

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 15, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 16 to 71, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 72 to 78, inclusive, answered orally.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

79. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Defence his proposals for cultivating closer EU/UN relations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21320/13]

84. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Defence his proposals for improving EU/UN relations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21301/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 79 and 84 together.

The EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy forms an integral part of the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy. In the area of Common Security and Defence Policy, the role of the Presidency is now limited to supporting the High Representative and the European External Action Service in this regard. However, that said, this arrangement provides Ireland with an opportunity to influence the Common Security and Defence Policy agenda. The EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy forms an integral part of the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy. In the area of Common Security and Defence Policy, the role of the Presidency is now limited to supporting the High Representative and the European External Action Service in this regard. However, that said, this arrangement provides Ireland with an opportunity to influence the Common Security and Defence Policy agenda.

Following on from an initiative by Ireland, the EU adopted an Action Plan on EU/UN co-operation. This action plan provides the contextual backdrop to the adoption as part of Ireland’s Presidency of the European Council 2013, the enhancement of EU/UN Relations, in particular, through EU engagement and participation in UN Peacekeeping.

I, and my Department, hosted a very successful and well attended seminar in Dublin Castle on this subject. Speakers from the EU, NATO, the UN and, for the first time, the African Union, as well as academia gave informative presentations to over 120 delegates who attended from all over Europe.

This seminar informed the follow up discussion at the Informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers who recognised the primacy of the UN in the maintenance of international peace and

security and the requirement for the EU to work hand in hand with the UN. Attendance by the UN at the Informal meeting of EU Ministers for Defence, represented by the Under Secretary General at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, has cemented this priority into the thinking of the EU.

Evidence of the deepening of co-operation between the European Union and the United Nations has resulted in the re-establishment of an EU/UN steering board which now meets on a regular basis. The most recent meeting took place two weeks ago. Furthermore at that meeting the UN undertook to provide the EU with a list of capabilities it requires to undertake international peacekeeping operations so as to ascertain how the EU may assist. As such we now have a concrete process for cultivating closer co-operation between the EU and the UN, partly as a result of this being made a priority of our Presidency.

In summary, this priority has and will continue to provide impetus to the Union as a whole to the enhancement of co-operation between the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and the United Nations.

Proposed Legislation

80. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Defence when he proposes to introduce new legislation for the Red Cross; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21296/13]

102. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence when he proposes to update legislation in the Red Cross; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21316/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 and 102 together.

To this end, my Department has commenced work on the review and has had discussions with the Secretary General of the Irish Red Cross on the proposed legislative proposals, which in the main relate to codification of the various legal instruments in effect since 1939. I am advised that the Red Cross have indicated to my officials that they are satisfied in principle with the Department's proposals. For the purposes of clarity, the Deputy may wish to note that it is not intended to alter the existing corporate governance arrangements of the Society. I anticipate subject to Government approval that a Red Cross (Amendment) Bill will be published during the lifetime of this Government.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 77.

Ministerial Travel

82. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide a report on his St. Patrick's Day programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21312/13]

93. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Defence if he will report on his visit to Lebanon, Israel and Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21133/13]

106. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Defence if he will report on his visit to Lebanon, Israel and Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20590/13]

107. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Defence if he will outline to Dáil Éireann, in respect of this year's overseas travel for Saint Patrick's Day, the benefit of this trip; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [21129/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82, 93, 106 and 107 together.

My visit to Lebanon afforded me an opportunity to see, at first hand, the dedication and professionalism of military personnel and the tremendous work done overseas by the Irish Defence Forces personnel serving as part of a joint Irish/Finnish battalion with the United Nations Interim force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in south Lebanon. I conveyed to the troops our deep appreciation for the outstanding manner in which they continue to perform their duties on overseas service.

The visit to the troops was part of a comprehensive St Patrick's Day programme in the Middle East. During my visit to the Irish/Finnish battalion's area of operations, I received briefings on the current situation in the region and met with the UNIFIL Force Commander, General Paolo Serra of Italy. I also laid a wreath at the Memorial in Tibnin to the forty-seven members of the Defence Forces who died in Lebanon in the cause of peace.

When in Lebanon I also met with the Lebanese Minister for Defence, Mr. Fayez Ghosn and we discussed the current security and political situation and the challenges being faced by Lebanon and how their efforts can be supported by Ireland and the international community. I also discussed with him the current conflict in Syria and the refugee crisis, and in particular the number of Syrian refugees in the Lebanon and the supports required by Lebanon from the EU.

On 12 March 2013, I visited the Golan Heights and I met with Irish Defence Forces personnel who are serving with the UN Truce Supervision Organisation as unarmed Military Observers in support of UNDOF, the UN monitoring force on the Golan Heights. I also met Major General Iqbal Singh Singha from India, the Head of Mission and Force Commander UNDOF. I was briefed on security issues in that area, especially the growing risks flowing from instability in Syria and the impact of the refugee crisis in the region.

In Israel, I engaged in trade promotion activities, attended a business breakfast organised by the IDA and the Embassy. I also attended the Israel launch of the Ireland-Israel Business Network. The IDA and the Ireland Israel Business Network are following up on contacts made. I attended the 45th anniversary celebration of the Ireland Israel Friendship League where I met with many of the Irish diaspora in Israel. I also attended Saint Patrick's Day events held in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv. In the course of my visit I also attended an Ireland/Israel seminar on road safety where the experiences of the relevant authorities in both States were shared and options for continued engagement in improving road safety were explored. I received a briefing on ongoing developments in the use of unmanned aerial systems for security surveillance purposes. The Defence Forces already use such systems in peacekeeping operations.

In relation to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, I received briefings and had a number of discussions on the overall political situation, with a number of politicians including both the outgoing and incoming Ministers for Justice in Israel, Yaakov Neeman and Tzipi Livni respectively. Tzipi Livni has been appointed by the Israeli Prime Minister as the lead negotiator with the Palestinians to advance the peace process.

While visiting Ramallah in the West Bank, I met with Nabil Shaath, a senior Palestinian official and negotiator, with the Minister for Justice of the Palestinian Authority, Mr Ali Muhanna and with NGOs and UN agencies operating on the ground. I reiterated at every opportunity the Irish Government's strong and consistent support for a two State solution resulting in a sovereign State of Palestine existing peacefully alongside a secure Israel and Ireland's support for the recommencement of discussions in respect of the peace process.

I was also briefed by Mr Kenneth Deane Head of mission of EUPOL COPPS, the EU's police training mission with the Palestinian police, which Ireland has strongly supported. Throughout my visit to the Middle East, I also promoted economic cooperation, high-tech research and innovation, bilateral trade links and tourism.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 77.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 79.

Defence Forces Deployment

85. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel currently deployed throughout the world; and the number of countries. [21288/13]

316. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the degree to which further overseas, EU or UN associated troop deployments are likely to emerge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21557/13]

318. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the number and location of Army, Navy and Air Corps personnel deployed overseas on foot of EU or UN deployment missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21559/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85, 316 and 318 together.

Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas are listed in the following tabular statement. Of the 439 personnel serving overseas, 427 are Army, 2 are Naval Service and 10 are Air Corps personnel.

The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 357 personnel, including the Deputy Force Commander; the EU Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia with 10 personnel, including the Mission Commander; the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) with 8 personnel; the EUFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina with 7 personnel; the NATO-led international security presence (KFOR) in Kosovo with 12 personnel; and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan with 7 personnel. Ireland also contributes 23 observers and staff to various United Nations and OSCE missions and 15 other personnel to staff appointments at UN, EU and OSCE headquarters.

The current contribution of some 439 personnel to overseas missions reflects the Government's continued commitment to our responsibilities in the area of international peace and security.

As regards future deployments of Defence Forces personnel overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis. When considering any particular request, the existence of realistic objectives and a clear mandate, which has the potential to contribute to a political solution, consideration of how the mission relates to the priorities of Irish foreign policy and the degree of risk involved are amongst the factors considered.

Last month, Ireland received requests from the UN to deploy a small number of additional observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organisation in the Middle East to the Headquarters of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria. These requests are cur-

rently receiving consideration and a decision will be made shortly.

No other formal request has been received from the UN for Defence Forces participation in additional missions. However, the UN regularly advises member States of deficiencies in existing or new missions. In this regard, my Department is also currently considering whether there is the potential for the Defence Forces to contribute to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Members of the Permanent Defence Force Serving Overseas as of 1st May 2013

1	UN Missions	
(i)	UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) HQUNIFIL 107th Infantry Battalion UNIFIL Sector West HQ	163338
(ii)	UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) – Israel, Syria and Lebanon	12
(iii)	MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)	3
(iv)	MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)	3
(v)	UNOCI (United Nations Mission in Ivory Coast)	2
	TOTAL	377
	UN Mandated Missions	
(vi)	EUFOR (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina)	7
(vii)	EUTM Somalia (EU-led Training Mission in Uganda)	10
(viii)	KFOR (International Security Presence in Kosovo) – HQ	12
(ix)	ISAF (International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan)	7
(x)	EUTM Mali (EU-Led Training Mission)	8
	TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS	421
2(i)	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina	2

1	UN Missions	
(ii)	OSCE Mission in Belgrade - Serbia	1
(iii)	Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group, Vienna	1
	TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING OSCE	4
3	EU Military Staff	
	Brussels	4
4	Military Representatives/Advisers/Staff	
(i)	Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York Military Adviser, Irish Delegation to OSCE, Vienna Military Representative to EU (Brussels) Liaison Office of Ireland, NATO/PfP (Brussels) EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium	11521
(ii)		
(iii)		
(iv)		
(v)		
	TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING	
	OVERSEAS	439

Defence Forces Sporting Activities

86. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Defence the rules regarding the participation of Defence Forces personnel in extracurricular sporting activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21313/13]

92. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Defence the rules in place with regard to the participation of Defence Forces personnel in extracurricular sporting activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21294/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 92 together.

As such, participation by members of the Defence Forces in sporting activities at local, regional and higher level competition is encouraged and where possible is facilitated having regard to, for example, the taking of annual leave. The level of participation in extracurricular sporting activities is governed by the exigencies of the service and no distinction is made in favour of any particular sporting discipline. In the recent past, many members of the Defence Forces, both male and female, have brought great honour to the Organisation, through their success, at the highest level in, for example, Gaelic games, boxing and League of Ireland soccer and this is to be welcomed.

Participation in sports and sporting activity forms an integral part of reaching and maintaining the Defence Forces desired fitness profile. As part of an overall structured training programme, a programme of sporting activities is available for members of the Defence Forces to participate in. This is managed and overseen by the Defence Forces Athletic Association.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 77.

Defence Forces Deployment

88. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Defence if he foresees more Irish troops being deployed to Lebanon as a result of the current conflict in the region. [21285/13]

95. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will report on the Defence Forces mission in the Lebanon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21309/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 95 together.

The 107th Infantry Battalion, comprising some 332 personnel, will complete its deployment with UNIFIL later this month when it will be replaced by personnel of the 108th Infantry Battalion. The Irish Battalion has been working alongside a contingent of 170 personnel of the Finnish Armed Forces as part of a joint Irish/Finnish Battalion since 1 June 2012. A further 16 Irish personnel are deployed to the Force Headquarters in Naquora and 8 personnel at the UNIFIL Sector West headquarters in Shama.

The Irish/Finnish Battalion conducts operational tasks on a daily basis, which include the provision of security, vehicle and foot patrols, checkpoints, establishing and occupying temporary observation posts and liaison/engagement with local leaders. Joint operations are conducted with units of the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed in the UNIFIL area of operations. Irish and Finnish troops also occupy two forward static UN posts on the Blue Line.

The security situation in the area in which the Irish/Finnish Battalion operates remains calm but increasingly unstable due to domestic and international factors largely stemming from the spillover effects of the Syrian crisis. The Battalion implements Force Protection measures appropriate to the prevailing operational and security developments in the region.

Ireland currently holds command of the joint Irish Finnish Battalion. Finland, in accordance with agreements entered into on the deployment of the joint battalion, will assume command of the joint battalion in November 2013. At that stage, the Irish contribution to the Finnish/Irish Battalion will reduce from 332 to approximately 181 Defence Forces personnel. The joint Irish/Finnish battalion currently consists of a total of 503 personnel (332 Irish and 171 Finnish).

Ireland is operating in accordance with agreed arrangements with the UN and Finland. There are no plans at this time to increase Ireland's contribution to UNIFIL.

EU Presidency Agenda

89. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide a progress report on Ireland's EU Presidency in so far as it relates to defence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21306/13]

96. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide an update

on his work programme for Ireland's EU Presidency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21326/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 96 together.

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy forms an integral part of the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. In the area of Common Security and Defence Policy, the role of the Presidency is now limited to supporting the High Representative and the European External Action Service in this regard. However, that said, this arrangement provides Ireland with an opportunity to influence the Common Security and Defence Policy agenda.

As part of Ireland's Presidency of the European Council 2013 I prioritised a number of areas to progress during our Presidency. These priorities included:

1. Preparations for the European Council in December 2013, which will include a thematic discussion on security and defence/military capabilities.
2. Continued development of the Common Security and Defence Policy.
3. Addressing the impact of the Financial Crisis on Defence, (Pooling and Sharing).
4. Enhancing EU/UN Relations;
5. EU cooperation in the area of Maritime Security and Surveillance;
6. Support for Jobs, Growth and Innovation through focusing on the role of SMEs in fostering innovation in the security sector.

In relation to progress made during the Presidency, the key event of the presidency was the Informal meeting of Defence Ministers held in Dublin Castle in February. The Secretary General of NATO, on his first formal visit to Ireland, attended the meeting as did, the UN for the first time and was represented by the Under-Secretary General in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. A range of issues were discussed including the upcoming European Council on Defence, Mali, the Horn of Africa and Partnerships between the EU and the United Nations.

To date, two very successful seminars have also been held in Ireland. The first seminar was on the topic of Regional Organisations Co-Operation with the United Nations in the area of Crisis Management, Peace Support and Peace Enforcement Operations. The second seminar dealt with the issue of Maritime Security and Surveillance. The outcomes have been very positive for both seminars and have stimulated debate in these areas at EU and institutional levels.

In summary, the priorities have centred on how Ireland and the Union as a whole can contribute to the enhancement of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, a critical component of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, which is central to the achievement of Ireland's foreign policy objectives.

Military Archives

90. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Defence since his Department has facilitated the availability of archive material to the nation, if he will outline the importance of this service; the cost to the State; the usage of same since this information was made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21130/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The mission of the Military Archives is to acquire, preserve and make available to the public the documentary heritage of the Defence Forces and the Department of Defence. The Military Archives also provides advice and other services to the Defence Organisation, assisting in the administration and management of its records. From as early as 1924, the Defence Forces undertook to preserve historical documents from that time and since 1990 the Military Archives has been the official place of deposit for such material, including that of the Army Pensions Board, under the terms of the National Archives Act, 1986. Associated with the Military Archives is the Military Service Pensions Archive (MSPA) project which, although not currently in the public domain, is a cornerstone of the Government's Centenary Programme. Approximately 300,000 files relating to the period from Easter Week 1916, through the War of Independence and Civil War comprise this collection. The files relate mainly to applications by individuals and/or their dependants for the award of pension and gratuities for veterans who served as members of the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army, the Hibernian Rifles, the Irish Republican Army, Cumann na mBan, Na Fianna Éireann, the National Army/Defence Forces on active service or who were casualties or wounded while on duty during the period from April and May 1916 through to 30 September 1923.

It is not possible to accurately record all costs associated with the Military Archives as a proportion of the work that contributes to this important activity is done in the ordinary course of the day to day duties of a wide range of Defence Forces and Department of Defence personnel. The annual budget for the Military Archives is €50,000 per annum and in addition for 2013 there is a further budget allocation of €100,000 allocated to a digitization project. Since the MSPA project commenced in 2008, the Military Archives have incurred direct costs of some €1m., including costs associated with the MSPA project. This figure would not necessarily include full costs of all incidentals and consumables, or all IT support; nor would it include salary costs.

During 2012, 1.5 million views were recorded from 142 countries on the online access to Military Archive services. This recording of usage began in January 2012 following the launch of the Military Archives website. In addition, the Military Archives facilitates research by the public, including academic, family and local history researchers. Demand for this service has grown with 3,383 e-mail or postal queries received by Military Archives in 2012 and 2,869 telephone requests for information.

The Military Archives is located at Cathal Brugha Barracks, Rathmines, Dublin and is open to the public from Tuesday to Thursday of each week by prior appointment. On average, the eight available research seats are fully utilised on a daily basis.

