any organisations under his remit have purchased services from or otherwise sought to use technology developed and-or sold by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21331/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I can confirm that neither my Department nor any organisations under my remit have purchased services from the company specified.

There are no records of dealings with this company.

### **Departmental Properties**

98. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Defence if he will sign over ownership of the military barracks in Nenagh, which is in a dilapidated state, to Tipperary County Council in order that it can make a decision on its future use. [21384/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Department of Defence is currently progressing the application for First Registration of this property with the Land Registry.

Upon completion of this application, the property will then be a Registered Title held under a folio, and the Department of Defence will proceed with its disposal. In this regard, the Department would be willing to consider the possibility of transferring the property to Tipperary County Council.

However, the Deputy may wish to note that when the Department previously raised the possibility of transferring the property, the Local Authority indicated that they were not in a position to consider the acquisition of the site.

### **Special Educational Needs**

99. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education the steps that are being taken to address the lack of secondary school places in Dublin 12 for students with autism. [21296/22]

100. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education the number of secondary schools in Dublin 12 that can cater for students on the autism spectrum; and the number that are unable to cater for same. [21297/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 and 100 together.

Enabling children with special educational needs to receive an education is a priority for this Government.

This year, my Department will spend in excess of €2 Billion, or over 25% of the Department's budget on providing a wide range of schemes and supports for children with special educational needs.

This includes additional teaching and care supports.

As a result, the number of special education teachers, special needs assistants and special class and school places are at unprecedented levels.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children with special educational needs nationwide.

Over the last two years, my Department and the NCSE have worked closely on a more streamlined and joined up planning process which has ensured a targeted approach to meet demand for special needs placements ahead of each new school-year.

I am satisfied that this more joined up approach is delivering. Through this intensive intervention, we have seen an additional 300 special classes (primary and post-primary), providing 1,800 new places, opened nationwide for the 2021/22 school-year. Budget 2022 also provides for the creation of 287 additional special classes for the 2022/2023 school year. These additional classes will provide over 1,700 new places from September next.

I also acknowledge that notwithstanding the extent of this investment, there are some parts of the country where increases in population and other issues have led to concerns regarding a shortage of school places.

The NCSE has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents and seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

The NCSE is currently engaging in a process of establishing new classes for the 2022/2023 school year and beyond. Both my Department and the NCSE are always grateful to schools who express a willingness to open a special class to meet the educational needs of students in their local communities. It is of course open to any school to engage with the NCSE to establish a special class.

There are Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) located across the country and they have a specific remit in helping and supporting parents in accessing the education necessary for their children, including in identifying suitable school placements.

The Deputy may be aware that Minister Foley and I recently announced the establishment of a new special school in Cork together with an update on the expansion of existing special class and special school capacity in Cork and Dublin.

In line with the demographics and as part of forward planning, it is envisaged that special classes will be required at most, if not all, post-primary schools.

A range of measures to meet additional SEN capacity demands have already been put in place including the utilisation of spare capacity in existing schools and delivery of additional SEN capacity within the scope of existing building projects. Additionally, it is general practice to include a SEN Base in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless exceptional local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. The extent of provision made at these schools is informed by the level of demand in the area as well as the size of the school.

My Department, together with the NCSE, is monitoring the availability of places for students with special educational needs throughout the country as a priority issue and will continue to work with relevant stakeholders to ensure a supply of placements coming on stream to meet emerging demand.

I want to reassure the Deputy that my Department will continue to support the NCSE and schools through the provision of the necessary funding and capital investment to ensure all children and young people are successful in accessing an education.

*Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 99.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

101. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to the demand for school places for autistic children in the Dublin 12 area; her views on the lack of places in local schools (details supplied); her plans to provide and or increase places for autistic children in local schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21312/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Enabling children with special educational needs to receive an education is a priority for this Government.

This year, my Department will spend in excess of €2 Billion, or over 25% of the Department's budget on providing additional teaching and care supports for children with special educational needs.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children with special educational needs nationwide.

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of a specialised provision and where sanctioned, a range of supports, including capital funding, is made available to the school.

Parents seeking special class placements for their children are advised to contact NCSE locally so that their needs can be taken into account for planning purposes.

The NCSE through their network of SENOs (Special Educational Needs Organisers) are currently engaged in a process of establishing new classes for the 2022/2023 school year and beyond. They are looking at local information in relation to projected demand for future special class places.

The local SENOs remain available to assist and advise parents of children with special educational needs. Parents may contact SENOs directly using the contact details available at: [www.ncse.ie/regional-services-contact-list](http://www.ncse.ie/regional-services-contact-list)

As the Deputy's question refers to the engagement with specific schools in the area referenced, I will arrange to have the details referred to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

### **Schools Building Projects**

102. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education if plans are in place for the development of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21323/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the building project for the school to which he refers has now been devolved for delivery to Donegal Education and Training Board (DETB).

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) has been issued to DETB. The next step is for the ETB to procure a Design Team for the project to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions, and move the project onward to tender and construction in due course.

As the project is at an early stage in the delivery process, it is not possible at this time to give a date for its completion. Please be assured that the ETB will be engaging directly with the school authority to keep it informed of progress.

### **Special Educational Needs**

103. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education the visiting teacher availability from September 2022 for a student (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21394/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The National Council for Special Education Visiting Teachers, are qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of hearing loss and/or visual impairment. They offer longitudinal support to children, their families and schools, from the time of referral through to the end of post primary education

The management of visiting teachers transferred from the Department of Education to the National Council for Special Education. The Department of Education provides the funding for visiting teachers for children who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired.

Each visiting teacher is responsible for a particular region and is allocated a caseload of students. The visiting teacher supports children/young people, parents, guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the child. The frequency and nature of support takes into account a range of factors based on the individual's needs.

The NCSE Visiting Teachers are currently comprised of some who are permanent employees of the NCSE, and some who are teachers seconded to the NCSE from schools. Secondments are limited to a period of 5 years, except where a derogation is granted by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Where Visiting Teachers have reached secondment limits, the NCSE will replace them with staff who are suitably qualified and experienced to provide the same service levels to children and their families. The Department works closely with the NCSE to maintain and enhance the role of the Visiting Teachers across all of their regions.