EU-IMF Programme of Support Issues

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence his views that arising from the consequences of the Troika agreement, if it will be possible to maintain the full scale of activity, services and support for the Defence Forces without the further downsizing and /or closure of barracks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21236/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): In the context of the very serious economic crisis that this country is experiencing, all elements of Defence expenditure have been critically reviewed in order to deliver savings. The required savings of recent years, in both pay and non-pay, have necessitated a flexible and adaptive approach from the Defence Organisation. A key focus has been the prioritisation and maintenance of Permanent Defence Force operational capacity in order to ensure that the Permanent Defence Force retain the capacity to fulfil all roles assigned.

Arising from the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure in 2011, the Government agreed to stabilise the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel.

The Defence Organisation has recently undertaken further significant re-organisation and reform as a result of the revised strength ceiling. These changes are designed to ensure that the Defence Forces organisational structures are configured to maximise required capabilities. There were no barrack closures as part of this process.

The Chief of Staff has advised me that the Defence Forces retain the capacity to fulfil all roles assigned by Government. The operational capacity of the Defence Forces will continue to be prioritised within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

Question No. 92 answered with Question No. 86.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 82.

Overseas Missions

94. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Defence if he is considering getting more involved in NATO projects in the future in view of the comments made by Anders Fogh Rasmussen on his recent trip to Dublin. [21292/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Secretary General of NATO, Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, visited Dublin on the 12th and 13th February this year. He did so at the invitation of the EU High Representative and myself to participate in the informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers which was held at Dublin Castle, as part of Ireland's EU Presidency. During his visit Mr. Rasmussen expressed his appreciation for the cooperation NATO has had with Ireland since we joined the Partnership for Peace in 1999. He paid tribute to the contribution Ireland has made to UN-led peacekeeping missions and to UN-mandated missions which are led by regional organizations such as NATO and the EU. Participation in overseas peacekeeping missions is a key element of Ireland's foreign policy and has been an important dimension in meeting Ireland's international obligations as a member of the UN and the EU. With the increasing use of more robust Chapter VII missions/operations, in the past number of years, the UN has turned to regional organisations to undertake and lead missions on its behalf. In effect the EU, the AU and NATO, together with other similar such organisations, are now major players in UN peacekeeping.

As the House will be aware, Ireland has been contributing Defence Forces Personnel to UN mandated, NATO-led missions since 1997, when we contributed personnel to the NATO-led Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Our forces have and continue to serve in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

As members of Partnership for Peace (PfP), Ireland participates in PfP's Planning and Review Process (PARP). As part of this process, Ireland has adopted a range of Partnership Goals aimed at assisting Ireland to meet its UN/EU commitments in the areas of Counter Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED), Cyber Security, Network Enabled Services, etc. Membership of PfP has allowed the Defence Forces to gain access to NATO standards – which are internationally-recognised as representing best practice for the development of military capabilities. The Defence Forces participation in PARP will continue as part of our engagement in Partnership for Peace.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 88.

Question No. 96 answered with Question No. 89.

Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 77.

Overseas Missions

98. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Defence his plans to develop EU co-operation in the area of maritime security and surveillance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21323/13]

100. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence his plans to foster EU co-operation in the area of maritime security and surveillance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21302/13]

109. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will report on the recent meeting on maritime security and surveillance; if he is considering any new measures to enhance our maritime security and surveillance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21127/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98,100 and 109 together.

A Seminar titled “Challenges and Opportunities in Maritime Security and Surveillance for Effective Governance and Innovation in the EU’s Maritime Domain” was hosted in April. High level representatives from the European Commission, European External Action Service, the European Defence Agency, NATO and national and international academics and practitioners, made presentations at the Seminar.

The seminar highlighted the importance of building EU wide consensus and cooperation in relation to security and surveillance in the maritime domain in support of EU Sea Basins Strategies (including the new EU Atlantic Strategy), the Integrated Maritime Policy, the Common Information Sharing Environment and Common Security and Defence Policy. In meeting the challenges of the 21st century, the unique aspects of the Union’s maritime and surveillance domain was highlighted. The seminar drew lessons from existing EU Sea Basin strategies and the technologies and operational procedures which support collaboration among member States, with a particular focus on EU Navies.

The seminar also highlighted that the EU’s seas and oceans provide an essential contribution to our wealth and wellbeing and hold immense untapped economic opportunities, in terms of energy, food and mineral resources. It is a very significant resource worth protecting. To achieve these benefits closer cross-sector and cross-border cooperation is required and this was clearly articulated during the seminar.

Key initiatives which are now being developed include:

The Atlantic Strategy, which will cover the coasts, territorial and jurisdictional waters of the five EU Member States with an Atlantic coastline – France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Preliminary meetings between these five Member States have taken place and work is ongoing regarding the development of this strategy, in which Ireland is playing a key role.

The “MARSUR” project, involving 13 Member States, including Ireland, will develop the Recognised Maritime Picture exchange network to allow for the sharing of sensitive and con-

fidential maritime information among participating member States Naval Forces in a safe and secure manner. The Irish Naval Service participates in this project.

The Common Information Sharing Environment (an EU Commission initiative) - will allow for the exchange of information across all EU maritime sectors, through the integration of existing maritime systems with the use of modern technologies, in a cost efficient and effective manner. "MARSUR" will ultimately feed into this system.

Ireland's involvement in this project will enhance information sharing and knowledge transfer between Member States and build working relationships based on "mutual trust" with other European agencies at the operational level. This is evident by Ireland's very successful involvement in drug seizures, the success of which is dependent on building partnerships between the various actors in this domain.

Emergency Planning

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he remains satisfied regarding the ability of the Defence Forces to respond to any security requirement including natural disasters that may arise notwithstanding expenditure cuts brought about as a consequence of the memorandum of understanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21237/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): My priority as Minister for Defence is to ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible. Whilst the Defence Forces are not a Principal Response Agency, as defined in the Framework for Major Emergency Management, they provide the fullest possible assistance to the appropriate Lead Department in the event of a natural disaster or severe weather emergency in its Aid to the Civil Authority (ATCA) role under the multi-agency Framework. At National level, representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both my Department and the Defence Forces ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency. The Defence Forces are also represented on the eight Regional Working Groups that have been established under the Framework and, on an ongoing basis, designated members of the Defence Forces, based around the country, act as Liaison Officers to Local Authorities.

In relation to security, primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order rests with An Garda Síochána. However, one of the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence (2000) is to provide Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. A wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies and the Defence Forces hold regular coordination and liaison meetings with An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

Similar to all other Government Departments, it is imperative that the Department and the Defence Forces take into account the current difficult economic environment we are now operating in. The budgetary situation will continue to dictate the level of funding available for new equipment, including vehicles, upgrades of equipment and different technologies. Within the resource envelope available for Defence, the Defence Forces will continue to fulfil all roles assigned by Government.

Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 98.

Overseas Missions

101. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide an update in the Defence Forces mission in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21307/13]

104. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Defence the situation with regard to the Defence Forces mission in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21328/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 104 together.

Seven (7) members of the Permanent Defence Force continue to serve with ISAF which was established under Security Council Resolution 1386 on 20 December 2001. Planning for the drawdown of ISAF generally is currently ongoing and the withdrawal of the Defence Forces personnel from the mission will be co-ordinated within the context of the overall ISAF draw-down plan.

Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 80.

Overseas Missions

103. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence his plans to deploy personnel to Syria currently. [21290/13]

105. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide an update in the current situation for Irish personnel serving with UNTSO, the UN Troop Supervision and UNDOF, the UN Observer Force on the Golan Heights after meeting with them on his recent trip. [21286/13]

306. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the four day kidnap of 21 UN Peacekeepers by Syrian rebels; and if there is any serious threat to the Irish personnel serving with the UN Troop Supervision Organisation and the UN Observer Force on the Golan Heights. [15519/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103, 105 and 306 together.

I also met with Major General Iqbal Singh Singha of India, the Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). I was briefed on security issues in that area, especially the growing risks flowing from instability in Syria and the impact of the refugee crisis in the region.

I was also briefed on the detention and subsequent safe release of twenty one (21) personnel serving with UNDOF in early March 2013. In the days following, UNDOF vacated two positions which were particularly exposed to gunfire.

The conflict in Syria has spread to the Golan Heights and has had an impact on the operations of both UNDOF and UNTSO. Both UNDOF and UNTSO are working closely together and have taken a number of steps to increase security and to provide maximum force protection to its members as they conduct their tasks.

Currently, members of the Permanent Defence Force are not serving with UNDOF. How-

ever, last month Ireland received requests from the UN to deploy a small number of additional observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organisation in the Middle East to the Headquarters of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria. These requests are currently receiving consideration and a decision will be made shortly.

Six members of the Permanent Defence Force who had been deployed as unarmed military observers to the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) were withdrawn in August 2012 when the mission's mandate came to an end.

Question No. 104 answered with Question No. 101.

Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 103.

Questions Nos. 106 and 107 answered with Question No. 82.

Value for Money Reviews

108. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence the financial supports that will be made available to members of the Reserve Defence Forces into the future in view of the Value for Money Review. [21289/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Arising from the implementation of the recommendations of the VFM Review of the Reserve Defence Force, direct expenditure on the Reserve will reduce to €11 million in 2013. This reduction has arisen largely due to the PDF Cadre support staff being reduced to 57.

The budget for Reserve training activity is €3.243 million for 2013. In order to sustain a Reserve Force at a strength level of 4,069 within existing resources, gratuities have been withdrawn from members of the Reserve and money previously allocated to gratuities has been redirected into paid training to increase the number of paid Mandays. This measure has significantly boosted the number of Mandays available to members of the Reserve, rising from 30,000 Mandays in 2012 to 41,500 in 2013. The effect of increasing the number of paid training days by one-third will ensure sustainable training for members of the Reserve.

This will provide financial supports to all Reservists undertaking paid training. In contrast, only 1,828 Reservists qualified for the payment of a gratuity in 2012.

Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 98.

Banking Sector Remuneration

110. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach further to comments from the chief executive officer of a company (details supplied), at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2013, if, when he met with the person, he gave any commitment on bankers' pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21089/13]

The Taoiseach: During a conversation I had with Mr. Howard Lutnick, CEO of Cantor Fitzgerald at an event in Davos organised by IDA Ireland with over 40 executives of major international companies, there were no discussions in respect of bankers' pay.

Departmental Properties

111. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners' management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi Unit Development Act within his Department. [21252/13]

The Taoiseach: Neither my Department nor the National Economic and Social Development Office, which is the only body under the aegis of my Department, own or rent property in commercial developments.

International Fund for Ireland

112. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the International Fund for Ireland has decided not to support the Wider Horizons Project that has over the past 25 years brought more than 17,000 unemployed persons both Catholic and Protestant from the North to Pittsburgh and elsewhere in the USA to live and learn together; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21088/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The International Fund for Ireland is an Independent International Organisation and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on a decision of its Board. The Wider Horizons Programme was one of very many successful programmes that the Fund supported over that time. All of these programmes would not have been possible without the support of the international donors to the Fund, the United States, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to whom we should all be very thankful. I understand the Fund is operating with significantly reduced resources and this, coupled with changes in Northern Ireland, requires it to adapt its approach. Regrettably despite the remarkable progress made to secure peace on the island of Ireland, some work is still required in those communities that have not previously, or only partially, engaged in peace building and reconciliation activities. Based on the need for this additional intervention the Fund has developed a strategic framework for the period 2012-2015 which has three specific elements which will target very specific areas and groups with a view to embedding the Peace Process in communities that to date have not fully engaged with it. I understand that the Fund will formally launch its new strategy shortly and I will arrange for a copy to be furnished to Deputy Martin.

Diplomatic Representation

113. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the review of the Irish network on honorary consuls worldwide has concluded; if he will outline the main points of the review; the date on which he intends to publish the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21097/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Department's review of Ireland's Honorary Consul Service has not yet concluded. It is hoped to complete the review by mid 2013.

European Parliament Membership

114. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if, in view of the fact that Ireland and the medium-sized EU countries are the most adversely affected by the European Parliament's recent decision to reallocate MEP seats, and in view of the fact that there is still no clarification on the Council position, the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union is prepared to liaise with similarly affected EU member states in order to ensure that adequate time is afforded to the redrawing of constituencies here if necessary; if he has a negotiation strategy to ensure that Ireland will not lose further seats in 2019, 2024 and beyond; if Ireland will accept the loss of an MEP seat without ensuring that there are no further losses in years to come; if Ireland has a veto on this matter; if Ireland alone could in fact block the reduction of MEP seats at Council level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21162/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): In exercise of its right of initiative under Article 14.2 of the Treaty on European Union, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 13 March 2013 on the composition of the Parliament with a view to the 2014 elections. It is a matter for the President of the European Council to bring it to the European Council for decision. I understand that it is intended to do so in a timely fashion to allow for the necessary arrangements to be made at national level in Member States in good time for the 2014 elections. The Government does not view the current proposal as providing a basis for further adjustments to the composition of the European Parliament beyond the 2014 elections. In this context, we note the intention of the European Parliament, as outlined in its resolution, to submit, before the end of 2015 and in good time for the 2019 elections, a new proposal for a decision of the European Council, with the aim of establishing a durable and transparent system which, in future before each election, will allow seats to be apportioned amongst Member States in an objective manner, based on the principle of degressive proportionality as required by the Treaty and taking account of any increase in the number of Member States and demographic trends in their population. The resolution was adopted by a substantial majority in the European Parliament. When the decision of the European Council is taken, it must be consented to by the Parliament. Our approach will be considered in this context.

Departmental Properties

115. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners' management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi Unit Development Act within his Department. [21246/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My Department does not own any property in the State and there are no agencies under its aegis. Ownership of Iveagh House, headquarters of my Department, is vested in the State. Lease and rental commitments relating to all other properties in the State occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are discharged by the Office of Public Works.

EU Summits

116. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if

he attended the recent EU-Japan trade agreement. [21362/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): On 22 March, the 21st EU-Japan Summit was postponed. This decision was taken due to the unfolding financial situation in Cyprus at the time. This required the presence of the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso and President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy. It was decided, in agreement with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, that the Summit be rescheduled at the earliest possible opportunity. From 15-19 April the first round of negotiations took place in Brussels. The next round of negotiations is scheduled for 24-28 June in Tokyo. Japan is the EU's 7th largest trading partner globally and the EU's 2nd biggest trading partner in Asia after China. Conversely, the European Union is Japan's 3rd largest trading partner. The opening up of Japan to further European trade and investment is expected to generate considerable gains for Ireland and our EU partners. It is estimated that an EU-Japan FTA could increase the EU's GDP by 0.8% and create more than 400,000 jobs for the EU economy.

Communicating Europe Initiative

117. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will indicate the person funding the Leviathan series of lectures entitled Communicating Europe; under what Department has it been promoted; the person responsible for the selection of speakers at this lecture series; the percentage of the fees paid to the Leviathan organisation that is coming from Irish taxpayers' money; if there was an open competition for the contract to facilitate and host these lectures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21421/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Communicating Europe Initiative (CEI) was established in 1995 to raise awareness about the European Union and to improve the quality and accessibility of public information on European issues. The programme is administered by the Department of the Taoiseach. This year's CEI was publicly launched on 29 January 2013, see link here:<http://www.merrionstreet.ie/index.php/2013/01/government-announces-communicating-europe-initiative-2013-focus-on-irelands-40th-anniversary-in-the-eu-and-the-european-year-of-citizens-2013/>. The closing date for funding applications was 15 February 2013.

Over 90 applications were received and these were examined by an evaluation committee comprising internal and external members. Forty six projects were recommended for funding. The list is here:http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Work_Of_The_Department/European_and_International_Affairs/EU_and_International_Affairs_Publications/Communicating_Europe_Initiative.html.

The proposal by Leviathan to organise four regional Citizens' Dialogues received an award of €39,000. Three have taken place (Athlone, Kilkenny and Limerick) and the last will be held in Letterkenny later this month. The arrangements for the events and selection of speakers are a matter for Leviathan. All Communicating Europe Initiative grant recipients are required to submit a report on completion of their projects.

Tax Code

118. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there are any exemptions from excise duty for charitable organisations who are trying to ship humanitarian aid to Lagos, Nigeria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21454/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): In certain circumstances, goods imported for charitable purposes may receive an exemption from import duties. The Embassy of Ireland in Nigeria would be happy to provide the relevant information to facilitate Irish charities and missionaries to apply to the Federal Ministry of Finance in Abuja, Nigeria for such an exemption.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

119. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding our Third World aid and our spend for each of the past four years in actual terms, as a per cent of GDP; his current policy regarding reaching 0.7% by 2015; if same is still the target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21548/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Last week the Tanaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Gilmore, and I launched Ireland's new policy on International Development – One World, One Future – where we set out our vision for a sustainable and just world. This policy sets out in very clear terms our goals and areas of focus and affirms Ireland's commitment to international development and its centrality to our foreign policy. Over the past four years, despite the unprecedented economic difficulties facing the country, this Government, and indeed its predecessor, provided significant financial allocations to Ireland's development aid programme. Expenditure on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and its percentage of Gross National Product (GNP) for the past four years is as follows:

Year	Total ODA	ODA as a % of GNP
-	€m	
2012	628.98	0.47%
2011	657.04	0.52%
2010	675.83	0.52%
2009	722.20	0.54%

One World, One Future restates the Programme for Government commitment to achieving the UN target of providing 0.7% of GNP to ODA. However this can only be achieved when economic circumstances permit and in the meantime we will endeavour to maintain aid expenditure at current levels.

Diplomatic Contacts

120. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will organise for the Irish Embassy in Oslo, Norway, to make contact with a person (details supplied) an Irish citizen in order to establish information regarding their well-being. [21562/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As I'm sure the Deputy will appreciate, officials from my Department have neither the qualifications, nor the authority in a foreign jurisdiction, to carry out assessments into the wellbeing of children who may also be citizens of that country. If the father of the person named by the Deputy has concerns for her welfare, he should report these concerns to An Garda Síochána (and to Irish Social Workers if An Garda Síochána deem this appropriate) so that investigations can be carried out through appropriate channels.

Tax Reliefs Application

121. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance the reason persons who availed of Revenue job assist whilst enduring long-term unemployment, subsequently receive wage deductions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21147/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Sections 472A and 88A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provide tax incentives for both employees and employers, to help the long-term unemployed to return to employment.

The relief under Section 472A, commonly known as the Revenue Job Assist scheme, allows qualifying employees, in addition to their normal tax credits, to claim certain income deductions, including additional deductions for qualifying children, for the three year period after taking up employment.

Section 88A provides an associated tax incentive for employers. Employers are entitled to claim a double deduction in computing the profits of the trade or profession in respect of the first 3 years wages paid to qualifying employees. This double deduction may also be claimed in respect of the employers' PRSI contribution on such wages.

In order to qualify for the Revenue Job Assist scheme, an individual must be unemployed for at least 12 continuous months prior to the date of commencement of the employment. They must also be in receipt of certain payments from the Department of Social Protection or signing for PRSI credits. Time spent on certain FÁS courses and employment schemes, as well as time spent in prison can count towards the "unemployed for 12 months" condition. The employer must not have made any staff redundant in the 26 weeks prior to the recruitment and must offer a job for a minimum of 30 hours per week with a contract for at least 12 months.

There is no provision in the legislation for the amount of salary that an employer must pay. The level of remuneration an employee receives is a matter for the employee and their employer.

Banking Sector Issues

122. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a copy of the Crisis Management Manual, also known as the "Black Book", as it existed at the end of 2006 and-or as redrafted during the period August 2007 to September 2008 under the auspices of the Domestic Standing Group, as referenced in the Honohan report and the Nyberg report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21091/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The document referred to by the Deputy in his question was drawn up by the Central Bank of Ireland to provide it with a set of processes and procedures to assist it in the management of a financial crisis situation. The question of releasing the document is therefore a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland in the first instance. The document was shared with the Department of Finance on the understanding it would be treated in strictest confidence given the nature of the matters treated in the document. I do not therefore propose to provide a copy of the document.

Property Taxation Collection

123. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Finance if the valuation of property owned by the Office of Public Works and the State has been completed for the purposes of the

local property tax; when he expects the review to be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21093/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Local Property Tax (LPT) is a self-assessed tax. Therefore it will be a matter for the relevant State/public body as property owner to calculate the tax due based on its assessment of the market value of its property and submit a completed LPT Return in respect of all properties in their ownership. The Property Management Service in the Office of Public Works has engaged with the Revenue Commissioners and concluded an exercise to identify all those state owned properties which may be liable for the LPT within its portfolio. The OPW Valuation Service is currently engaged in assigning these properties to the appropriate tax band and work will be complete in advance of the Revenue deadline.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that where local authority owned properties are not exempt from LPT, the market value of any such property will be deemed to fall into the lowest valuation band of zero to €100,000 for the period up to and including 2016. This will result in an LPT charge of €45 per property for 2013 and €90 per year for 2014 to 2016. In addition, section 119 of the 2012 Act also gives local authorities until 2014 to pay the 2013 tax. In common with other liable persons who own multiple properties, local authorities have until 28 May 2013 to file their LPT Returns.

Property Taxation Administration

124. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the online system for the local property tax for properties in joint ownership to recognise both PPS numbers to ensure that the Revenue Commissioners know that the tax has been paid on the property regardless of which spouse paid it (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21153/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): An important aspect of the work undertaken by Revenue in the implementation of Local Property Tax (LPT) was the compilation of the first ever Register of residential properties in the State and the matching of the residential property with its owner or owners, where this information was available. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that joint owners of a property are jointly and severally liable for LPT in respect of the property. I am further informed that the Revenue Commissioners issued one LPT Return for each residential property to the person that the Commissioners designated as the liable person for the property and only one Return should be filed for a property. Joint owners of a property can, however, decide who should be the designated liable person in respect of the property and requests to change the designated liable person for a property must be submitted in writing to the LPT Branch, PO Box 1, Limerick or by emailing lpt@revenue.ie. Once this person is identified on the Register as an owner of the property, all future LPT correspondence for the property will be addressed to this person and he or she will be required to file the LPT Return and pay the tax due.

Accordingly, where one owner of the property files the LPT Return and pays the tax due, this discharges the LPT liability for the property and meets the obligations for the joint owners. Revenue records will reflect the position regarding the receipt of the Return for each property, the valuation band declared for the property and the payment made and this information will be available to all of the property owners associated with that property so that there can be complete clarity as to status of LPT for that property. This information is accessed through the Revenue LPT online system using the unique Property ID and PIN so it is important to retain these for future use.

I am satisfied that the LPT online system has been developed in such a way as to provide the necessary information to all owners that have been linked to the property and, where the full liability has been paid by one of the owners, the obligations of the joint owners will have been met and no accumulation of arrears of tax will arise.

Pension Provisions

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if Permanent TSB plans to wind up its defined benefit pension scheme; if he will confirm the number of scheme members who would be affected by such a move; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21160/13]

137. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his approval has been given for the closure of the Permanent TSB defined benefit pension scheme; his views on the company's actions regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21223/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 137 together.

As the Deputy will be aware the pension arrangements for the staff of Permanent TSB are a matter for the management of that company and for the trustees of the relevant pension schemes.

I am informed by Permanent TSB that it currently operates 3 defined pension schemes for employees who joined the bank before 2007 and a defined contribution scheme for staff who joined the bank since then. I am informed by the bank that very substantial funding deficits exist in the various defined benefit schemes.

Permanent TSB has advised me that, in response to this significant problem and as part of a review of the overall cost base of the business, it has recently communicated to staff plans to discontinue employer contributions to all the existing defined benefit pension schemes and to commence, in their place, contributions to a new defined contribution pension scheme from 1 June 2013. I am informed by Permanent TSB that there are currently 1,360 staff in defined benefit schemes in Permanent TSB which will be affected by this move. Ultimately it is for the trustees of the defined benefit schemes to decide how the schemes will respond to this development but it will most likely result in the relevant defined benefit schemes being wound up and the assets already accumulated being distributed among the members of the relevant schemes in accordance with the requirements of the Pensions Act. I have been informed that the matter may be referred to the Labour Court but that would be an issue for the various interested parties.

As the Deputy will be aware there is a Relationship Framework in place with Permanent TSB which provides the basis on which the relationship between the Minister and Permanent TSB is governed. Under the terms of the Relationship Framework the bank operates as an independent economic entity and matters such as this fall within the purview of the bank.

I can inform the Deputy that the Minister for Finance has not been asked, and is not required, under the terms of the Relationship Framework to give approval for a wind-up of Permanent TSB's defined benefit pension schemes.

Tax Code

126. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance if persons who availed of

the farm retirement scheme are able to avail of the exemption from capital gains tax in the event of the disposal of all or part of their farm, even after leaving the scheme; if it is still the case in relation to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21170/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that before a definitive answer could be given to the Deputy's question it would be necessary to have further relevant information relating to the case. It would for example be necessary to know the effect of leaving the retirement scheme in question relative to the terms of the scheme rules; how long the farmer was within the scheme; what use was made of the land during the period the farmer was within the scheme and what use is being made of the land since leaving the scheme. In the absence of this information, it is only possible to reply in general terms. Section 598 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides that land which has been owned and used by an individual for the purposes of farming for a period of 10 years, ending with the transfer of an interest in that land for the purposes of complying with the relevant Early Retirement From Farming Scheme, qualifies for retirement relief where an individual disposes of that land. In order to qualify for the relief, the individual must be aged 55 years or over.

Currently, full relief from capital gains tax applies where the aggregate consideration for disposals outside the family does not exceed €750,000 and the farmer making the disposal satisfies the conditions governing the tax relief outlined above. Marginal relief may apply where the consideration does not greatly exceed that amount. In the case of disposals by individuals aged 66 or over on or after 1 January 2014, the relief will be reduced to €500,000.

If you wish to provide me with the information required and the name and address of the taxpayer in question, I will request the Revenue Commissioners to provide a definitive reply.

NAMA Debtors

127. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos 198 and 199 of 23 April 2013, when he stated the National Assets Management Agency advises that even there the bankruptcy is discharged, the bankruptcy estate continues until such time as all assets have been liquidated and the debt, in so far as possible, has been repaid and in relation to the discharge from bankruptcy in Britain of a person (details supplied) in November 2011, if he will confirm that NAMA has still not written off the unpaid debt originally owed by the person to NAMA, and that generally, NAMA has not yet written off any debt as a result of bankruptcy by its debtors in foreign jurisdictions. [21173/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As previously advised, even where a bankruptcy is discharged, the bankruptcy trustee continues to deal with outstanding debt until such time as all assets have been realised and the debt, in so far as possible has been repaid. NAMA advises that it is precluded from commenting on individual cases. As has also been previously advised, NAMA has not written off debt arising from debtor bankruptcy applications.

NAMA Board Appointments

128. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to parliamentary Question No. 224 of 23 April 2013, the consultation he had with the advisory board of the National Assets Management Agency prior to appointing a person (details supplied) to the board of NAMA; the date and general nature of such consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21174/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can confirm to the Deputy that consideration of the appointment of Oliver Ellingham to the NAMA Board was discussed at the most recent meeting of the Advisory Group which took place on the 15th March 2013. Mr Ellingham was appointed to the board of NAMA as he has significant international experience in finance as well as his experience as a member of the board of IBRC.

NAMA Board Appointments

129. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 224 of 23 April 2013, the consultation, if any, that he had on the three persons at the National Treasury Management Agency and the National Assets Management Agency who have not accepted waivers on their €200,000 salaries in 2013. [21175/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Chief Executive of the National Treasury Management Agency informed me of this matter in the course of putting in place the administrative arrangements for the continuation of the gifting of 15% of salary or such lesser amount of salary as exceeds €200,000 by employees whose salary exceeds €200,000. I do not plan any further consultations on the matter.

Banking Sector Issues

130. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 69 of 24 April 2013, if the two advisers acting on behalf of AIB-EBS and the AIB-EBS pension fund were employees of the same firm. [21176/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have previously advised the Deputy for commercial confidentiality reasons AIB has confirmed that it does not publicly disclose the details of contracts with individual external service providers. However, the bank can confirm that for the purpose of asset valuation, separate advisers were used by AIB and the Trustees of the AIB Pension Fund.

NAMA Expenditure

131. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 224 of 23 April 2013, if he will confirm the budgeted and actual cost of the National Asset Management Agency advisory board in its first year of operation. [21177/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My department had budgeted costs in the region of €40,000 to cover the hotel, travel and subsistence costs of the Advisory Group for 2012, the actual cost of the group in the period was approximately €23,000. As previously advised, the members of the group operate on a pro bono basis.

Bank Debt Restructuring

132. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm the amount of debt forgiveness that will be provided by Allied Irish Bank to Independent News and Media as part of the latter firm's recently announced reorganisation plans. [21178/13]

150. **Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will state, in both absolute and percentage terms, the amount of the debt being written down by wholly and partly State owned lending institutions for Thomas Crosbie Holdings Limited and Independent News and Media Limited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21415/13]

152. **Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage stake the State will now hold through Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland in Independent News and Media Limited as a result of the debt for equity swop to facilitate the write down of INM Limited debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21424/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132, 150 and 152 together.

I have been informed that due to data protection rules and customer confidentiality the banks are not in a position to discuss details of individual customer circumstances.

Banks Recapitalisation

133. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his latest estimate of the gross and net cost of bailing out Anglo Irish bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society. [21179/13]

134. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 283 of 18 September 2012, in which he stated the bank’s CEO has given an indication previously that the likely outcome for Anglo Irish Bank would be in the €25-€28 billion region, if, following the planning of the special liquidation of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation from October 2012 when he stated that he first consulted KPMG on the matter and following the appointment of a special liquidator on 6 February 2013, his views on whether this outcome of €25-€28 billion still holds. [21180/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 134 together.

It is important to note that comments made by the former executives in IBRC were based on the assumption that IBRC was to continue as originally planned and that payment of interest and capital on the Promissory Notes would also continue which is not now the case. There are numerous benefits from the arrangements that have been undertaken. There are efficiency gains from housing ‘legacy assets’ in a single vehicle, NAMA. Exceptional Liquidity Assistance and the inherent risk associated with short term borrowings has also been removed from the Irish banking landscape. There is also an expected reduction in the underlying deficit by c.€1 billion per annum over the coming years with a reduction in government debt over time. These all need to be taken into account in assessing the benefits of the IBRC liquidation.

It is far too early to predict the outcome of the liquidation process and the overall cost for the State in relation to IBRC. It will not be possible to conclude for certain whether the value of the assets to be sold by the Special Liquidators, is sufficient to compensate NAMA for the amount paid for the net IBRC debt that it has acquired, until the valuation of those assets has been completed.

As part of the role of the liquidators, the assets of IBRC will be valued independently before being sold. Any assets not sold to third parties at or above the valuation price will be sold to NAMA at the independent valuation. This ensures a ‘floor’ price on the assets of IBRC and that where required, assets with limited sale potential now, can be worked through in the medium term by NAMA rather than sold to the best available third party at any price. This approach en-

sure a fire sale of assets will not occur. This Government's approach is consistent and focused on the best outcome for the Irish State and its people.

IBRC Liquidation

135. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the total actual and potential claims by local authorities against Irish Bank Resolution Corporation in respect of unpaid developer bonds relating to building developments; and if he will confirm the way such liabilities will rank amongst IBRC's creditors. [21181/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that development bonds previously entered into by IBRC in favour of the various County Councils or local authorities remain in place. However it should be noted that it is likely that any liabilities arising under these arrangements, if called upon, will rank as unsecured claims in the special liquidation. It must be stressed that these bonds are contingent liabilities and will only be called upon where developers breach planning conditions and are not in a position to meet any liability that arises as a result. Any local authority should contact the Special Liquidators directly in respect of such claims should they arise. The Special Liquidators are in the process of establishing the level of bond/guarantees and indemnities entered into by IBRC (prior to liquidation) in favour of County Councils.

Property Taxation Exemptions

136. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance the way liability and qualification for deferral of the local property tax determined in a case where two siblings jointly own a home, but both individuals' income are below the threshold to allow for deferral of the tax, but jointly would be over the threshold; if siblings are jointly assessed in this case or just one liable individual; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21205/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Local Property Tax (LPT) is a self-assessed tax and it is a matter for a property owner to calculate the amount of LPT due based on his or her assessment of the market value of the property. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the amount of LPT due is determined by reference to the valuation band based on the market value of the property. As the siblings are joint owners of the property, they are jointly and severally liable for the LPT. However, in cases of joint ownership, only one of the owners is designated by the Revenue Commissioners for the purposes of submitting the LPT return form and paying the tax. For individuals on low incomes the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a system of deferral arrangements for owner-occupiers where there is an inability to pay the tax and certain specified conditions are met. Owners may qualify to defer all or part (50%) of their LPT liability.

In the context of the Deputy's question, where the joint owners are siblings, one owner will be the designated owner for filing and payment purposes. It is only the gross income of the designated owner, provided he or she is an owner-occupier, that is taken into account to determine if the deferral conditions are met, i.e. there is no aggregation of the gross incomes of all of the joint owners. In this case, as both incomes are below the individual threshold the designated owner will qualify for a deferral. To determine whether deferral applies for 2013, the designated owner is required to estimate on 1 May 2013 what his or her total gross income for 2013 will be. Where a deferral is being claimed on the basis of income threshold, the LPT Return must be completed and the relevant deferral condition selected.