### **Schools Building Projects**

104. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education if he will report on the new



post-primary schools for Ballycullen and Citywest, Dublin; if a school (details supplied) will be vacating the site of another school before September 2022 for its new location at Ballycullen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21402/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The permanent school building projects for the schools referred to by the Deputy are being delivered under my Department's Design and Build programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Manager to progress the projects through the relevant stages of architectural planning, tender and construction.

The first post-primary school referred to by the Deputy is currently located in suitable interim accommodation at the Firhouse Community College site, pending delivery of interim accommodation on the school's permanent site.

Work has commenced on site to deliver the interim accommodation on the permanent site and the school will re-locate to this accommodation for the 2022/2023 school year.

The permanent accommodation plans continue to be progressed while taking account of the interim accommodation. A pre-planning meeting with the local authority has taken place and developed design work is ongoing. Until such time as planning permission is secured for the permanent accommodation it is not possible to provide a timeline for its delivery. My Department will continue to keep the patron body and the school informed of developments.

The second post-primary school referred to by the Deputy opened in interim accommodation in the Citywest Campus in 2020, with additional interim accommodation provided to cater for the 2021/22 school year.

The final grant of planning permission for the project was received in March 2021. My Department's Project Manager together with their Design Team are engaged in the preparation of tender documentation for the project. My Department is considering the timeline for the progression to tender of a number of Design & Build projects, including the permanent accommodation for this school and will advise the school's patron body further as soon as possible.

Pending delivery of the permanent building project, my Department will continue to address the interim accommodation needs of the school in conjunction with the school's patron body.

### **Disadvantaged Status**

105. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education the circumstance under which a school (details supplied) in County Offaly failed to be included on the recent list of schools receiving DEIS status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21455/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I recently announced that from next September the DEIS programme will be extended to an additional 310 schools. 37 schools will also benefit from additional supports following reclassification. Schools were identified for inclusion in the programme through the refined DEIS identification model which is an objective, statistics based model. Schools were not required to apply for inclusion in the DEIS programme and the model has been applied fairly and equally to all schools.

My Department is committed to ensuring that all schools are treated equally and fairly in the manner in which they have been identified for inclusion in the DEIS programme. Schools who were not satisfied with the outcome following the application of the DEIS identification model to their school enrolment data will now have the opportunity to have that outcome reviewed.



Circular 0019/2022 outlining the details of this appeals process was published recently by my Department and is available at [www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/](http://www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/).

My Department notified all schools of the appeals process on 30th March 2022. Schools have until 5pm on Friday April 29th to submit an appeal.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an invalidity pension application in the case of a person (details supplied); when the application process will be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21324/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** To date no application for invalidity pension has been received from the person concerned.

I can confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this person on 30 March 2022.

On 22 April 2022 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on his DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Citizens Information Services**

107. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the citizens information centre in Rathmines, Dublin 6 is due to be closed; and, if so, the proposed future changes to the role of citizens information centres across the State. [21341/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Citizens Information Board (CIB), under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection, is the statutory body with responsibility for the Citizens Information Service. The CIB funds and supports eight regional Citizens Information Services (CIS) companies. Each CIS is a limited company overseen by a regional manager and board of directors. Each company is responsible for all matters and decisions relating to its staff and operations.

Dublin South CIS have confirmed the Citizen Information Centre in Rathmines will cease at the end of May 2022, as the landlord has sold the premises. Dublin South CIS is currently reviewing alternative options for premises in the general area to ensure services continue to be accessible.

Staff from Rathmines will work out of offices in the Liberties and the Carmelite Centre until such time as a permanent alternative in the general area can be procured, renovated and opened.

Dublin South CIS is committed to delivering face to face services, where a member of the public can walk into their local office and receive information, advice and advocacy services. Within a 3km zone of Rathmines, people can continue to access citizens information services at the following locations:

- **Liberties CIC, 90 Meath St, Dublin 8:** Contact by phone or email Mon, Tues, Thur, Fri 9.30am – 4.30pm, appointments will be offered as required.

- **Dublin 12 & 6W CIC, 8 Sundrive Road, Dublin 12:** Open Monday - Friday 9:30am - 4:30pm for reception, phone and email. Appointments will be offered as required., reopening on 5th May 2022.

- **Carmelite CIC, 56 Aungier St, Dublin 2,** Open Monday – Wednesday 10 am – 12 noon for reception, phone and email. Appointments will be offered as required.

During the COVID period, the Rathmines CIC office was closed for public health reasons. Dublin South CIS implemented a number of measures to ensure an ongoing service was provided to all citizens including telephone / email / letter contact. These measures will continue after May 2022 to accommodate service users impacted by the closure.

In addition, the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) is a nationwide service with extended opening hours. It can be reached on 0818 07 4000, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

With regard to future changes, there are no plans in place to change the role of Citizens Information Services nationally. It is envisioned that CIS will continue to provide essential information and advice to the citizens of Ireland in the most effective manner possible.

### **Citizens Information Services**

108. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the citizens information centre in Rathmines will be relocated; if so, the location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21393/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Citizens Information Board (CIB), under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection, is the statutory body with responsibility for the Citizens Information Service. The CIB funds and supports eight regional Citizens Information Services (CIS) companies. Each CIS is a limited company overseen by a regional manager and board of directors. Each company is responsible for all matters and decisions relating to its staff and operations.

Dublin South CIS have confirmed the Citizen Information Centre in Rathmines will cease at the end of May 2022, as the landlord has sold the premises. Dublin South CIS is currently reviewing alternative options for premises in the general area to ensure services continue to be accessible.

Staff from Rathmines will work out of offices in the Liberties and the Carmelite Centre until such time as a permanent alternative in the general area can be procured, renovated and opened.

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In addition, the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) is a nationwide service with extended opening hours. It can be reached on 0818 07 4000, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

### **Social Welfare Eligibility**

109. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) has sufficient contributions to qualify for benefits while being unfit for work; and the supports that are available for the self-employed sector. [21396/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and for no other reason and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last or second last complete contribution year before the relevant date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E, H & S contributions are reckonable for IP purposes. IP was extended to the self employed from 01 December 2017.