On 25 April I provided details on the option of deferring payment of LPT based on income threshold in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 69 on 25 April (19691/13). I am advised by the Commissioners that full details of all deferral options are outlined in the Guidelines on Deferral or Part Deferral of Local Property Tax, which are available on Revenue's website www.revenue.ie.

Question No. 137 answered with Question No. 125.

Departmental Properties

138. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners' management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi Unit Development Act within his Department. [21245/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy's question my Department does not own or rent property in commercial developments. In respect of bodies under the aegis of my Department I am not aware that any of these bodies own or rent property in commercial developments.

Personal Debt

139. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance his views that a well regulated debt management advice sector can provide assistance to persons with personal debt difficulties who do not qualify for the reliefs set out in the Personal Insolvency Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21262/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The amendment to the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Bill 2011, which I proposed at Committee Stage, and was agreed on the 24th April 2013, will provide for a regulatory regime for debt management and debt advice companies. On the issue more generally people in debt or in danger of getting into debt can avail of the services of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS). This is a national, free, confidential and independent service. MABS have offices throughout the State. It is strongly suggested that anyone with debt or budgeting difficulties should approach their local MABS Office with a view to securing a confidential consultation with a money adviser to consider their particular circumstances.

The Deputy should be aware that the Government has introduced a range of additional information and guidance resources to assist mortgage holders through what can be a difficult and stressful process. A dedicated website, www.keepingyourhome.ie, has been put in place to provide general public information on mortgages arrears issues. In addition, there is a Mortgage Arrears Information Helpline, which is established under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board, to provide more tailored information to individual callers. Finally, a panel of accountants has been put in place to provide "one to one" independent advice to borrowers who have been provided with a long term forbearance resolution offer by their lender in respect of a mortgage on their primary home. All of these information services are provided at no direct charge to the users of the service.

Personal Debt

140. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance if he will ensure that his plans to regulate the debt management advice sector prohibits misleading advertising, ensures reasonable charges and appropriate protection for client funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21263/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The amendment to the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Bill 2011, which I proposed at Committee Stage, and was agreed on the 24th April 2013, will provide for a regulatory regime for debt management and debt advice companies. Under the proposed legislation the Central Bank will require that debt management firms will be obliged to comply with an appropriate code of conduct. The existing protections of the Consumer Protection Code will apply to debt management firms and it is via this code that protections for consumers with regard to advertising and charges etc. will be provided for.

Debt management firms will be authorised to provide debt advice and debt negotiation services as provided for in the definition of debt management services in the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Bill 2011. They will not be authorised to hold client funds on the basis of solely holding a debt management firm authorisation. Where debt management firms propose to receive client funds and make payments on behalf of clients to their creditors they may require a payment institution authorisation under the European Communities (Payment Services) Regulations 2009 or a money transmission business authorisation under Part V of the Central Bank Act 1997 (as amended) depending on their business model. It is under these regimes that the appropriate protection for client funds is provided for.

Tax Code

141. **Deputy Ann Phelan** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the disparity that exists in the sale of nicotine replacement patches in Northern Ireland and here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21274/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that nicotine replacement patches are subject to the standard rate of VAT in Ireland, currently 23%. Unlike other nicotine products, such as nicotine inhalers, tablets and chewing gum, which are categorised as oral medicines and therefore qualify for the zero-rate of VAT, nicotine replacement patches do not fall into this category and are therefore subject to the standard rate. While in the UK nicotine patches are liable to a reduced VAT rate of 5%, under the EU VAT Directive it is not possible for Ireland to apply a 5% VAT rate to the supply of nicotine patches. This is because the VAT Directive only permits Member States to apply two reduced rates of VAT, and as Ireland already applies two reduced VAT rates of a 9% and 13.5%, it would not be possible to apply a 5% rate to nicotine patches.

Alcohol Pricing

142. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the steps, if any, he proposes to take to influence a reduction in the price of non-alcoholic beer on sale in the on and off-trade in view of the relatively high price of such products here and the positive contribution lower prices would have on the demand for alcohol and hence on the very significant costs associated with alcohol-related harm here. [21344/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The issue of the price of non-alcoholic beer on sale is a matter for the Department of Health and Children and I would advise the Deputy to forward her question to them for direct reply.

Negative Equity Mortgages

143. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has any plans to assist homeowners who are in negative equity on their homes but need to move due to changing family circumstances but are unable to sell or get a new mortgage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21350/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has advised me that it has engaged with mortgage lenders in relation to negative equity mortgages to develop a mortgage product that would allow home owners to sell their existing home and transfer the negative equity portion of the original loan to the new loan. In order to ensure that proposals in relation to such mortgages are consistent with the Central Bank's consumer protection and prudential policy objectives, the proposed criteria for any such facility need to be agreed in advance between mortgage lenders and the Central Bank. While the provision of negative equity mortgages will facilitate people moving homes and generate transactions in the housing market, it is not expected that there will be a large take up of this product, as all sales must comply with the affordability and suitability provisions set out in the Consumer Protection Code. It should however be noted that a decision to introduce a negative equity type product is a matter for each mortgage lender and is based on commercial and policy considerations. At present some lenders are offering this product, while others are considering making such a product available.

Departmental Expenditure

144. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the total amount of fees paid out by his Department and agencies under its remit, to PR companies; and if he will list the companies and the fees received for in the years 2010, 2011 and 2012 and to date in 2013. [21364/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I take it that the Deputy is referring solely to public relations costs and not to advertising costs that would be incurred by my Department in the normal course of business, such as entries into telephone directories, the placing of advertisements in national newspapers, recruitment advertising, etc. In the period in question my Department, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Appeals Commissioners and Revenue have not incurred any such PR costs.

The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) will respond to you under your parliamentary question number 21365/13.

State Bodies Expenditure

145. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, a list public relations companies that received payments from either the National Assets Management Agency, the National Treasury Management Agency, the National Development Finance Agency, the State Claims Agency or the National Pension Reserve Fund; the overall cost of these payments from each agency named and the level of payments made by each

agency to each company listed in respect of work carried in the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013. [21365/13]

146. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies or individuals that recently tendered for the renewal of the public relations contract for the National Treasury Management Agency; and if the NTMA secured a reduction in the rate charged in the previous contract. [21366/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 and 146 together.

The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) does not maintain an internal press office. Instead, its internal communications resources are supported by an external service provider (appointed following a public procurement process) – currently Gordon MRM – in order to offer a full press office and communications service (including out-of-hours contacts for the media) across all the NTMA's business areas: Debt Management, National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), National Pensions Reserve Fund, National Development Finance Agency, State Claims Agency, NewERA and, during 2010 and 2011, the Banking Unit.

These arrangements were initially put in place during 2010 in light of a significant increase in the volume of domestic and international media queries being received by the NTMA and associated bodies. In September 2012 the NTMA retendered for the provision of these services. A total of five companies submitted tenders. Following the tender evaluation process the NTMA awarded the contract to Gordon MRM in December 2012.

The initial contract, in place to end-2012, was based on an hourly rate for services provided. During the term of this contract a 20% reduction in the hourly rate was agreed with effect from June 2011 until the end of the contract. The new contract, which commenced in January 2013, is based on a fixed fee and it is anticipated that this will result in a significant reduction in the overall fees paid by the NTMA.

NAMA draws on the NTMA's shared services in a number of areas including its outsourced press office facility. NAMA reimburses the NTMA in respect of the costs of these services attributable to NAMA.

The overall costs incurred for the provision of the services above (excluding VAT) were as follows:

2010 - €207,255*

2011 - €205,388 (of which €112,353 was charged to NAMA)

2012 - €223,723 (of which €142,653 was charged to NAMA)

2013 - €24,488 (to end-February) (of which €12,000 was charged to NAMA).

* In 2010 costs were not specifically attributed to NAMA. NAMA was charged a proportionate share of the NTMA's third party service costs which included Gordon MRM.

In the light of the sovereign debt crisis the NTMA also engaged Powerscourt – a London based communications consultancy – for international communications initiatives in the funding and debt management area. Total costs (excluding VAT) incurred for the provision of the services provided by Powerscourt were as follows:

2010 - €160,334

2011 - €74,395

2012 - €10,257

2013 - €12,103 (to end-February).

Property Taxation Application

147. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will explain the way a joint owner of a house who has no communication at all with the other owner of the house should complete the local property tax form, when they are not in a position to follow the instructions in the booklet that read, if you are not the sole owner of the property, you should agree with the other owner(s) who is to complete and submit the return and pay the tax due. [21389/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Local Property Tax (LPT) is a self-assessed tax and it is a matter for property owners to calculate the amount of LPT due based on their assessment of the market value of their property. Joint owners of a property are jointly and severally liable for the tax on the property. I am informed that the Revenue Commissioners issued one LPT Return for each residential property to the person that the Commissioners designated as the liable person for the property and only one Return should be filed for a property. Joint owners will be required to decide who will file the LPT Return and pay the tax. On the matter of communication between joint owners, owners will have had to put arrangements in place to address issues such as insurance, payment of utility bills and all other matters associated with the property jointly owned. The Revenue Commissioners would expect LPT to be handled in a similar manner.

Once the LPT Return is filed and the tax paid, this will discharge the LPT liability for the property. However, where no Return has been filed and no payment has been made by the relevant deadline, Revenue can pursue collection of the LPT from either owner.

Departmental Staff Numbers

148. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons that are employed at the local property tax help line; the grade of these people employed; the nature of their contracts and if he will give details of the customer charter that applies to them. [21390/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the introduction of the Local Property Tax (LPT) represents a significant administrative challenge. It is the largest extension of the self-assessment system in the history of the State. As a new service that will have exceptional temporary pressures at particular stages of its initial implementation it is difficult to predict the level of contact that will arise during its introduction and, consequently, the resource required to handle queries from members of the public. Revenue considered a number of options for the provision of a phone call service to handle queries from members of the public. It was necessary to ensure that the introduction of LPT would not adversely affect Revenue's capacity to deliver for the Exchequer in relation to their overall priority of maintaining and improving levels of compliance across the range of taxes and duties. Revenue decided to use a mix of existing staff, staff from the redeployment resource panel, Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) and external resources to deal with Local Property Tax.

At the end of April 2013, Revenue had a total of 80 full-time equivalent staff assigned to the Help Line, comprising 59 permanent staff and 21 TCOs. The permanent staff resource was filled through the internal redeployment of existing staff and the recruitment of some staff from the Public Service Resource panel. The permanent staff are made up of Assistant Principal, Higher Executive Officer, Executive Officer, Staff Officer and Clerical Officers grades.

Revenue is currently in the process of recruiting an additional 35 TCOs to support the LPT Helpline.

Following an open competitive tendering process, the contract for call services was awarded on the basis that the service provider would

1. Deliver information and assistance to taxpayers having difficulty understanding Local Property Tax (LPT) and completing their returns and making payments.

2. Assist taxpayers to navigate a new online system for filing returns and payments for LPT.

3. Escalate calls to a Revenue call service where taxpayer specific information is required to resolve the call.

4. Make outbound calls to taxpayers with information on their Property Tax queries where requested by Revenue to do so.

5. Provide telephony infrastructure and supports to allow direct transfer to Revenue.

6. Support services and resources including account management and quality control.

The contract also includes the following provisions:

- Private sector employers acting under a public service outsourcing contract will be required to comply with all statutory terms and conditions relating to the employment of people in Ireland, including any registered agreement or Employment Regulation Orders.

- As a matter of public policy, all public contracting authorities will make clear to tenderers their expectation that the statutory industrial relations procedures (LRC or Labour Court) will be utilised for dispute resolution, consistent with domestic and EU procurement law.

The service provider must meet Revenue customer service standards and the industry ISO standards. Revenue has provided training and training material to ensure that the standards are achieved. An Irish language service is provided. The necessary confidentiality and security procedures have been implemented.

Revenue's customer service standards state that 100% of calls were answered within five minutes but also states that at peak periods it may take longer. Revenue is experiencing extremely high volumes of all calls in relation to the Local Property Tax at present. The Help-Line service is provided on a 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday basis in the normal course. During peak filing periods the service is provided from 8am to 8pm and may include Saturday.

The service commenced on 7 March 2013 and call volumes of 199,834 were handled up to 30 April 2013. The external service delivery of peak call handling in respect of the LPT provides a flexible, scalable response to an unpredictable demand. Up until the end of April 2013 the number of staff provided by the service provider ranged from 40 up to 193.

NAMA Debtors

149. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if the income of developers who are now being paid by National Assets Management Agency can be used towards reducing their insolvency debt; if the new personal solvency service will affect NAMA's dealing with debtors in any way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21412/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As has been previously advised to the House, NAMA seeks to ensure that income generated by assets securing its loans is applied towards repaying a debtor's indebtedness to the Agency. In certain circumstances, debtors are allowed to retain a portion of asset income in lieu of overheads which include staff costs. NAMA also seeks to obtain charges over a debtor's unencumbered assets and to realise such assets so as to further reduce indebtedness.

The position outlined above does not apply to debtors against whom enforcement action has been taken, as their assets and asset income are under the control of insolvency practitioners appointed by NAMA. I am advised by NAMA that, whilst the relevant procedures for the new insolvency arrangements have not been finalised, it does not envisage the new arrangements will have a major material effect on its interaction with its debtors. In so far as there may be an impact, debtors will be considered on a case-by-case basis after implementation of the new insolvency regime but NAMA will abide by the statutory bankruptcy mechanism in all such cases.

Question No. 150 answered with Question No. 132.

Tax Forms

151. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a Med 1 claim for 2012 was refused in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21418/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that this taxpayer's claim for medical expenses for the year 2012 has been processed and a balancing statement (P21), dated 6 February 2013, has been issued. The balancing statement includes full credit for the medical expenses claimed, but also includes other adjustments, the overall effect of which is a net refund of €58.72. If the taxpayer wishes to have the balancing statement explained to him in detail, he should contact Deirdre Kavanagh in Revenue, Cork, telephone 1890 22 24 25 extension 27253.

Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 132.

Banking Sector Remuneration

153. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to further address the issue of maximum salaries for bank executives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21445/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The present policy on remuneration at the covered institutions dictates that no individual may receive annual aggregate remuneration (excluding pension contributions) exceeding €500,000 unless specifically authorised. Our policy on bank remuneration is being augmented following the Review of Remuneration Practices and Frameworks at the covered institutions, conducted by Mercer, that as the remaining institutions still incur losses their respective cost bases need to be reduced further. This is

essential if they are to return to profitability, be in a position to support the economy and repay the State's investment through a return to private ownership. On behalf of the Government, I directed the banks to come up with plans as to how they intend to address this issue in a manner that can help meet the State's objectives. I expect the value of those plans to mean a saving of 6% - 10% of total remuneration costs, through reductions in payroll and pension benefits, new working arrangements and structures that deliver efficiency gains. Tackling the cost base is of course only one of many goals that need to be achieved but combined with other measures will deliver the required results.

Property Taxation Exemptions

154. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance if a first time buyer who signed for their property on 20 December 2012 is exempt from the local property tax; and if not if he will consider an exemption for those who purchased their home from the time of the budget announcement to the 1 January 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21517/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 8 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for an exemption from the charge to LPT for a property purchased by a first time buyer between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2013. The Deputy will be aware that tax relief on mortgage interest was available subject to certain conditions for first time buyers, in respect of loans taken out in the period 1 January 2004 to 31 December 2012. It was in that context that the 1 January 2013 date was selected for the LPT exemption, and I do not intend to extend it to properties purchased earlier than that. In relation to your specific question, on the understanding that the purchase of the property by the first time buyer was completed prior to 1 January 2013, the property will not qualify for the LPT exemption.

Mortgage Interest Rates Issues

155. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding hikes of the interest rates imposed by banks which seem to have no connection with the actual price at which Irish banks are getting their money, mostly through the ECB; if he is planning any action in relation to the sustainable situation of those on variable mortgages who bought their family houses on the peak of the housing market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21519/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I, as Minister for Finance, have no statutory role in relation to the mortgage interest rates charged by regulated financial institutions. It is a commercial matter for the banks concerned. Firstly I must point out that it is not true to say that the Irish banks are funded mostly through the ECB; in fact the Irish banks primarily funded by deposits and other types of market funding.

The Central Bank has responsibility for the regulation and supervision of financial institutions in terms of consumer protection and prudential requirements and for ensuring ongoing compliance with applicable statutory obligations. The Central Bank has, however, no statutory role in the setting of interest rates by financial institutions, apart from the interest rate cap imposed on the credit union sector in accordance with the provisions of the Credit Union Act, 1997.

The mortgage interest rates that financial institutions operating in Ireland charge to customers are determined as a result of a commercial decision by the institutions concerned. This

interest rate is determined taking into account a broad range of factors, including European Central Bank base rates, deposit rates, market funding costs, the competitive environment and an institution's overall funding.