Eligibility for IP can only be established on receipt of a completed application form. The person in question should submit an IP application form and their entitlement can then be determined.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current position in regard to an application for a carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) who has given up their employment to care for their relatives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21405/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 25 January 2022.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 7 April 2022 with effect from 27 January 2022.

The first payment issued to the nominated bank account on 14 April 2022.

Arrears of payments due from 27 January 2022 to 13 April 2022 issued on 14 April 2022.

The person concerned was notified of this decision on 7 April 2022 , the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **International Protection**

111. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the gross total spend to date by IPAS on privately owned accommodation (details supplied) as part of its response to the crisis in Ukraine. [21389/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department is focused on providing accommodation where requested to people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Over 16,500 people have been provided with International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) accommodation to date.

IPAS has contracted approximately 5,000 hotel rooms, with additional capacity also being pursued through different means including hotels, guest houses and B&Bs, accommodation pledged by the general public, religious properties, accommodation operated by voluntary organisations, and local authority facilities.

Total spend in this challenging environment is monitored in line with governance requirements. My Department is collating the information requested and a reply will then issue to the Deputy.

### **International Protection**

112. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the total number of rooms acquired by IPAS within privately owned accommodation (details supplied) as part of its response to the crisis in Ukraine. [21390/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department is focused on providing accommodation where requested to people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Over 16,500 people have been provided with International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) accommodation to date.

IPAS has contracted approximately 5,000 hotel rooms, with additional capacity also being pursued through different means including hotels, guest houses and B&Bs, accommodation pledged by the general public, religious properties, accommodation operated by voluntary organisations, and local authority facilities.

My Department is collating the information requested and a reply will then issue directly to the Deputy.

### **Education and Training Provision**

113. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he plans to streamline the safepass renewal process to remove the requirement for renewal courses given that under the Further Education and Training Act 2017,

SOLAS is an administrative body and no longer a training authority. [21318/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to this issue has been requested from SOLAS.

Officials in my department are engaging with SOLAS to confirm the position and the details will be communicated to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Education and Training Provision**

114. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the reason that the management of SOLAS between 2017 and 2019 have deviated from or gone beyond the ministerial order to demand that candidates for Safe Pass take a course to renew their safepass, ignoring the High Court and its own counsel and legal advice. [21319/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to this issue has been requested from SOLAS.

Officials in my department are engaging with SOLAS to confirm the position and the details will be communicated to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Education and Training Provision**

115. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if SOLAS is entitled to run apprenticeship and construction courses as an administrative body under section 38 of the Further Education and Training Act 2017. [21320/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to this issue has been requested from SOLAS.

Officials in my Department are engaging with SOLAS to confirm the position and the details will be communicated to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Further and Higher Education**

116. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the average annual cost of studying part-time at ‘undergraduate and postgraduate level in public institutes of higher education; the total number of part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students in public institutes of higher education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21354/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The number of part-time students enrolled in HEA-funded institutions available is shown in the table below. This data is taken from the HEA’s student records system (SRS), and shows the three most recent years available.

-	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Undergraduate	25,555	27,392	27,204
Postgraduate	17,474	18,401	22,454
Total	43,029	45,793	49,658

Neither my Department nor the HEA compile part-time undergraduate and post-graduate fee information. Part-time or flexible students can fall under a number of categories such as part-time students on traditional on-campus full-time programmes, blended learning, evening/ weekend on-campus students, or online students. Part-time students can take a wide range of credits and may pay per credit and there is, therefore, no average cost for part-time courses.

### Third Level Fees

117. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the cost of reducing part-time undergraduate and below course fees by €500, €1000 and abolishing them completely in public institutes of higher education for EU students; the cost of reducing postgraduate fees by €500, €1000 and abolishing them completely in public institutes of higher education for EU students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21356/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, fee levels vary across the institutions, disciplines and mode of delivery. Part time and postgraduate tuition fees are payable directly to Higher Education Institutions.

Higher Education Institutions are autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own day-to-day management and operational affairs, including the management of academic affairs. They retain the right to determine their own policies and procedures. The level of part time and postgraduate tuition fees to be charged are therefore a matter for the relevant institution to determine in line with its own criteria. My Department is therefore not in a position to provide an estimated cost for reductions in such fees by the sector.

### Departmental Funding

118. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the total current reserve of the National Training Fund at the end of 2021; the projected expenditure and income to the fund for 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21357/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins):** The closing balance in the National Training Fund at the end of 2021 was €1.1 billion. The estimated income and expenditure for the Fund, as set out in the Revised Estimates Volume for 2022, are €854.74 million and €765.07 million respectively, giving an estimated surplus of €88.67 million in 2022.

### Capital Expenditure Programme

119. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated total capital expenditure on further education,



the technological sector and universities in 2022, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21376/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The revised National Development Plan (NDP) published in October 2021 provided clarity on Departmental capital ceilings for the period 2022 – 2025.

The table below sets out the 2022 capital ceilings. It should be noted that in addition to the €256.5m set out, a further €0.5m and €1m have been allocated to SOLAS and the HEA respectively to meet agency capital costs. Carryover amounts from 2021 into 2022 are excluded from this table but are incorporated into expenditure plans as follows: HE capital: €22.2m, HE PPPs: €3m.

-	Expenditure
HE Capital	€166m
HE PPPs	€43m
FET Capital	€47.5m
TOTAL	€256.5m*

\* The amount above includes up to €15m for shared ICT Infrastructure for the Higher Education Sector programme providing investment in the upgrade of ICT infrastructure and business applications for the higher education sector.

### Third Level Costs

120. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of a 1% increase in the Student Universal Support Ireland, SUSI, maintenance grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21378/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Student Grant Scheme, administered by SUSI, provides grant assistance to students attending an approved course in an approved institution who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means. The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter for the centralised student grant awarding authority SUSI to determine.

The estimated cost of a 1% increase in the 2021/22 SUSI maintenance grant rates is in the region of €1.63m. As the Deputy may be aware as part of Budget 2022, I increased all maintenance grant rates by €200, which is significantly more than 1%.

I commissioned a major review of the Student Grant Scheme, which has been conducted by Indecon International Economic Consultants under the direction of a steering group chaired by my Department and comprising a number of stakeholders.

It is my intention to bring the final report to Government shortly. It is my strong view that cost and access issues must be considered in tandem with the issues of system funding and reform. If we want the best outcomes, we need a well funded system which is accessible to people regardless of their background. Reform of the student support system can also be a critical enabler of other strategic outcomes across the tertiary system, including enhanced lifelong learning and stronger diversity among the postgraduate community.

Given these interconnections, it is my intention to bring the Student grant review to Cabinet

alongside the report on funding and reform of higher education.

### **Third Level Costs**

121. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of extending the income threshold increase announced as part of budget 2022 to the special rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21379/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Student Grant Scheme, administered by SUSI, provides grant assistance to students attending an approved course in an approved institution who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

In assessing an application for the 2022/23 academic year, SUSI will have regard to the following qualifying criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant:

1. The student must qualify for the standard rate of grant;
2. Total gross reckonable income for the 2021 tax year, after income disregards and Child Dependent Increase(s) are excluded, must not exceed €24,500; and
3. As at 31st December 2021, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed in Schedule 2 of the Student Grant Scheme 2022.

The report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education made detailed recommendations concerning the introduction of special rates of maintenance grants for disadvantaged students. The target group of “those most in need” was defined in terms of the dependents of people receiving long-term welfare payments, where the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

Accordingly, to effectively target this cohort, the income limit for the special rate of grant is aligned to the maximum point of the weekly State Contributory Pension plus the maximum Qualified Adult Allowance for a person over 66 years. The student grant means test for 2022 is based on gross reckonable income for the 2021 tax year.

The income threshold for the special rate of grant is strategically aligned with the highest Department of Social Protection rate as described in order to target students from households in receipt of long term social welfare assistance effectively. The income threshold changes when this Department of Social Protection rate changes so the estimate that the Deputy is requesting is not possible to provide.

However, as the Deputy may be aware I did increase the special rate of grant payment itself by €200 as part of Budget 2022, along with all other student grant rates. For the 2022/23 academic year, the special rate of grant is payable at the non-adjacent rate of €6,115 or the adjacent rate of €2,575, depending on the distance the student is from the college attended.

### **Third Level Costs**

122. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of extending SUSI to support students from the South who study at approved institutions (details supplied) in the North of Ireland; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [21380/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** I understand that the Deputy has clarified with my officials that the Deputy wishes to know the estimated cost of extending the student contribution grant to those undergraduate students currently studying in the four approved Institutions in the North of Ireland.

Under the terms of the Student Grant Scheme, grant assistance is awarded to eligible students attending an approved course in an approved institution who meet the prescribed conditions of funding including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

In general, an approved undergraduate course in this context is defined as a full-time undergraduate course of not less than two years duration pursued in a university or third level institution, which is maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from public funds in another EU Member State or the UK.

The Student Grant Scheme provides maintenance grants to eligible undergraduate students pursuing approved courses in other EU Member States. Student grant legislation was amended in 2020 to retain the status quo to allow maintenance grant funding for eligible students attending an approved undergraduate course in Northern Ireland/the UK to continue post Brexit.

The Student Grant Scheme does not extend to the payment of the student contribution to institutions outside the State for undergraduate students.

There are currently 327 students with addresses in the Republic of Ireland who have been awarded maintenance grant funding for undergraduate courses at Institutions in Northern Ireland.

The estimated cost of providing the student contribution grant to those 327 students is €1m. This does not take account of any additional students who may choose to study in Northern Ireland should a change be made to the scheme to allow for the payment of tuition fees to students studying in Northern Ireland.

### **Residency Permits**

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21315/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility ([inisoireachtasmal@justice.ie](mailto: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.

### **Residency Permits**

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21316/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The person referred to by the Deputy holds a Stamp 1G permission, which has been extended until 31 May 2022, under the automatic extension of immigration permissions I announced on 17 December 2021. All permissions are extended on the same terms and conditions to the permission already held.

It is open to the person concerned to contact their local Immigration Office before 31 May 2022 to apply for a further renewal of their immigration permission. I strongly recommend that they make efforts to renew their permission as early as possible rather than waiting until May when demand for appointments will be significantly greater.

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 at [INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie](mailto:INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie), which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in the cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Departmental Contracts**

125. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice if her Department or any organisations under her remit have purchased services from, or otherwise sought to use, technology developed and-or sold by a company (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21330/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** It has not been possible to collate the information requested in the time allowed. I will write to the Deputy directly when the information is available.

### **Residency Permits**

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the residency status of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21338/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The person referred to by the Deputy is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 23 September 2019. Representations were received on their behalf requesting that the Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). All relevant aspects of the case will be considered before a decision is made either to affirm or to revoke the Order.

Once a decision has been made, it will be notified to the person concerned in writing. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility ([inisoireachtasmail@justice.ie](mailto:inisoireachtasmail@justice.ie)), which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary

Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **International Protection**

127. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice the number of asylum seekers awaiting entry into the international protection system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21347/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The overall objective of my Department is to have recommendations made on international protection applications as soon as possible. This ensures that those who are found to be in need of protection from the State can receive it quickly and begin rebuilding their lives here with a sense of safety and security.

For the sake of clarity, I should firstly explain that anyone who wishes to make an application for international protection must proactively do so on their own behalf and on behalf of any of their minor family members. If they apply initially at their port of entry to the State they will still need to make a formal application at the Dublin offices of the International Protection Office (IPO) of my Department. There is no need to make an appointment. Everyone completes their preliminary interview under Section 13 of the International Protection Act 2015 on the day they first attend the IPO offices. Therefore, there are no applicants waiting for a preliminary interview.

Applicants will generally receive the Temporary Residence Certificate on the same day they complete their application if there is no language barrier and if the number of applications the IPO received on that given day is not excessively high.

If an interpreter is required to assist them or for other reasons beyond the control of the IPO, the applicant may need to be called back to complete their application. The call back appointment is usually arranged quickly, unless there is a difficulty with sourcing an interpreter for the required language.

In recent months, the number of people claiming international protection has increased significantly with approximately 1,039 new applications received in the month of March alone. This has unfortunately impacted the IPO's ability to complete an application and issue TRC cards on the same day to applicants. There are currently approximately 937 applicants who need to return to complete their applications.