However, as part of the Central Bank's work on mortgage arrears, lenders were asked to consider all avenues to help customers in arrears, including interest rate reductions. Currently, several lenders do consider a temporary interest rate reduction but this is on a case by case basis.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government is very aware of the significant difficulties some homeowners are facing in meeting their mortgage obligations and it has put in place a comprehensive strategy to address the problem focusing on four main distinct areas:

- **Innovative Personal Insolvency Reform:** Personal insolvency reform was identified by the Keane Report as a catalyst for addressing the mortgage arrears problem and it indicated that without an effective insolvency system the mortgage arrears problem will not be resolved. The introduction of the new Personal Insolvency Act provides new statutory insolvency frameworks to allow debtors and creditors reach arrangements on unsustainable mortgage and personal debt. The legislation provides a legal framework for the resolution of mortgage arrears, as well as other personal debt, and it will provide certainty for borrowers and lenders alike about the consequences of non-payment and failure to reach agreement. It does not preclude, however, borrowers and lenders reaching bilateral agreements to address mortgage or other debt difficulty.

- **Mortgage Arrears Resolution Strategies:** As announced in March 2013, the implementation of the mortgage arrears strategies has further intensified with the Central Bank now setting time bound and measurable targets for the main banks on their progress in resolving, on a durable basis, the position of their mortgage customers who are in arrears on their mortgage. The "Keane Report" has already outlined a number of possible options that can be considered by banks to provide a sustainable solution for a mortgage in difficulty on a case by case basis.

- **Comprehensive Advice and Guidance:** In addition to existing arrangements, the Government has introduced a range of additional information and guidance resources to assist mortgage holders through what can be a difficult and stressful process. A dedicated website, www.keepingyourhome.ie, has been put in place to provide general public information on mortgages arrears issues. In addition, there is a Mortgage Arrears Information Helpline, which is established under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board, to provide more tailored information to individual callers. Finally, a panel of accountants has been put in place to provide "one to one" independent advice to borrowers who have been provided with a long term forbearance resolution offer by their lender in respect of a mortgage on their primary home. All of these information services are provided at no direct charge to the users of the service.

- **Keeping families in their homes:** As a social housing response, a "mortgage to rent" scheme is now in place on a nationwide basis. This option will be available to households with unsustainable mortgages and who would qualify for social housing support and meet other appropriate criteria and will allow the family, in the context of an agreed resolution to an unsustainable mortgage, to remain in their home.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

156. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the 2000cc limit on the size of a vehicle that can be used by a person with a disability; and if he will change the regulations regarding same. [21536/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The criteria relating to the engine size of a vehicle and the relief available for vehicles which qualify under the Disabled Drivers Passenger Scheme have been in place since 1989. The purpose of the scheme was to provide for ways in which people with a physical disability could become more mobile; it is felt that the present limit of 2000cc is sufficient to allow for an extensive choice of vehicle in that regard. The legislation does not provide for any exceptions and the provisions of SI 353/1994 must be fully adhered to. Reliefs will continue to be available to those properly qualified to receive them in accordance with those regulations.

Given the scale and scope of the scheme, any possible changes can only be made after careful consideration and with regard to the existing and prospective cost of the scheme and the available resources.

Pensions Levy Issues

157. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the levy imposed on private pension funds; the date on which this commenced; the length of time it will be in place; the levies that have been collected to date; if the legislation was tested by the courts; if there is a firm committment to end this levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21546/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The pension fund levy applies at a rate of 0.6% per annum to the market value, on the valuation date, of assets under management in pension funds and pension plans approved under Irish tax legislation. The levy will operate for a period of 4 years only (2011 to 2014) and the legislative provisions giving effect to the levy (section 4 of Finance (No 2) Act 2011) were specifically drafted to reflect this.

The moneys raised from the pension fund levy are being used to pay for the Government's *Jobs Initiative* introduced in May 2011. The measures introduced as part of the *Jobs Initiative* include a new 9% VAT rate on certain activities, the halving of the lower rate of PRSI and small amounts of additional current and capital expenditure.

The implementation of a jobs and growth strategy is a key priority of the Government. The measures announced in the *Jobs Initiative* are aimed at assisting in employment generation – providing opportunities for those who are out of work, to restore public morale and confidence in the economy and encourage spending by consumers.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that receipts to date from the levy amounted to €463 million in 2011 and €483 million in 2012. This is broadly in line with the amounts anticipated to be collected in those years. There is no yield from the levy as yet in respect of 2013. The deadline date for payment of the levy in 2013 is 25 September next.

I wished to be satisfied that the legislative provisions giving effect to the pension fund levy do not pose any legal difficulties. I received legal advice in that context.

I confirmed in my Budget 2013 Speech that the levy will not be renewed after 2014.

VAT Rebates

158. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify the matter in relation to VAT refunds on disabled persons extensions and walk-in showers for elderly with mobility problems; if he will outline the projects which do not allow the applicant to apply to

the Revenue Commissioners for VAT refund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21549/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a provision exists for the refund of VAT incurred on qualifying goods for the use of disabled persons. The Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 15) Order 1981 specifies the degree of disability and defines the qualifying goods. In this context qualifying goods are defined as goods which are aids or appliances, including parts and accessories, specially constructed or adapted for use by a disabled person and includes goods which, although not so specially constructed or adapted, are of such a kind as might reasonably be treated as so constructed or adapted having regard to a particular disablement of that person. The provisions of the Order extend to works carried out on homes, including the installation of walk-in-showers, to adapt them to make them more accessible for disabled persons. The provisions do not apply to the actual construction of a home but would apply, for example, to certain alterations or adaptations that would be necessary to meet the particular needs of the disabled person. Age is not specifically mentioned in the Order as a degree of disability.

Any application under the Refund Order should be made on Form VAT 61A and submitted to the Revenue Commissioners' Central Repayments Office in Monaghan.

Property Taxation Application

159. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if he will estimate the number of residential properties in respect of which Revenue has not issued letters regarding the local property tax; and the plans to follow up the liable persons in respect of these properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21572/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): An important aspect of the work undertaken by Revenue in the implementation of Local Property Tax (LPT) has been the compilation of the first ever Register of residential properties in the State and the matching of the residential property with its owner or owners, where this information was available. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that LPT Returns, personalised letters and an LPT Guide have issued to owners of 1.66 million residential properties either by post or by way of their ROS (Revenue Online Service) inbox. In the absence of a Register, it is not possible to state the number of residential properties in respect of which Revenue has not issued an LPT Return. I am advised that there are a number of possible reasons why the owners of certain residential properties have not yet been received LPT Returns, including:

Where the original LPT Return and personalised letter, which was issued as part of the general issue of LPT Returns, has been sent back undelivered by An Post. I am advised that there are approximately 26,000 such letters, of which some 9,000 have already been reissued, and work on the others is ongoing.

Several properties have the same non-unique address, which is not unusual in rural areas. A further complication in this category is cases where the owners' first names and surnames are the same.

A property was not reflected in any of the original data sources that Revenue used to establish the LPT Register. This would largely consist of new residential properties acquired since the start of the year, which are now in use as a residence.

As regards the follow up, I am advised that the Commissioners are continuing to refine and build the Register from additional data sources. They will also re-refresh the LPT Register short-

ly with the most updated version of the Local Government Management Agency's (LGMA) Household Charge database and they will continue to do this until the LGMA database is handed over to them after 1 July 2013.

As the Deputy is aware, LPT is a self-assessed tax and, in common with other self-assessed taxes, certain responsibilities rest with the taxpayer even where they have not received a communication from Revenue. I have indicated to the House on a number of occasions, most recently in my reply to Questions Nos. 87 and 92 on 1 May (20686/13 and 20652/13), that liable persons, who have not yet received a Return from Revenue, must still self-assess the amount of LPT due, complete and file their LPT Return and pay the tax due. They should contact the LPT helpline on 1890 200 255 or they can login to LPT online at www.revenue.ie and file a return by clicking on the "I have not received a Property PIN" tab. There is good evidence on the helpline that people are responding to the message.

The process of ensuring that the LPT Register is as accurate and complete as possible will be an ongoing one, given the scale of the task, and will continue beyond the filing deadlines. I am satisfied that the continuing work of the Commissioners will ensure that all residential property owners are registered for the tax and will be advised of their compliance obligations if they do not come forward of their own accord.

VAT Rates Application

160. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify the rate of VAT on each of the following contraceptives, all types of contraceptive pill available over the counter here, in addition to contraceptive patches, implants, injectable contraception, emergency contraception, vaginal rings, implants, diaphragms, condoms, injectable and intra-uterine devices and systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21578/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that oral contraceptive pills are liable to VAT at the zero rate and non-oral contraceptives are liable to VAT at the 13.5% reduced rate. The VAT rating of goods and services is constrained by the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. Under the EU VAT Directive, Member States may retain the zero rate on goods and services, such as oral contraceptives, which were in place on 1 January 1991, but cannot extend the zero rate to new goods and services. In addition, Member States may only apply a reduced VAT rate to those goods and services which are listed under Annex III of the VAT Directive. Annex III does include products used for contraception and this is the basis for applying the reduced rate to non-oral contraceptives.

Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme

161. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be made available from FÁS in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly to complete their carpentry and joinery apprenticeship phase seven module, where a local registered contractor is willing to take them on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21351/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): This is a day to day operational matter for FÁS who have responsibility for the Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme (RAPS).

I understand from FÁS that the individual in question recently declined to take up an offer

of a place on this scheme with an employer in Templemore.

I understand that he has indicated to FÁS that he would like to secure a placement on the RAPS with an alternative employer in Co Offaly. However, the FÁS Midlands Region has allocated its 2013 budget to other redundant apprentices. FÁS may be in a position to re-allocate a place to the individual in question should someone decide not to go ahead with their planned placement.

Student Grant Scheme Application Numbers

162. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applicants for third level education grants nationally; the number of students that have been paid grants and college fees to date; the number that were refused; the up to date position regarding the number of students who sought to appeal and are accepted as valid appeals; the number of students that have been requested to supply further information on their claim to proceed or to confirm that they are still seeking a grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21120/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I understand from Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that, as at close of business on 6th May 2013, it has received 69,612 student grant applications nationally for attendance at both further and higher education. Some 37,936 students have been paid their maintenance or have had their entitlement to fee confirmed (where awarded a “fees only” grant).

Some 20,027 applications have been refused. This figure includes applications refused as part of SUSI’s close out strategy on incomplete applications. Some 6,900 appeals have been received by SUSI to date. Some 1,694 students who have been requested to provide additional information have not done so. These students are being contacted by SUSI as part of their close out strategy for applications for the 2012/13 academic year to confirm that they are still seeking a grant.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

163. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the anomaly in the correspondence (details supplied) whereby persons who complete a foundation course under the springboard initiative in order to access third level can be made ineligible for free fees in respect of their third level course on the basis that the foundation course is itself a major award. [21141/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm to the Deputy that the matter to which he refers is currently under consideration and officials from SUSI will be in contact with the student shortly.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

164. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will give an assurance to all those affected by Down syndrome that the awaited National Council for Special Education report on whether Down syndrome should be reclassified as a low-incidence disability in all incidents regardless of assessed cognitive ability will be examined and acted upon by his office promptly on receipt of the report. [21143/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware of this Government's ongoing commitment to ensuring that all children with special educational needs, including children with Down syndrome, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs. The policy of my Department is to secure the maximum possible level of inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, or where a special school or special class placement may be required to ensure such placements are provided for.

Pupils with Down syndrome attending mainstream schools may receive additional teaching support in primary schools, either under the terms of the General Allocation Model (GAM) of teaching supports, if the pupil's educational psychological assessment places the pupil in the mild general learning disability/high incidence disability category, or through an allocation of individual additional resource teaching hours which are allocated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), if the child is assessed as being within the low incidence category of special need, as defined by my Department's Circular Sp Ed 02/05.

Pupils with Down syndrome may be allocated resources under the category of mild general learning disability, or under the categories of moderate general learning difficulty or Assessed Syndrome, in conjunction with another Low Incidence disability. There is not presently a distinct disability category of Down syndrome for resource allocation purposes.

I have asked the National Council for Special Education to provide me with policy advice on the issue of whether Down syndrome should be reclassified as a low incidence disability in all instances, regardless of assessed cognitive ability. This advice will be included in the NCSE's comprehensive policy advice on how the education system can best support children with special educational needs which is currently in preparation and which is expected in the coming weeks. The position in relation to the implementation of any recommendations which may be contained in the report will be considered once the report has been received by my Department.

Schools Building Projects Status

165. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will sanction funding approval in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cork to enable construction to commence without further delay. [21155/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department approved funding to the school to which he refers for the provision of two classrooms for pupils with special needs.

Subsequent engagement by my Department with the school resulted however in the project being withdrawn by my Department due to building design issues, the extent to which the school's plans exceeded the scope of the original grant allocation and the significant additional funding sought by the school to deliver a project based on the school's plans. The school has since requested that the Department would re-consider its decision. However my Department's views have been conveyed to the school that for the reasons outlined above it is not possible to accede to the school's request.

My Department is continuing to work with the National Council for Special Education in respect of how best to meet the accommodation needs for pupils with special needs in the area.

School Staffing

166. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in relation circular 38/2012 from his Department, the reason teachers already in the system and who were entitled to panel rights prior to the circular were not provided for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21163/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The core function of the re-deployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers to other schools that have vacancies. The redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers is key to the Department's ability to manage within its payroll budget and ceiling on teacher numbers. Thereafter, schools are required under the panel arrangements to fill permanent vacancies from supplementary panels comprised of eligible fixed-term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers.

Following a review of the operation of the subsidiary and supplementary panel arrangements in the 2012/13 school year and in order to enable the redeployment process to operate in a more efficient manner a number of changes are being introduced with effect from the 2013/14 school year.

All eligible applicants who meet the eligibility criteria will be placed on the relevant supplementary panels. There will no longer be separate subsidiary panels.

The Subsidiary and Supplementary Special National Panels are being phased out and no new applications are being accepted. This decision by the Department reflects the wider availability of primary teachers who are qualified to work in all settings which was not the case when this panel was originally set up. Access to the Supplementary Special National Panel for the 2013/14 school year will be confined to those teachers who were on the Subsidiary or Supplementary Special National Panels in the 2012/13 school year and who did not secure a permanent teaching post. My Department has contacted these teachers directly. A further change is that the Supplementary Special National Panel for the 2013/14 school year will be used only for filling permanent teaching posts in special schools that are not otherwise required for the redeployment of surplus permanent teachers.

The arrangements for panel access for fixed term (temporary), substitute and part-time teachers for the 2013/14 school year are set out in Circular 0038/2012 which is available on the Department website.

Schools Building Projects Status

167. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide, in tabular form, all new places being made available in both primary and secondary schools in an area (details supplied) in County Wicklow in the coming months and years; if he will outline all the upgrades and emergency works in the area since his appointment; if he will outline new school places and new schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21198/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the Five Year Construction Plan, that I announced on 9 March 2012, outlines the major school projects that will commence construction over the duration of the Plan. The primary aim at the core of the Five Year Plan is focused on meeting demographic demands to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place and that our school system is in a position to cope with increasing pupil numbers.

The 5 Year Plan provides for the following level of additional primary school accommodation in the areas referred to by the Deputy:

Greystones: 15 additional classrooms will be in place following the completion of the building project for Gaelscoil na gCloch Liath and Greystones Educate Together National School. It is envisaged that this accommodation will be ready for occupation for the 2013/2014 school year.

Kilcoole: An 8 classroom extension project at Kilcoole National School is contained on the 2015/2016 construction list. This will facilitate the growth of the school to a 24 classroom facility. Pending the delivery of the extension project, my Department has approved the rental of 3 mainstream classrooms to cater for the school's interim accommodation requirements.

Newcastle: My Department provided funding to St. Francis National School in 2012 to facilitate the replacement of two prefabs with a permanent structure and I understand that the project is currently on site. A project for a replacement school for St. Catherine's Special School, Newcastle is contained on the Five Year Plan and is currently at Stage 2 (b) of the architectural planning process.

Newtownmountkennedy - A 5 classroom extension at Newtownmountkennedy National School is contained on the 2015/2016 construction list. This will facilitate the growth of the school to a 16 classroom facility.

Devolved funding for the provision of an additional 5 mainstream classrooms to cater for the 2013 and 2014 accommodation needs of the Greystones/Delgany area has also been approved by my Department for the following schools:

- St. Laurences N.S., Greystones - 2 classrooms
- St. Patrick's N.S. Greystones - 2 classrooms
- St. Kevin's N.S. Greystones - 1 classroom

The Deputy will also be aware that I have sanctioned a new school at post-primary level for the Greystones area and I expect this to commence operation in September 2014. Details of all works funded under my Department's Additional Accommodation and Emergency Works Schemes, including works in schools in Co. Wicklow, are available on my Department Website and this is updated on a weekly basis.