The IPO has identified the practical efficiencies that can be made to improve the process and has put in place measures to ensure that the call back appointments are cleared as quickly as possible for the benefit of applicants allowing the majority of applicants complete the entire process on the first day. The target is to have up to 300 call back slots taking place per week to eliminate the backlog in the shortest timeframe possible, including by offering appointments at weekends. The IPO is determined to maintain the positive momentum around this approach and to continuing to ensure that the majority of new applicants receive their TRC cards on the day of application.

You may be interested to know that the IPO received its highest ever number of daily applicants on 19 April 2022 (163 new applicants). All 163 people received their TRC cards on the same day, eliminating the need for call back appointments.

### **Visa Applications**



**128. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for a visa in the case of persons (details supplied); if an application can be treated as an emergency application given the worsening situation in Nigeria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21348/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The visa application referred to by the Deputy was refused by the Visa Office in Abuja on 2 November 2020. The reasons for this decision were set out in the refusal letter sent to the applicants at that time. An appeal of this decision was launched on 19 January 2021.

Appeals for applications of this type are processed in the order in which they are received, to be fair to all applicants. While every effort is made to process these applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume of appeals received, their complexity, the possible need for the visa office to seek further information in relation to certain appeals and the resources available to process them.

All visa applicants are advised that the onus is on them to provide as much information in support of their application as they feel is necessary. Guidelines in this regard are posted on my Department's immigration website: [www.irishimmigration.ie](http://www.irishimmigration.ie).

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](mailto: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.

### **Control of Firearms**

**129. Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice if she has progressed plans to formulate a committee to review existing legislation relating to the control of firearms; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21371/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** As the Deputy may be aware, the new Justice Plan 2022 contains a commitment to undertake an expansive review to modernise firearms and explosives legislation.

Within the plan, Action 34.3 outlines a commitment to identify all outstanding issues requiring overdue reform in the management and processing of firearms licensing, register of firearms dealers and inspections. It also commits to the production of a roadmap for addressing issues identified, including a new legislative framework.

I am pleased to report that work in regard to this action is progressing well. I anticipate that by the end of the second quarter of this year, a determination will be made in terms of the medium term policy and legislative changes required, as well as a timeline agreed for the further development of legislation.

While I cannot pre-empt the outcome of the review, I can advise that in advance of the finalisation of any new or amending measure, I will of course be consulting with all relevant stakeholders in due course and hope to be in a position to provide greater detail in relation to all of this work as the review progresses.

This review is proceeding in tandem with plans to establish a Firearms Expert Committee,



on a non-statutory basis, which it is intended will bring forward recommendations on which type of firearms should be licensable in the State and for what purposes.

On 31 March 2022, I announced that I am seeking expressions of interest from suitably qualified candidates for appointment to a new advisory body, the Firearms Expert Committee, to be established in the second quarter of this year in line with commitments under the Justice Plan 2022.

Applications are specifically sought for the roles of:

- Chairperson; and
- Ordinary member (two positions).

The Firearms Expert Committee will comprise five members in total, including representatives of this Department and An Garda Síochána. The Committee will be established on a non-statutory basis for an initial period of six months, which may be extended for a further six months at my discretion, if required.

The Expert Committee will serve in an advisory capacity to me as Minister, providing guidance on a wide range of matters related to firearms licensing in the State. In line with its Terms of Reference, the Committee will carry out an assessment of all types of firearms currently licensed in the State to determine their use under the existing licensing system. Based on this assessment, the Committee will make recommendations on the suitability of different types of firearms for future licensing.

The Committee will complete this assessment and report to me within a short six-month period. The critical expertise of the Committee and its recommendations will inform any future determinations for reforms to the firearms legislation and licensing regime within this jurisdiction.

Further information concerning the Firearms Expert Committee and the appointment process is detailed in the Expression of Interest available online at:

[www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/EoI\\_Firearms\\_Expert\\_Committee](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/EoI_Firearms_Expert_Committee)

The closing date of receipt of expression of interest is no later than 15:00 on Friday 29 April 2022.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the progress that has been made to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21381/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Citizenship Division of my Department will contact the persons concerned shortly to notify them of their application numbers. Applications for naturalisation and general queries in respect of same are dealt with in chronological order by date received.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility at: [INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie](mailto:INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie), which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the

Parliamentary Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in the cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Medical Cards**

131. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the way that a person (details supplied) can access an S1 form for the purpose of applying for a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21304/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Officials in my Department have made contact with your office by email and phone seeking additional information for this PQ. However, this information was not provided by the required deadline time to process this PQ answer. Should you forward the outstanding information, my officials will pursue on your behalf.

### **Health Services Staff**

132. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in south Kerry CAMHS offered to return to CAMHS on a temporary basis until a full-time consultant psychiatrist was appointed; if so, the response to the offer; the notification the person received; the rationale for the response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21306/22]

**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 to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

133. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will clarify a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21309/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines and medical devices under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, I have asked the HSE to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

134. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will remove the current age restriction for the FreeStyle Libre device with immediate effect following a recent survey (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21310/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines and medical devices under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, I have asked the HSE to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

135. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the current impasse that seems to be preventing the undertaking of a health technology assessment for the FreeStyle Libre device or offer a different process to enable this to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21311/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines and medical devices under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, I have asked the HSE to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

136. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the reimbursement for the FreeStyle Libre device continuous glucose monitoring sensor to over 21 years of age under the HSE's community funded scheme for aids and appliances (details supplied); if so, the details of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21326/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines and medical devices under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, I have asked the HSE to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances**

137. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health the way that his Department is addressing inequalities in the uptake of continuous glucose monitoring sensors between the under-21s and over-21s age groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21327/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines and medical devices under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, I have asked the HSE to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Disease Management**

138. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to the introduction of a national diabetes register considering that the lack of a register has made it difficult for policy makers and academics to understand the impact of tools used to help diabetes patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21328/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The development of a national diabetes registry remains a priority. The National Diabetes Registry Demonstrator Project, funded through Sláintecare, was paused as key HSE staff were redeployed onto urgent on-going COVID-19 work. Following substantial increases in investment in eHealth, the national diabetes

registry is now being considered as part of a wider review of Ireland's health information strategy, and will operate as a "virtual" registry.

Government approval was given this month to prepare the General Scheme of a Health Information Bill. It is envisaged that the Bill will include a provision to enable the operation of disease-specific "virtual" registries, including a virtual national diabetes registry, where information on disease diagnoses and treatment from healthcare providers is efficiently collated, combined and quality-checked from administrative records to create a database akin to an active registry for each disease. This will greatly improve the potential to monitor rare-disease prevalence in Ireland.

### **Disease Management**

139. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing issues concerning the treatment and prevention of Lyme disease; if his Department has implemented in full all of the recommendations issued in the October 2019 report of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre Lyme borreliosis sub-committee; the action his Department has taken to improve testing, diagnosis, treatment and management of Lyme disease on foot of the October 2019 report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21334/22]

**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**

140. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health the status of ensuring access for medical card holders to dental care; the steps that are being taken to ensure that dentists are providing services to medical card holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21339/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have acknowledged immediate issues of concern with the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS), which I am addressing as a matter of priority. Officials from my Department and from the HSE have held three rounds of discussions with the Irish Dental Association, the most recent on 2nd March when my Department and the HSE presented proposals to invest additional resources in the DTSS.

I have now given approval for significant fee increases to be paid to contracted dentists across a number of items, including the Dental Examination and Fillings. I have also approved the reintroduction of Scale and Polish for medical card patients on the DTSS. These new measures are designed to address access problems for patients, and address dentist's concerns about the viability of the DTSS, while aligning the DTSS more closely with the Dental Treatment Benefits Scheme, which is widely operated by private dentists for PRSI patients.

These measures should amount to an additional investment this year of about €26 million over what was spent on the Scheme in 2021. My Department and the HSE will work together to quickly implement the changes to the Scheme for the benefit of patients.

### **Dental Services**

141. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists in coun-

ties Roscommon and Galway who are active in the dental treatment service scheme. [21340/22]

**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**

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when arrears for nursing home care for 31 January to 29 March 2022 will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21351/22]

**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.

### **Disease Management**

143. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients being seen at Huntington's disease weekly clinics; the way that multidisciplinary care is provided for these patients; the medical disciplines from which staff at these clinics are drawn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21358/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Disease Management**

144. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure Huntington's disease patients are provided with diagnostic pathways and follow-up pathways after diagnosis to help them understand their journey from first presenting symptoms to planning care from after diagnosis; his plans to provide patients with a named medical professional or medical team responsible for coordination of care following diagnosis considering the complex and multidisciplinary nature of the disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21359/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Disease Management**

145. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients with Huntington's disease presenting at memory clinics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21360/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Disease Management**

146. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health the location that his Department provides information on Huntington's disease including the care and services that persons may need or be entitled to following diagnosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21361/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

#### **Disease Management**

147. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health the way that the National Rehabilitation Strategy addresses the needs of young persons with paediatric Huntington's disease and juvenile onset Huntington's disease; the way that it addresses the needs of young carers of a family member with Huntington's disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21362/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

#### **Disease Management**

148. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase access to long-term care for patients with Huntington's disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21363/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

#### **Disease Management**

149. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the number of facilities with the capacity to provide multidisciplinary care for people with Huntington's disease, considering that Bloomfield Hospital is the only facility in Ireland that does so and it is not accessible to persons living in many parts of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21365/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

#### **Disease Management**

150. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health the actions his Department or the HSE are taking to improve access to Bloomfield Hospital's Huntington's disease service for patients considering that it only has the capacity to care for 2% of the persons with Huntington's disease in Ireland at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21366/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.



## **Disease Management**

151. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve engagement with persons with Huntington's disease, their families and the staff who support them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21367/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the Deputy's question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

## **Care of the Elderly**

152. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Health when the fair deal scheme to be applied to care in the home will be rolled out definitively, especially in the CHO 5 area in which persons with life-limiting and time-critical debilitating conditions are anxiously awaiting its arrival; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21382/22]

153. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will take steps to remedy the apparent lack of information and communication within the HSE on the fair deal scheme to be applied to care in the home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21383/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 153 together.

The Programme for Government agreed in 2020 commits the Government to 'Introduce a statutory scheme to support people to live in their own homes, which will provide equitable access to high-quality, regulated home care'. This is an entirely new scheme and separate to the "fair deal" scheme.

Consequently, work is on-going within the Department of Health to progress the development of the new statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home-support services. Taking place within the broader context of the Sláintecare reforms, this work encompasses the development of the regulatory framework for the new scheme; the examination of the options for the financing model for the scheme; and the development of a reformed model of service-delivery.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to give you definitive dates for new statutory scheme. This is because there are dependencies for these pieces of work that are beyond the control of the Department.

In April 2021, Government gave approval to draft a General Scheme and Heads of a Bill to establish a licensing framework for home-support providers. This is being progressed by the Department with a view to bringing it through the Houses of the Oireachtas at the earliest opportunity. It is expected that the primary legislation will give the Minister for Health the power to make regulations in respect of minimum requirements which will form the criteria against which a provider's eligibility to hold a licence will be determined. A regulatory impact analysis will be undertaken by the Department in 2022 to ensure effectiveness and mitigate risks.

In collaboration with HIQA and in consultation with the Health Service Executive and other key informants, the Department developed draft regulations and a targeted stakeholder consultation was undertaken in January 2022. Evaluating the feedback of this consultation is informing amendments in the draft regulations in advance of a public consultation planned in Q2 2022.

On 24th February, the ESRI published a report on the demand for and cost of home support. This is the final output from a programme of research that the ESRI has undertaken to support the Department of Health to progress the development of the new home support scheme. This research will form an important part of the evidence base for the development of a sustainable funding model for home support services in the context of our ageing population. Government approval will be sought in due course on any proposed legislation to provide for a financial support scheme, taking into consideration the cost associated with the various options.

In addition, work is ongoing in relation to the development of a reformed model of service delivery for the new scheme. The Pilot for testing of a reformed model of service for the delivery for home-support is fully operational. It commenced in November in CHO 8, which is the first of the four pilot sites. The three other sites CHO2, CHO 4 and CHO 7 became operational in January 2022. The pilot site evaluation will be critical to the development of the new home-support scheme.