Student Grant Scheme Delays

168. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if students whose Student Universal Support Ireland grants were delayed through no fault of their own will be compensated, consistent with extra revenue secured by the State via delayed payments of the household charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21211/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Regrettably, there have always been some delays in grants being awarded. While it has to be acknowledged that Student Universal Support Ireland, (SUSI) the new single awarding authority has had problems its first year of administration, the establishment of a single grant awarding body will serve our students better in the longer term.

FÁS Training Programmes

169. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Par-

liamentary Question No. 588 of 16 April 2013, the avenue available to a person who is unemployed or disabled and not in receipt of a social welfare payment to engage in a training course when they have been advised by their local FÁS office that they are not entitled to participate in any course because they are not in receipt of a social welfare payment; if FÁS must provide training courses to those who are disabled and not in receipt of a payment due to a spouse's income and where this training course would be beneficial to their rehabilitation and well-being; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21212/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): People with disabilities are eligible to access FÁS mainstream services.

Persons who are unemployed but not in receipt of a social protection payment are generally eligible to take part in FÁS training courses. However, only those who were receiving a social protection payment prior to commencing training may be eligible to receive a FÁS training allowance while undertaking a course.

In addition FÁS continues to provide 2,110 specialist vocational training places for people with disabilities who do not avail of the mainstream options through Specialist Training Providers (STPs).

Internationalisation Register

170. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way a course provider (details supplied) may be listed and qualify on the internationalisation register; the actions that are required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21220/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Internationalisation Register is administered by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on behalf of the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Education and Skills. Revised arrangements for the operation of the Register were implemented as of August 2012 and information on those arrangements, including the types of programmes eligible for inclusion and the process for making applications, can be found on a dedicated website, www.intregister.ie.

Departmental Properties

171. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners' management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi Unit Development Act within his Department. [21243/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Office of Public Works (OPW) acts as an agent for all Government Departments, and is responsible for the provision of Government offices from the State portfolio or by lease agreement. The terms of the leases are a matter for the OPW. Accordingly, my Department is not in an ownership position as defined in the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011.

In addition none of the bodies under the aegis of my Department are owners of office properties and accordingly, the issue of their role with regard to representation on the board of

management companies does not arise.

Physical Education

172. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has any plans to make physical education an examinable subject on the second level curriculum similar to the recognition given to this subject in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21266/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The NCCA is currently working on curriculum and assessment specifications for Physical Education at Senior Cycle.

The new Framework for Junior Cycle, which I published last October, will enable schools not only to offer Physical Education but also to have it certified.

International Education Strategy

173. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken in the US to attract third level students to come here to study. [21358/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The United States is a priority market for the promotion of Ireland under the Government's International Education Strategy 2010-2015.

Enterprise Ireland indicates that over 8,000 American students study in Ireland each year. Around 60% study in Irish higher education institutions, with the rest on US faculty-led programmes. Ireland remains the ninth largest destination for US students choosing to study abroad.

Enterprise Ireland has a US market strategy in place, focusing on increasing both undergraduate and postgraduate recruitment. The promotional programme includes the Education in Ireland Student Ambassador initiative, on-line and print marketing, recruitment fairs and other engagement activities, and working with US high schools and universities. These efforts are underpinned by market research, and the national effort is undertaken in close collaboration with individual higher education institutions.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

174. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide additional resources and resource hours to schools who have pupils with Down syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21377/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware of this Government's ongoing commitment to ensuring that all children with special educational needs, including children with Down syndrome, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs. The policy of my Department is to secure the maximum possible level of inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, or where a special school or special class placement may be required to ensure such placements are provided for.

Pupils with Down syndrome attending mainstream schools may receive additional teaching support in primary schools, either under the terms of the General Allocation Model (GAM) of teaching supports, if the pupil's educational psychological assessment places the pupil in the mild general learning disability/high incidence disability category, or through an allocation of individual additional resource teaching hours which are allocated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), if the child is assessed as being within the low incidence category of special need, as defined by my Department's Circular Sp Ed 02/05.

Pupils with Down syndrome may be allocated resources under the category of mild general learning disability, or under the categories of moderate general learning difficulty or Assessed Syndrome, in conjunction with another Low Incidence disability. There is not presently a distinct disability category of Down syndrome for resource allocation purposes.

I have asked the National Council for Special Education to provide me with policy advice on the issue of whether Down syndrome should be reclassified as a low incidence disability in all instances, regardless of assessed cognitive ability. This advice will be included in the NCSE's comprehensive policy advice on how the education system can best support children with special educational needs which is currently in preparation and which is expected in the coming weeks.

Summer Works Scheme Expenditure

175. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider making the Summer work scheme available for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21383/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In view of the need to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential school accommodation, it is not possible for me to advance with a summer works programme in 2013.

My Department's over-riding objective is to ensure that every child has access to a physical school place. To ensure that this is achieved, the delivery of major school projects to meet significant demographic demands nationally will be the main focus for capital investment in schools in the coming years. The Five Year school building programme is focused on meeting those demographic needs.

Alternative Energy Projects

176. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide clarification on the findings of the biomass deployment programme; if the programme has proven effective; if funding will be made available for other suitable sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21384/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): All new technologies and approaches are tested to ensure compatibility with school design and operational requirements. Successful and repeatable results are then incorporated into all new school designs and refurbishments.

In 2006 the Department of Education & Skills commenced a unique project in relation to biomass energy use in schools to evaluate the suitable application and performance and compatibility of biomass systems. The evaluation process included school heating requirements in

terms of heating demand characteristics, controls, reliability, fuel storage and maintenance and operation and customer satisfaction. The evaluation of the 14 sites that formed the Biomass Deployment Pilot Programme from 2007 to 2009 met the overall objective in that it trialled a number of boiler types for integration into a representative sample of educational buildings which included both new and existing structures.

The project was assessed by independent consultants. The pilot highlighted the positive and negative aspects in the challenges of successfully integrating biomass into the school stock. This was not achieved without some issues and the overall level of satisfaction was rated at approx. 56%. The study found that biomass boilers can provide an efficient and renewable form of heating in schools but cannot be deemed an exact fit. It is also considered that it will prove difficult to match the small schools in the country with biomass heating on an operational and costs basis. The study found that as reflected in the satisfaction rating, biomass systems can require a significant amount of management input on site to ensure that they operate at optimum level and provide reliable heating to the school.

One outcome from the project highlighted the potential market for Energy Supply Companies (ESCO) to provide a heat contract to schools based on biomass heating, where the ESCO finances, operates and maintains the system and sells heat to the school. The Department also makes allowances for same in all new school designs via our Technical Guidance Documents, thus ensuring that there are no barriers to an ESCO being developed on a new school site.

Schools Building Projects Applications

177. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current position in relation to an application to County Donegal Vocational Education Committee towards the acquisition of a site, of adequate dimension, to cater for the proposed campus development to include Gael Scoil Buncrana and possibly Coláiste Chineál Eoghain. [21385/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that discussions are ongoing between officials in Co. Donegal VEC and my Department in relation to identifying a suitable site to cater for the proposed campus development to which he refers. Due to the commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to comment further at this time.

State Examinations Issues

178. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to teachers' concerns about the new junior certificate examination proposals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21395/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Short courses were originally suggested in the document "Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle" prepared by the NCCA. There was extensive consultation over many months with teachers and other stakeholders in relation to this document. The NCCA advice in relation to short courses was largely taken up by the Minister in the "Framework for Junior Cycle" published in October 2012.

Some short courses will be designed centrally by the NCCA and others by schools themselves or other bodies. It is a matter for schools to determine whether they wish to offer short courses as part of their junior cycle programme, being mindful of the needs of their students and their particular local circumstances. Short courses will enable schools to have the opportunity

to broaden the learning experiences of their students if that is what the school decides. The opportunity to include short courses has been widely welcomed.

School Patronage

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in the context of the outcome of the survey on the patronage of primary schools, if it is his intention to change the patronage of a certain school (details supplied) in County Cork or to establish a new school under the Educate Together patronage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21419/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Following on from the recent publication of the results of the surveys of primary school patronage, I have written to the Catholic Patrons in the 23 areas where parental demand for change has been confirmed in the most recent surveys. This includes the area referred to by the Deputy. I have requested they now consider options for reconfiguring schools under their patronage in order to allow the transfer of schools to new patrons. The Catholic Patrons have been asked to submit an interim response within three months and a final response with detailed proposals on divesting schools within six months. Options for change will be considered in respect of these proposals. No decision has been made in respect of the patronage of any individual schools at this time.

School Staffing

180. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review a submission from a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21420/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to schools is published annually on the Department's website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing arrangements for the coming school year 2013/14 are set out in Circular 0013/2013 which is available on the website. The staffing arrangements also include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The appeal criteria are also set out in Circular 0013/2013. The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. Having considered the school's application in the context of the published grounds, the Board refused the appeal at its meeting in 27th/28th March 2013. The school was notified accordingly.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

School Patronage

181. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if students of all religions who wish to attend their local secondary school (details supplied) in Dublin 15 in the multi-ethnic community, will be required to wear a Catholic crest on their school jumper, as is proposed by the patrons and as appears on their website. [21444/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct

governance of a school.

Individual school authorities are responsible for the drawing up of a school policy in relation to the wearing of school uniforms. However, my Department recommends that the formulation of such a school policy should allow for prior consultation with teachers, parents and pupils where appropriate and enable any concerns to be raised and considered.

Decisions regarding school uniforms are a matter for each individual school.

The patronage of the school in question was decided in July 2012 following a report prepared by the New Schools Establishment Group, an independent advisory group. All Patrons were asked to provide evidence of parental demand when making an application for a new school. In addition, the criteria used in deciding on patronage included how the proposed schools under the respective patrons would provide for extending or strengthening diversity of provision in each area, having regard to the views of parents.

In accepting the advice of the New Schools Establishment Group on the patronage of the school in Tyrellstown, I was particularly conscious of taking into account the clear parental demand for plurality and diversity of patronage. I am confident that the new schools, alongside the existing schools in the area, will mean that parents and students have real choice when it comes to deciding which school most reflects their own ethos.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

182. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a determination will be made in a grant application by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21453/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the student referred to by the Deputy was issued with a decision on the 2/5/2013 advising him that he was ineligible in relation to his grant application for 2012/13 academic year.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI, and remains of the view that SUSI has not interpreted the scheme correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the Student Grant Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form is available on request from SUSI.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

183. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider the provision of 4.5 hours one to one resource weekly support for a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21456/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the policy of my Department is to secure the maximum possible level of inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, in order to ensure that as many children as possible can be educated with their peers within their own community.

My Department therefore provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs in order to ensure that, wherever a

child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

Children with special educational needs may be enrolled in a mainstream school and attend all mainstream classes and receive additional teaching support through the learning support and/or resource teacher. Or they may enrol in a mainstream school and attend a special class, or they may enrol in a special school.

Where schools have enrolled pupils with special educational needs they may be supported by additional resource/learning support teaching either under the General Allocation Model in primary schools or the school may make an application to the National Council for Special Education for resource teaching hours for pupils with low incidence special educational needs as set out in my Departments Circular 02/05.

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The NEWB will try to help parents to find a school placement if their child has been unable to secure a school placement to date. The NEWB can be contacted at National Educational Welfare Board, National Headquarters, 16-22 Green Street, Dublin 7 or by telephone at 01-8738700.

In addition, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) can assist parents to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs.

Parents may contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs and to seek assistance in identifying placement options, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

The enrolment of a child in a school is a matter in the first instance for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools. However, where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to the Secretary General of my Department. Only where an appeal under Section 29 is upheld, may the Secretary General of my Department direct a school to enrol a pupil.

Pension Provisions

184. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when his Department will be able to respond to queries regarding accessing the pre 1979 files for a retired teacher (details supplied) so that they may proceed with a pension application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21460/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The person to whom the Deputy refers has no entitlement to an occupational teachers pension from my department in respect of his teaching service. This was advised to him in correspondence from my Department on various occasions over a number of years. During his teaching service, membership of the secondary teachers pension scheme was open to him on a voluntary basis, however, the person to whom the Deputy refers did not join the pension scheme. It is no longer possible for him to do so.

School Enrolments

185. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the mechanisms that are in place to ensure that children who have been adopted or fostered are not disadvantaged from enrolling in local schools where there is a high demand due to their inability to enrol at an early age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21516/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The question of enrolment in individual schools is the responsibility of the managerial authority of those schools. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or, occasionally, on the basis of some other criterion. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that as regards that policy that principles of equality and the rights of parents to send their children to a school of the parents choice are respected.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Vocational Educational Committee or to the Secretary General of my Department.

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The Board can be contacted at National Educational Welfare Board, National Headquarters, 16-22 Green Street, Dublin 7 or by telephone at 01-8738700.

As the Deputy will be aware, I announced at the recent Teacher Union Conferences that I will shortly bring to Government draft heads of a bill – the Education (Admission to School) Bill 2013. I will seek to publish the Bill in draft form to allow a full public discussion, including inputs from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection and the education partners. I also intend to publish draft regulations that I plan to make when the Bill is enacted.

In bringing forward these proposals, it is not my intention to unnecessarily intrude into how schools do their business. My policy objective is to ensure that every child is treated fairly and that the way in which schools decide on applications is structured, fair and transparent. As the Bill and the Regulations will be published in draft form, they will also be subject to a lot of detailed scrutiny before becoming law. I will be reflecting carefully on the views expressed in the consultation process to ensure they strike the right balance between school autonomy and fairness in our education system.

State Examinations Issues

186. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Dublin has been refused a reader for the leaving certificate examination, having been assigned a reader for the Junior Certificate, and having

successfully passed the educational psychologists needs assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21527/13]

187. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that all students who have appealed their application for a reader for the leaving certificate, will receive a decision early to mid May; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21528/13]

188. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that all students who have appealed their application for a reader for the junior certificate, will receive a decision early to mid May; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21529/13]

189. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in view of comments made by individual teachers and schools that the number of successful applications for the appointment of a reader has been reduced, he will confirm the number of applications for readers, for the junior certificate, that were rejected in 2013, as a percentage of the number of students who applied; the way this percentage compares to the percentage number that were rejected in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21540/13]

190. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in view of comments made by individual teachers and schools that the number of successful applications for the appointment of a reader has been reduced, he will confirm the number of applications for readers, for the leaving certificate, that were rejected in 2013, as a percentage of the number of students who applied; the way this percentage compares to the percentage number that were rejected in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21541/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 to 190, inclusive, together.

The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

The State Examinations Commission operates a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate examinations. Applications for such accommodations are submitted by schools on behalf of their students. Full details of the scheme is available for downloading from their website: www.examinations.ie/candidates/reasonableaccommodations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

191. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are any financial assistance schemes available for two persons seeking to do masters degrees (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21580/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The student grant scheme includes provision for grants to eligible students pursuing full-time undergraduate courses of at least two years duration in publicly-funded institutions in other EU Member States. However, the student grant scheme does not extend to postgraduate study outside of Ireland.

Departmental Properties

192. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi Unit Development act within his Department. [21250/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that the nature of the property portfolio of my Department and those under my aegis, at this time, are not impacted by the introduction of the Multi Unit Development Act 2011.

Sale of State Assets

193. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position in relation to the proposed sale of harvesting rights on Coillte-owned land; if he acknowledges the significant role Irish forestry can play in investment and job creation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21450/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy will be aware, Coillte and its assets have come under consideration as part of the State assets disposal programme, which is being undertaken as part of our commitments under the EU/ECB/IMF funding programme and with a view to generating resources for additional investment in job creation initiatives in the economy. The Government has, nevertheless, explicitly ruled-out the sale of Coillte's land holdings.

Instead, the Government determined last year that a concession for the harvesting rights to Coillte forests represented the best option to release value from Coillte in the short to medium term. A Steering Group was established, comprising the relevant Government Departments and NewERA, to progress this matter and to report back to Ministers on how this could be done.

NewERA, on behalf of the Steering Group, has been working closely with Coillte to analyse the various financial, policy and technical issues that would arise in the context of a proposed sale of harvesting rights. These include all of the concerns that have been raised by various interest groups, including the issue of public access to the forests, replanting obligations to ensure the continued existence of our forests, harvesting policy, the issue of supply of timber to the local saw mills, etc., as well as the implications for Coillte itself: Depending on the nature and scale of a transaction, the future viability of the company could be called into question by the disposal of its most significant asset. Therefore, any liabilities to which this might expose the Exchequer must also be quantified.