*Question No. 153 answered with Question No. 152.*

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

154. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his views on a new publicly owned elective hospital being located in the mid-west. [21385/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Cross Party Sláintecare Report in 2017 articulated a new vision for healthcare in Ireland, including the provision of elective only hospitals, providing protected capacity for elective care. The “Elective Hospitals Oversight Group”, under the joint governance of the Department of Health and HSE has been guiding the development of the elective hospital proposals, following the process outlined in the updated Public Spending Code, setting out the value for money requirements for the evaluation, planning, and management of large public investment projects.

The provision of additional protected capacity for elective care is further confirmed by the Government Decision, in December 2021 and subject to the necessary approvals and requirements under the Public Spending Code being met, on a new National Elective Ambulatory Care Strategy. This new strategy aims to change the way in which day case, scheduled procedures, surgeries, scans and outpatient services can be better arranged to ensure greater capacity in the future and help to address waiting lists. The development of additional capacity will be provided through dedicated, standalone Elective Hospitals in Cork, Galway and Dublin. The Government decision is very clear on this. No other locations are under active consideration. It is important to note that the locations chosen will allow for new facilities of a size and scale to implement a national elective care programme that will tackle waiting lists on a national basis. This means that the new facilities will be designed to maximise their capacity and in doing so will operate to cover as a wide catchment area as possible, extending beyond existing and future health areas including the mid-west.

The elective care scope of service will be developed in two phases commencing with day cases, diagnostics, and outpatients and then by in-patient treatment. On this basis, the Elective Care Centres (ECCs) will be designed to provide sufficient capacity to facilitate future phases, including some elective in patient capacity, thereby providing a sustainable and strategic response to cater for the highly dynamic landscape of healthcare policy and practice.

### **Birth Certificates**

155. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the steps that are being taken to reduce delays in granting birth certificates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21387/22]

**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 Services

156. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of the staffing allocation for the room at the emergency department at Tipperary University Hospital that is specifically for patients presenting with mental health issues; the grades of staff attending; the hours that staff are in attendance; the number of hours per week the room is staffed; if the room is fully resourced and staffed to accept patients on a 24-7 basis; the regularity with which the room is available to patients presenting with mental health issues on a 24-hour basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21391/22]

**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.

### Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

157. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health if he discussed the critically important need for an elective-only hospital for mid-west region with the executive management team of University Hospital Limerick during his visit to the facility on 16 and 17 February 2022; his plans to fast-track the case for an elective-only hospital in the mid-west region; if three options are being explored (details supplied); the timeline for the development of an elective-only hospital for each of the options being explored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21397/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Department of Health is committed to improving services at University Limerick Hospital Group and ensuring patient-centred care for the people of the Mid-West. In recent years, there has been significant investment in University Limerick Hospital Group, providing additional infrastructure and services right across the Group. The Department will continue to work with the HSE to ensure services, facilities and patient experience at ULHG continue to be developed into the future.

Health capital investment decisions are informed by Programme for Government priorities, sectoral policies, strategies and reform initiatives set out in Sláintecare. The Department of Health engage with the HSE in the planning for and delivery of capital projects. The HSE is responsible for the planning and delivery of health services and management of health infrastructure. In this role, they have developed robust assessment and appraisal procedures that adhere to public financial procedures. As part of these procedures, project proposals must be prepared by the relevant Hospital Group. Proposals are then forwarded to the relevant HSE service directorate for support and sign off before being submitted to the HSE National Capital and Property Steering Committee for consideration and recommendation for inclusion in the project pipeline.

The Cross Party Sláintecare Report in 2017 articulated a new vision for healthcare in Ireland, including the provision of elective only hospitals, providing protected capacity for elective care. The “Elective Hospitals Oversight Group”, under the joint governance of the Department of Health and HSE has been guiding the development of the elective hospital proposals,

following the process outlined in the updated Public Spending Code, setting out the value for money requirements for the evaluation, planning, and management of large public investment projects.

The provision of additional protected capacity for elective care is further confirmed by the Government Decision, in December 2021 and subject to the necessary approvals and requirements under the Public Spending Code being met, on a new National Elective Ambulatory Care Strategy. This new strategy aims to change the way in which day case, scheduled procedures, surgeries, scans and outpatient services can be better arranged to ensure greater capacity in the future and help to address waiting lists. The development of additional capacity will be provided through dedicated, standalone Elective Hospitals in Cork, Galway and Dublin. It is important to note that the locations chosen will allow for new facilities of a size and scale to implement a national elective care programme that will tackle waiting lists on a national basis. This means that the new facilities will be designed to maximise their capacity and in doing so will operate to cover as a wide catchment area as possible, extending beyond existing and future health areas including the mid-west.

### **Departmental Policies**

158. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 352 of 24 February 2022, the status of the feasibility study into remunerating service user family member carers. [21415/22]

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

159. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the wait time to see a respiratory consultant at Temple Street Children's Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21428/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I sincerely regret that children can experience a long waiting time for treatment, and I remain conscious of the burden that this places on them and their families. One of the central priorities for me as Minister for Health is that waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures are improved, and that children receive the care that they need and deserve in a timely and appropriate fashion.

It is recognised that waiting times for scheduled appointments and procedures have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. While significant work continues to positively impact on waiting times and improve pathways to elective care, acute hospitals have been impacted by operational challenges arising from surges in cases related to the Omicron variants.

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

The Department of Health continues to work with the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to identify ways to improve access to care, including through increased use of private hospitals, funding weekend and evening work in public hospitals, funding “see and

treat” services, providing virtual clinics, and increasing capacity in the public hospital system.

The 2022 Waiting List Action Plan, which was launched on the 25th of February, allocates €350 million to the HSE and NTPF to reduce waiting lists. Under this plan the Department, HSE, and NTPF will deliver urgent additional capacity for the treatment of patients, as well as investing in longer term reforms to bring sustained reductions in waiting lists.

The plan builds on the successes of the short-term 2021 plan that ran from September to December last year. The 2021 plan was developed by the Department of Health, the HSE and the NTPF and was driven and overseen by a senior governance group co-chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Health and the CEO of the HSE and met fortnightly.