Specialist advisers were engaged by Coillte in late 2012 to further inform this process, and they reported at the end of November last. Since then, the Steering Group has been considering the results of the analytical work – this consideration is on-going - and relevant Ministers have been kept informed on progress to date. I expect the Steering Group to conclude this work very shortly, and to report to Government with its findings and recommendations.

I wish to assure the deputy that, in examining this issue, Government is conscious of the

public value that Coillte provides in terms of investment and employment, and that a harvesting rights transaction will only proceed if it makes economic and strategic sense for the Irish people.

Departmental Properties

194. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi-Unit Development Act within his Department. [21248/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department does not own or rent any property as these arrangements are a matter for the Office of Public Works.

The ownership or rental of property in commercial developments by the Agencies under my remit is an operational matter for the Agencies concerned, for which I have no function. I am referring the specific question to each of the Agencies under my remit with a request to respond to you directly.

Enterprise Support Schemes

195. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of and are now online due to the getting businesses online initiative, supported in part by the city and county enterprise boards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21334/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) have been to the forefront in delivering training programmes to small businesses in all sectors on topics related to the internet covering email to online engagement with customers and much more. CEBs run locally-arranged training on topics such as: 'ICT Essentials for SMEs', 'Social Media for Your Business', 'Blogging Effectively for Your Business', 'E-Marketing', 'Digital Marketing Strategy and Website Analytics',

In addition in 2011 the CEBs, in partnership with Google, delivered a Programme called 'Getting Irish Business Online' whereby entrepreneurs were able to avail of a free easy to update website. As part of this initiative, the CEBs have been involved with approx 2,400 websites which have been set up since summer 2011 using the Getting Business Online website template tool.

The CEBs will continue to prioritise online business trade (not simply have a website presence but to have an online trading presence) and going forward the new LEOs will have a strong role in the development of web-enabled services with a focus on increasing the number of small businesses trading online.

In addition, the 2013 Action Plan for Jobs includes a commitment to increase the number of businesses trading on line through a new Business On-Line voucher scheme. This initiative

is being led by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. It will support one or more pilot projects in 2013 with the intention of informing a scaling-up of the initiative in 2014. The detailed operational arrangements for the pilot(s) will be agreed in the third Quarter of this year.

Household Benefits

196. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection her view on the new Electric Ireland policy being implemented in September 2013; the way this will effect saved electrical units; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21233/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In 2013, my Department will spend an estimated €284 million on the household benefits scheme, providing some 410,000 customers with a package worth almost €700 per year.

The structure of the electricity and gas allowance was changed from a unit based allowance to a cash credit which is currently €35 per month. This rate is aligned to the best average market rate currently available. The changed structure of the allowance is designed to encourage customers to achieve better savings through greater mobility between energy suppliers who can best meet their individual energy needs.

The new arrangement represents a significant improvement in the options available for customers. Customers who do not use their full entitlement each month will be able to carry forward that unused cash credit and draw it down as they wish; this includes customers who wish to switch to a different supplier. Prior to these changes, customers with Electric Ireland could not carry forward their unused credits if they switched to a new supplier; this acted as an impediment to customers achieving the best value for their particular energy needs. Under the new arrangement, customers with Electric Ireland who build up cash credits will have those credits refunded if they switch to a different company.

As regards the old non-cash units, a number of customers have unused units which they have carried over from 2012. These customers may use these unused units up to the end of September, 2013. My Department has contacted customers in this regard.

Social Insurance Issues

197. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position of working proprietary directors and PRSI; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21414/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The determination of the employment status and therefore the PRSI Class applicable to working directors has been the subject of challenges, court judgments and legal advices. As a result, the Department is examining the matters that determine the insurability status of working directors, having regard to these judgments and advices. In the meantime decisions have been suspended.

I would hope that I would be in a position to bring forward proposals to address this complex area shortly.

Carer's Allowance Applications

198. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review an application for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will expedite a positive reply. [21085/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's allowance from the person in question on the 12th of October 2012. The person concerned was refused carers allowance on the 4th of April 2013 on the grounds that the care recipient is not so disabled as to require full time care and attention as prescribed in regulations. He was notified of this decision and the reason for it.

The person in question requested a review of this decision and submitted additional medical evidence in support of the application. This supplementary information has been forwarded to the Department's medical assessor for consideration. Once the review is completed in this case the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome

Rural Social Scheme Eligibility

199. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Limerick will be considered for employment under the rural social scheme; if they meet the qualifying criteria; and if he will issue an application form for same to the person. [21111/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of the rural social scheme is to provide income support for farmers and those engaged in fishing who have an entitlement to specified social welfare payments. Participants are engaged for 19½ hours per week to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. To qualify for participation in the RSS, an individual **must** be actively farming, have a valid herd number and be in receipt of one of a number of specified social welfare payments. It is up to the person concerned to determine whether they satisfy the eligibility criteria, which are available in full on www.welfare.ie.

While overall responsibility for the RSS rests with the Department of Social Protection, responsibility for its day-to-day operations, including dealing with applications for participation and providing advice on eligibility, rest with 34 local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta which is responsible for delivery in Gaeltacht areas, collectively referred to as Implementing Bodies. The person concerned is advised to contact the relevant impending body, West Limerick Resources Limited, St Mary's Road, Newcastle West Telephone 069 62222 and email info@wlr.ie who will be able to advise on RSS vacancies and on matters relating to eligibility.

Widow's Pension Applications

200. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for a non-contributory widows pension will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21140/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that following an oral hearing of the case in question, the Appeals Officer has referred the case back to a Social Welfare Inspector for further investigation and clarification on certain issues. On receipt of the inspector's response, the case will be further considered by the Appeals Officer.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 201 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Applications

202. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [21149/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I can confirm that an application for disability allowance (DA) was received from the person concerned on 21 May 2012. The application was referred to a social welfare investigator (SWI) for a means investigation. DA, has contacted the SWI to expedite the case. A decision on the person's entitlement to disability allowance will be made on receipt of the social welfare investigator's report and the person will be notified directly of the outcome.

Pension Provisions

203. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will confirm that her Department accepts no liability regarding the Labour Court recommendations, LCR19293, regarding the provisions of pension benefits of supervisors and assistant supervisors in contract with her Department for the operation of community employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21151/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Labour Court recommended in July 2008 that an agreed pension scheme should be introduced for community employment (CE) scheme supervisors and assistant supervisors, and that such a scheme should be adequately funded by FÁS. Notwithstanding the positions of the Department in rejecting that liability for these costs falls to be met from public funds, this matter has been the subject of discussions between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, my Department, and the unions representing CE supervisors. In the event that funding was required from FÁS, the implementation of the claim is not considered sustainable in light of the current and ongoing fiscal environment and the requirement to contain and reduce public expenditure. The costs of the introduction of any scheme are likely to be of the order of €3m per annum with retrospective costs of the order of at least €30m.

The Deputy should note that FÁS, under which CE operated at that time, was not the employer of CE supervisors and such employees are not public servants. Neither was FÁS a party to the Labour Court dispute on this matter. Responsibility for CE transferred from FÁS to the Department of Social Protection in January 2012. The Department does not accept it has any liability in respect of this matter. The responsibilities of the sponsoring organisations and the individuals concerned must also be recognised when considering pension provision arrangements.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

204. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will approve

and expedite an invalidity pension appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21156/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 30th April 2013, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

205. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the maximum duration a recipient of disability allowance may remain outside the State in order to remain entitled to their payment. [21158/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no specific legislative provision for disability allowance to be paid to persons living outside the State.

There have been some instances where, in exceptional circumstances, disability allowance has been paid to persons for periods where they were undergoing medical treatment outside the State. In addition, if a person leaves the country a short period, e.g. up to 3 weeks in any 12 month period, disability allowance may be paid when the person returns to the State depending on the individual circumstances of the case.

Disability Allowance Appeals

206. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update regarding to an appeal for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [21161/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having fully considered all the available evidence allowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of summary decision. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 29 April 2013. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

207. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if any community welfare officers employed by her Department issued rent allowance from her Department's funds, or previously from funds from the Department of Health via the Health Service Executive, to recipients living in properties owned by community welfare officers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21168/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of rent supplement is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation, whose

means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. The overall aim is to provide short term assistance, and not to act as an alternative to the other social housing schemes operated by the Exchequer. There are currently approximately 86,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million for 2013.

Under the legislative provisions governing rent supplement, the Department's relationship is with the tenant; the tenant makes the application for rent supplement and payment is made to the tenant. Rent supplement is specifically for the benefit of tenants to assist them with their accommodation needs. There is no direct relationship between the landlord and the Department in the administration of the scheme.

There is nothing in legislation which prohibits payment of rent supplement to a tenant whose landlord is an officer administering supplementary welfare allowance. Statistics on any such cases are not maintained by the Department.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments

208. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will supply the names of furniture shops that received payments from those in receipt of the new accommodation grant scheme to purchase furniture and other household items; if there is a register of such shops and if she will make any such register available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21171/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided over €47 million for the ENP scheme in 2013.

ENPs are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the SWA scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance. The Department's legislation provides that a person may nominate another person to receive their SWA payment subject to the consent of the officer administering the scheme. The Department does not maintain statistics on payments made to furniture shops or maintain a register of such shops.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

209. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the basis on which an application for jobseeker's allowance was refused in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9; if she will provide details of the means assessment carried out in respect of this application; if this claim will be reviewed in view of the fact that any savings accrued are the result of this person sensibly and conscientiously saving benefits they received. [21204/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for jobseeker's allowance from 9 April 2013 and was assessed with means of €169.41 per week arising from his parents' income. As these weekly means exceed the maximum weekly rate of €144.00 which would have been payable in this instance, the person concerned does not qualify for a jobseeker's allowance payment. It should be noted that means assessed were derived solely from his parents' income; his accrued savings were below the assessable threshold and

played no part whatsoever in the assessment. This was fully detailed in the decision letter issued to him 19 April 2013. A review of his means is not proposed at this time as there has been no change in his personal circumstances.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

210. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on a carer's allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford in view of the fact that a minor error was made on the original application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21207/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 3 December 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 22 April 2013 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

211. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will approve an application for rent supplement in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21213/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has had Rent Supplement approved – payment is due to issue on 02/May 13.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

212. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the provision that exists to make rent allowance available to a person (details supplied) in County Sligo, who find themselves with their name still on a mortgage but no longer enjoying the benefits of a family home, and no longer involved with servicing the mortgage, as they have had to move out post-separation and are unemployed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21222/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In order to be considered for a rent supplement payment, the person in question must first be assessed by a housing authority as having a housing need. The person concerned was advised of this by the Department in September 2012 and again in December 2012 and he was also provided with documentation and forms to assist him with this process. To date, the person concerned has not provided the Department with evidence that a housing needs assessment has been completed.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

213. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on an application for domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21234/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on the 14th December 2012. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who found that the child was not medically eligible for the allowance. A letter issued on the 25th February 2013 advising of the decision.

The person concerned has now supplied additional information and an appeal will be registered in this case. As part of the appeal process, the case will be forwarded to another of the Department's Medical Assessors for further consideration, including a review of the new information supplied. Upon receipt of the Medical Assessor's opinion, the case will be further considered and forwarded to the Appeals Office, if necessary.

Departmental Funding

214. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a guarantee that her Department will continue providing funding for the maintenance of MABS offices nationwide; if she will further guarantee that no reduction of this funding will be allowed; if she will ensure that the current disagreements between MABS and citizens information does not jeopardise the operations of any MABS office; if she will detail the steps being taken to resolve this conflict; if her attention has been drawn to the vital importance of MABS offices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21329/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board, provides a high quality personal service to assist people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems, in particular those on low incomes and people living on social welfare payments.

There has been no reduction in the funding provided to the Citizens Information Board which is responsible for delivering critical elements of Government business, notably in the provision of information, advice and advocacy relating to social services and entitlements and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service. In 2013, the Citizens Information Board has been allocated some €47.4 million from the exchequer of which some €19 million has been assigned to MABS and €14.6 million has been assigned to the Citizens Information Services. The corresponding allocation to the Citizens Information Board in 2012 was €46.8 million of which some €18.3 million was allocated to MABS and €14.6 million for the Citizens Information Services.

The Citizens Information Board is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate governance arrangements are in place in relation to the expenditure of these public funds. It is essential that this significant amount of public monies is carefully monitored and properly accounted for, in terms of financial accountability, effective performance and excellent delivery of quality services to the customer and taxpayer, who ultimately funds these services. The Board is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate governance arrangements are in place in relation to the expenditure of these public funds.

An important element of assessing accountability is through the formal agreement of Service Level Agreements. These are annual contracts between the CIB and the 96 separate companies, which provide the services for which the Citizens information Board has responsibility,

including the 42 local Citizens Information Services and the 53 MABS companies. These contracts are agreed by the governing board of the Citizens Information Board and cover standard items such as service delivery, governance, financial controls, HR practices, reporting, evaluation, monitoring etc. This enables the Board to ensure that excellent service and best value is achieved across the wide range of services it provides.

There had been no reduction in funding to the individual MABS services and the Citizens Information Board continues to engage with the MABS network to resolve any outstanding issues relating the service level agreements for 2013.

Disability Allowance Appeals

215. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21333/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 27 February 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

216. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection with regard to an application for domiciliary care which was received by her Department on 10 May 2012, refused and subsequently went for appeal in February 2013 (details supplied) in County Donegal, if it is appropriate that this application will now take a possible 41 weeks if it goes to an oral hearing and in view of the fact that further new information was received by the appeals office last week with regard to this young person's condition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21348/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all the evidence, disallowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of summary decision. Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of the Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed by the Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts.

Following the submission of additional evidence the Appeals Officer has agreed to hold an oral hearing in this case which will be scheduled for the last week of May. The person concerned will be notified shortly of the arrangements for the oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Personal Public Service Numbers

217. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason the delays in the issuing of PPS numbers, which is now taking between ten and 12 weeks, causing enormous problems for staff in new employment who are paying emergency tax forcing them in some incidences to have to leave their employment and the measures she proposes to deal with this backlog. [21353/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Personal Public Service Number (PPS Number) is the individual's unique reference number for all dealings with Government Departments and public bodies.

A PPS Number is automatically issued in the case of children born in Ireland. In other cases PPS Numbers are issued following a controlled allocation procedure which takes approximately 20 minutes and involves personal attendance at one of the Department's PPS Number allocation centres, the completion of a written application form, the submission of appropriate identity documents and the proving of identity.

In circumstances where a person is not resident in the State, but requires a PPS Number, s/he, or someone acting on his or her behalf, must apply by post to the Department submitting the required documentation. The Department processes some 17,000 of these applications annually. Due to an increase in the numbers of such requests received, there is at present a seven to eight week backlog in allocating PPS Numbers for such applications. Staff resources have been temporarily re-assigned to this work in order to reduce this.

The vast majority of such requests are for reasons such as probate or property purchase. However some requests are from individuals who are employed outside of the State by an Irish employer and require a PPS Number in that context. Where these requests are identified, they are given priority by the Department. In all cases, once it becomes apparent that a person will require the allocation of a PPS Number, I would urge that the application be submitted immediately, rather than waiting until the last minute, in order to ensure that it will be available when required.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

218. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection in view of the non-payment of rent supplement to a landlord by a rent supplement recipient, the procedures, if any, in place whereby a landlord may recoup rent supplement owed to him or whereby the Department may recoup unpaid rent supplement from the rent supplement recipient; the action, if any, the Department may take on notification by a landlord that they have not been receiving payment from the rent supplement recipient; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21354/13]

219. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection in view of the non-payment of rent supplement to a landlord by a rent supplement recipient, if her attention has been drawn to the number of cases where rent supplement is not passed on to the landlord; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21355/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 and 219 together.

The overall aim is to provide short term assistance, and not to act as an alternative to the other social housing schemes operated by the Exchequer. There are currently approximately 86,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided €403 million for 2013.

Under the legislative provisions governing rent supplement, the Department's relationship is with the tenant; the tenant makes the application for rent supplement and payment is made to the tenant. Rent supplement is specifically for the benefit of tenants to assist them with their accommodation needs. There is no direct relationship between the landlord and the Department in the administration of the scheme. However, social welfare legislation provides for the payment of a rent supplement payment to a nominated payee such as a landlord on behalf of the tenant. This arrangement is entered at the tenant's request and subject to the consent of the Department. The department official dealing with the request will take into account all the relevant circumstances of the particular case and the tenant's preference will be accommodated where possible.