This rigorous level of governance and scrutiny of waiting lists has continued into this year with the oversight group evolving into the Waiting List Task Force. The Task Force will meet regularly to drive progress of the 2022 plan.

This is the first stage of an ambitious multi-annual waiting list programme, which is currently under development in the Department of Health. Between them, these plans will work to support short, medium, and long term initiatives to reduce waiting times and provide the activity needed in years to come

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the wait time to see a respiratory consultant at Temple Street Children’s Hospital Dublin has been provided to my Department by the NTPF and is outlined in the attached document. The information is provided for Outpatient (OPD) and shows the number of patients on the paediatric Respiratory Medicine waiting list by time-band at Temple Street Children’s Hospital at the end of March.

Respiratory Medicine Outpatient Waiting List (OPD), as at 1/03/2022

Children’s Health Ireland (CHI) Temple Street

Time Band (months)	0-6 Months	6-12 Months	12-18 Months	18+Months	Grand Total
Paediatric Respiratory Medicine	176	127	119	529	951
Grand Total	176	127	119	529	951

### Hospital Staff

160. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant respiratory consultant posts at Temple Street Children’s Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21443/22]

**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.

### Gender Recognition

161. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the improvements that his Department is making in the area of healthcare for transgender persons; his views on the current waiting time of over two and a half years to be first seen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21450/22]



**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan):** The Programme for Government commits to create and implement a general health policy for Trans people, based on a best-practice model for care, in line with the World Professional Association of Transgender Healthcare (WPATH) and deliver a framework for the development of national gender clinics and multidisciplinary teams for children and adults.

The HSE is committed to developing services for the transgender community in accordance with international best practice across a number of programmes including mental health, acute hospitals and primary care. This includes a robust and agreed care pathway for young people with gender dysphoria, in line with international best practice.

I am advised that a proposed model of care for transgender children, adolescents and adults has been developed by the HSE Quality Improvement Division. The model recommends a comprehensive multidisciplinary psychosocial assessment prior to commencement of hormone therapy by endocrinology services, and also outlines the framework for the development of National Gender Clinics and MDTs for children and adults.

While there are definite challenges in responding to the needs of this population, there have been many positive developments: -

- embedded clinical services, with expertise, in certain parts of the country,
- constructive advocacy groups in place with both individual and family experience of this issue,
- funding for a number of posts exists, and
- a proposed model of care in place .

The challenges mainly centre around operational and governance issues which reflect the fact that the Irish health services are delivered by a range of voluntary and statutory services and have grown up along with demand and clinician-led responses.

I am committed to the development by the HSE of a well-governed and patient-centred health care service for adults and children in the transgender community, in line with the Programme for Government.

### **Health Service Executive**

162. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 708 of 29 March 2022, the total cost to the HSE of its use of Garnish House to date, including cleaning, insurance, security maintenance and any other costs; the rental costs for each month since April 2020; the estimated projected additional total cost comprising costs (details supplied) per month for the remainder of 2022; the expected duration of use of Garnish House by the HSE as a mental health facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21451/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

### **Health Service Executive**



163. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health the total investment by the HSE in any works carried out on Millfield House, Blackpool, Cork since the property was vacated in April 2020; the nature of these works; the dates on which these works were carried out; the total costs incurred by the HSE in respect of Millfield House since it has been vacated, for example, insurance, security and maintenance costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21452/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

### **General Practitioner Services**

164. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Health his plans to deal with the lack of general practitioner surgeries in north-west Dublin taking on new private patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21453/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** GPs are self-employed practitioners and therefore may establish practices at a place of their own choosing. There is no prescribed ratio of GPs to patients and the State does not regulate the number of GPs that can set up in a town or community. Under the GMS scheme, the HSE contracts GPs to provide medical services without charge to medical card and GP visit card holders.

Under the terms of the GMS and GP Visit Card contracts, the maximum number of medical card or GP visit card patients on a GP's patient panel may not exceed 2,000, or 2,200 if the GP also holds an under 6 contract, except in exceptional circumstances. There is no minimum number of patients specified for a panel. The State does not prescribe the number of private patients that may be registered with a GP; this is a matter for individual GP practices.

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. Information on the capacity of GP practices to accept private patients is not collected by the HSE.

The Government is aware of the workforce issues currently facing general practice and is working to ensure patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future.

The 2019 Agreement on GP contractual reform and service development will see the Government increase annual investment in general practice by approximately 40% (€210 million) between 2019 and 2023. 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 number of years, rising from 120 in 2009 to 233 in 2021, with an intake of 258 planned for this year.

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.

### **Medical Cards**

165. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card application by a person (details supplied) will be finalised given the extensive and comprehensive documentation provided. [21466/22]

**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.

### **National Maternity Hospital**

166. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the way the clinical appropriateness of a service is to be determined and by whom, given the agreement reached in respect of the proposed constitution of the National Maternity Hospital at Elm Park Designated Activity Company to include the wording “all services that are clinically appropriate and legally permissible”; if he has obtained legal advice on whether this wording is in compliance with the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018; and if so, the advice that was provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21468/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 sets out the parameters in which termination of pregnancy may be lawfully carried out in this country. Clinical guidelines for the provision of termination of pregnancy services, within the legal framework set out in that Act, have been developed by the relevant professional medical bodies. Medical practitioners are bound through professional regulatory mechanisms to operate in accordance with best medical practice.

This is the process that underpins the provision of healthcare services in this country, and this will remain the case in the new National Maternity Hospital (NMH).

The new NMH is a vital project and work is ongoing to finalise the legal arrangements underpinning the planned relocation to the Elm Park campus. As I have previously said, the core objectives of the legal framework are to ensure that:

- firstly, all clinically appropriate services that are legally permissible are provided for women who need them in the new NMH;
- secondly, to prevent any influence, religious or otherwise in the operation of the new hospital; and
- thirdly, to protect the State’s investment, in relation to capital, revenue and service provision at the new hospital, for the public good.

As I have stated previously, I will bring a proposal to Government for approval to proceed once I am satisfied that the legal arrangements achieve the objectives set out above, and that all legally permissible services, including termination of pregnancy, will be provided in the new NMH as they are in the current hospital building at Holles Street.