It is open to the landlord to bring to the attention of the Department any instance where they suspect that a tenant is receiving rent supplement and is not paying their rent. Where the Department becomes aware that a person is not using rent supplement to meet the accommodation costs, payment of the supplement is suspended and the matter investigated. Where a landlord has a grievance in relation to the non-payment of rent by a tenant, s/he may apply to the Private Residential Tenancies Board to have the dispute resolved through the Board's dispute resolution process. Statistics are not maintained on the numbers of cases where it is reported that rent supplement has not been passed on to landlords.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

220. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on their appeal for farm assist; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21357/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 23rd April 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the appeal in question will be referred in to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 221 withdrawn.

State Pension Reform

222. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has any plans to compel employers to maintain the employment of citizens beyond the age of 65, should they choose to do so, in view of the fact that pension entitlements to this group have been outlawed by her Department. [21381/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The recently published OECD report on the Review of the Irish Pension System confirms that reforms are necessary if we are to continue to put pension provision on a sustainable footing given the changes in demographics, the deficit in the Social Insurance Fund, and the difficult fiscal situation.

The abolition of State pension transition and the standardisation of the pension age at 66

from 2014 is part of a series of measures aimed at improving the sustainability of pensions in the future. Growing numbers of people want to work or may need to work beyond the State pension age as people are living longer. The abolition of State pension transition removes the retirement condition which acts as an incentive to leave the workforce and has been widely criticised as a barrier to older people remaining in employment. Recipients of State pension contributory can continue to work.

Existing legislation provides that, social welfare supports, such as job seekers benefits, will continue to be available to those who meet the qualifying conditions of the schemes available. Furthermore, the legislation also provides that for those whose job seekers benefit expires in their 65th year, the payment will continue to be paid up until the age of 66 when State pension becomes payable for those who satisfy the qualifying conditions.

There is no statutory compulsory retirement age for employees in Ireland. In relation to the employment relationship, responsibility for setting retirement age is a matter for the employer/employee relationship and the contract of employment. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has made rulings in a series of age-discrimination cases concerning Directive 2000/78/EC, which prohibit work-related discrimination on various grounds, including age. The CJEU has clarified that mandatory retirement ages may be set down by employers within the context of national law, whether by contract, custom and practice or other means, which must be objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate social policy aim, with the means of achieving that aim being both appropriate and necessary. Enterprise policy and equality issues come within the respective remit of my colleagues, the Minister for Jobs Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Justice and Equality.

An interdepartmental Working and Retirement Group was initiated to consider the cross departmental policy issues arising that may support longer working and thereby improve the sustainability and adequacy of pensions systems. The interdepartmental group, established in August 2012, is chaired by the Department of Social Protection, and includes representatives from the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Pensions Board. Further engagement has also been undertaken with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health and Children.

The issues under consideration are the broad range of issues impacting on the labour market participation of older workers; enterprise issues, employment and equality law issues; proposals regarding deferral of the state pension, and consideration of occupational pension issues. It is expected that the Group will prepare preliminary proposals detailing measures which may encourage participation and retention in the labour market of older workers and present proposals to Government in the near future.

Household Benefits

223. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has examined the possibility of seeking a reduction in the total cost to her Department of the free television licence scheme due to the bulk-buy nature of her Department's purchase of licences on behalf of social protection clients and the fact that there are less collection, enforcement, and administrative costs involved. [21397/13]

224. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department is currently reimbursed in circumstances where her Department discovers an overpayment which includes the overpayment of a free television licence; and will set out the arrangements in place

to recoup the costs of such licences. [21398/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 and 224 together.

There are currently 408,626 customers in receipt of the free television licence as part of the household benefits package at year end 2012, with an expenditure of €57,184,565. Payments to the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) in respect of the TV Licence have been capped at 2010 levels of expenditure as announced in the National Recovery Programme 2011-2014. Up to the time of the imposition of the cap on expenditure under this heading, payments were made on a monthly basis using an agreed formula based on a percentage of the Department's customer base. This took into account the savings to RTE and An Post on costs of administration, enforcement and collection of the licence fees for this cohort of customers.

The customer base has grown from 394,030 in 2010 to its current level of 408,626. To maintain the cap on expenditure, this Department is currently making fixed monthly payments, in line with that paid in 2010, to DCENR despite the increased number of customers qualifying for the scheme. This measure does not impact, however, on customers' individual entitlement to the scheme. The entitlement to a free television licence commences only after the expiry of a customer's current licence subject to satisfying the qualifying conditions. The licence when granted is in respect of a full calendar year and therefore no refund would be due for part of a year. Customers receive their free licence directly from the Department and their entitlement remains valid for as long as they continue to receive the household benefits package. This arrangement reduces further the administration costs for my Department, DCENR, An Post and RTE as customers previously had to renew their licences annually through the Post Office network.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

225. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will indicate the legislation that governs the invitation of a social welfare recipient to an interview under caution; the wording (details supplied) prescribed in law; the effort made to advise the recipient of their rights when being interviewed under caution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21399/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Chapter 3 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005 provides for the appointment and duties of Social Welfare Inspectors (SWIs) and, in general terms, requires SWIs to investigate and report to the Minister on, inter alia, any question arising in relation to a claim for a benefit under the Act. In appropriate cases, social welfare recipients may be invited to attend an interview with a SWI to that end. The wording used by the Department when inviting a person to attend an interview under caution is not prescribed in law.

When the person attends for interview under caution they are advised at the outset that the notes of the interview will be recorded. The person is also advised that they may leave or terminate the interview at any time, and that they will be asked questions about their entitlement to social welfare payments they have received or are in receipt of. They are also advised that they are not obliged to say anything unless they wish to do so, but that whatever they say will be taken down in writing and may be given in evidence.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

226. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a social welfare appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo, if it will be expedited owing to the financial difficulties the applicant is in; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21401/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 28 February 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 7 March 2013 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Carer's Allowance Applications

227. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Carlow has had their carer's allowance for the care of their 81 year old mother suspended. [21416/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person in question on 14 May 2012. The application was awarded on 4 of March 2013. All arrears of allowance due to the person in question have issued. Carer's allowance payments have never been suspended in this case.

Carer's Allowance Applications

228. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive arrears of carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21423/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person in question on 14 December 2011. The application was awarded on 28 November 2012 payable from 14 of June 2012. Arrears due to the person concerned issued on 18 February 2013. The person in question requested a review of the decision and requested further backdating. It has been decided to backdate this claim to 15 December 2011. Arrears of allowance due from 15 December 2011 to 13 June 2012 less any other payments made to the person in question will issue in due course.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

229. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on an application for invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will expedite a decision on this application. [21426/13]

Minister for Social Protection(Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having fully considered all the available evidence, including that adduced at oral hearing, allowed the appeal of the person concerned who has been notified of the decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Disability Allowance Appeals

230. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on the status of an application for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21429/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all the evidence, disallowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of the Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed by the Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Mortgage Schemes

231. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to include mortgage brokers/financial brokers as part of a new advisory service for mortgage holders in difficulty which was announced last September; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21448/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Mortgage Arrears Information and Advice Service was established to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to assist people in mortgage distress.

The approach differentiates between mortgage information and mortgage advice. The first two elements involve the enhancement of the website www.keepingyourhome.ie and the establishment of a Mortgage Arrears Information Helpline within the Citizens Information Board both of which focus on the provision of comprehensive mortgage arrears information in particular to people in arrears or pre-arrears.

The third element of the service is the provision of independent financial advice to mortgage holders who are being presented with long term mortgage resolution proposals by their lenders. This advice is provided by a panel of accountants drawn from members of the main accountancy institutes in Ireland who have agreed to participate and support this independent service. This panel is available on a county by county basis on the website www.keepingyourhome.ie.

When a lender is proposing longer-term mortgage resolutions, the lender advises the borrower to obtain independent financial advice on the proposed arrangement and that, if the bor-

rower wishes to avail of this option, that the lender will pay €250 to an accountant of the borrower's choosing for the provision of this advice.

The advisory framework has commenced with practicing accountants because they already operate within a regulatory regime which includes qualitative oversight by their regulating bodies and in these circumstances it was possible to establish the advisory framework for people with mortgage distress within a relatively short timeframe.

There is nothing to inhibit other financial intermediaries from continuing to give advice on mortgages as required by borrowers. The advisory framework is being monitored on an ongoing basis and a full review of the service will be undertaken in June 2013. The review will be undertaken to ensure that it is meeting its objectives and will encompass all aspects of the service including if participation is extended to other interested parties, the criteria that would be required in terms of relevant qualifications, experience, independence, professional indemnity insurance etc. All relevant stakeholders will have an opportunity to input to the review.

Mortgage Interest Supplement Applications

232. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for mortgage interest supplement for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15 will be expedited; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21455/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for a mortgage interest supplement on 29th November 2012; however his application was incomplete at the time. An effort was made to contact him via telephone but this proved unsuccessful. A letter has since been sent to him apologising for the long delay in bringing this matter to a conclusion. A contact number has been made available to him should he wish to discuss this delay in person and to make an appointment to meet with a relevant officer to process his claim. In advance of this he can also attend the local clinic at Roselawn Health Centre any Tuesday or Thursday morning between 10am and 11am he can be interviewed by a member of staff and have his application fully completed and made ready for a decision.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

233. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 312 of 20 March 2013, when arrears will issue in respect of application for jobseeker's allowance which is now closed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21518/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned made an application for jobseekers allowance on 14th December 2012. He applied for supplementary welfare allowance while his jobseeker's application was being processed. He collected his first supplementary payment on 21st December 2012 but he did not collect the following four payments covering the period 3rd January 2013 to 30th January 2013.

When the jobseeker's application was awarded on 30th January 2013 arrears were withheld as the person concerned failed to contact the office to explain why he did not collect the supplementary payments. His jobseeker's application was closed with effect from 6th February 2013 as he failed to sign.

The person concerned made a fresh application for jobseeker's allowance on 10th April

2013. He has been requested to submit documentation regarding his residency in the country since 3rd of January 2013. When the documentation is received a decision will be made regarding any arrears that may be due to him. *Questions Nos. 234 and 235 withdrawn.*

Social Welfare Benefits Numbers

236. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a break down of the number of returning Irish emigrants who have applied for a social welfare payment during each of the past three years broken down by each social welfare office; and the number of returning Irish emigrants who applied for but were refused a social welfare payment on the basis of not fulfilling the habitual residency condition during each of the past three years broken down by each social welfare office. [21561/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is not available. Information relating to disallowances of returning Irish emigrants is not captured during the claim decision making process. However, information pertaining to overall disallowances on the grounds of the habitual residency condition including those disallowances relating specifically to Irish nationals is contained in the tabular statement.

Table: Claims disallowed under Habitual Residence Condition, 2010 – 2013

Year:	2010*	2011	2012	2013 to date
Irish Disallowances	650	455	428	107
Total Disallowances	5,906	4,494	2,817	985

**Please note that figures for 2010 are incomplete due to industrial action.*

National Internship Scheme Eligibility

237. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if, the position regarding jobbridge in respect of a person in (details supplied) in County Kildare will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21575/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has been in direct contact with the individual referred to by the Deputy since February 2013. The individual has completed one internship and is currently undertaking a second. The intern is seeking to finish a second internship and be permitted to undertake a third.

In the first instance, the intern was dissatisfied with the activities assigned to him but withdrew his complaint the following day. A monitoring visit has been conducted and the Department is satisfied that the host organisation is abiding by the scheme criteria. In the second instance, the intern wishes to finish the internship because he deems it not to be related to his academic qualifications.

Under current guidelines, JobBridge interns may avail of no more than two internships to maximum cumulative period of nine months. The Department is not in a position to make exceptions in this regard. The individual was advised by the Department to consider participating in other schemes such as the Work Placement Programme and referred to the National Contact Centre for further assistance in this respect.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

238. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé chun éisteacht leis na 63 eagraíocht, idir eagraíochtaí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta, mac léinn, cultúrtha agus eile, a scríobh chuige ar an 19 Márta 2013 á mholadh go n-aithneofaí pobal na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta mar gheallsealbhóirí ar chur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, agus an struchtúr riachtanach ardleibhéil a chur ar bun idir na húdaráis agus na heagraíochtaí pobail Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta chun na fadhbanna le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise go dtí seo a réiteach, lena chinntiú go ndéanfaidh an pobal agus na húdaráis le chéile a gcuid féin den Straitéis, agus lena chinntiú go mbeidh pleanáil chomhtháite éifeachtach éifeachtúil ann ón mbun aníos; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [21280/13]

239. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad go díreach, go praiticiúil, a chuirfear i bhfeidhm sa Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010 - 2030; cé atá i bhfeighil ar chur chuige na straitéise i Roinn an Taoisigh agus i Roinn na Gaeltachta; an bhfuil rannóg faoi leith ann i Roinn na Gaeltachta atá ag plé leis an straitéis amháin; má tá, cé mhéid duine atá ag obair ansin; cé a bheidh ag déanamh athbhreithniú ar an Straitéis; cad é an creat ama don athbhreithniú sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [21281/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Tógfaidh mé Ceisteanna Uimh 238 agus 239 le chéile.

Is sa *Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030* a leagtar amach polasaí an Rialtais maidir le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge. Sa chomhthéacs seo, tá sé ráite i *gClár an Rialtais 2011-2016* go dtabharfaidh an Rialtas tacaíocht don Straitéis agus go ndéanfaidh sé na spriocanna indéanta atá luaite inti a sheachadadh.

Aithnítear sa Straitéis go bhfuil gá le cur chuige céimneach chun bearta éagsúla na Straitéise a chur i gcrích. I gcomhréir leis an gcur chuige seo, tá obair leanúnach ar siúl ag mo Roinn le páirtithe leasmhara éagsúla chun raon leathan gníomhaíochtaí faoin Straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm. Ós rud é go bhfuil an Straitéis fite fuaite le hobair mo Roinne sna réimsí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus Oileán trí chéile, tá na rannóga sin i mo Roinn ag plé le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise sna réimsí sin.

Thug mo Roinn faoi chéim an bhunaithe den Straitéis a chur i gcrích in 2011 nuair a díriodh ar dhaoine a chur ar an eolas faoin Straitéis agus ar bhunú na struchtúr eagraíochtúil agus oibríochtúil. Tugadh tús áite do ghnóthaí reachtaíochta in 2012 le hAcht na Gaeltachta a thugann bunús reachtúil do chóras pleanála teanga, taobh istigh agus taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht, agus a thugann ról lárnach sa phleanáil teanga d'Údarás na Gaeltachta agus d'Fhoras na Gaeilge.

Mar thoradh ar an obair atá ar siúl ag mo Roinn le páirtithe leasmhara na Straitéise, táthar ag súil go mbeidh na páirtithe sin ag foilsiú a gcuid pleananna forfheidhmithe faoin Straitéis níos moille i mbliana. Ina theannta sin, tá sé i gceist tuarascáil a fhoilsiú níos moille i mbliana maidir leis an dul chun cinn atá déanta faoin Straitéis go dáta. Tá an Coiste Rialtais ar an nGaeilge agus ar an nGaeltacht, a bhfuil an Taoiseach ina chathaoirleach air, ag déanamh maoirseachta ar an dul chun cinn faoin Straitéis.

Mar thoradh ar Acht na Gaeltachta, beidh ról níos lárnaí ná riamh ag pobal na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta agus ag na heagraíochtaí pobail i gcur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise tríd an bpróiseas pleanála teanga ar an talamh. Tá tosaíocht á tabhairt ag mo Roinn d'ullmhú na reachtaíochta tánaistí faoi Acht na Gaeltachta. Is faoin reachtaíocht seo a shonrófar na critéir pleanála teanga a bheidh mar bhunús chun pleananna teanga a aithint sna Limistéir Pleanála Teanga Ghael-

tachta, sna Bailte Seirbhíse Gaeltachta agus sna Líonraí Gaeilge. Tá obair ullmhúcháin ar bun ag Údarás na Gaeltachta agus ag Foras na Gaeilge chun cabhrú le heagraíochtaí pobail ar an talamh pleananna teanga a fhorbairt sna ceantair éagsúla.

Maidir leis an éileamh atá déanta ag an earnáil dheonach go mbeidh ról níos lárnaí acu i gcur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise, tá sé i gceist seimineár a réachtáil leis na heagraíochtaí seo ó am go chéile. Beidh sé de bhuntáiste ag a leithéid de chur chuige go mbeadh bealach ann chun an próiseas maidir le malartú eolais faoinn Straitéis a éascú idir an Roinn agus na heagraíochtaí Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta. Ina theannta sin, tabharfaidh seimineáir dá leithéid deis an próiseas pleanála teanga a phlé leis na heagraíochtaí seo freisin. Táim ag súil go mbeidh an chéad seimineár á réachtáil leis na heagraíochtaí Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta níos moille i mbliana.

Deontais Caipitil Gaeltachta

240. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta mar gheall ar an chúnamh caipitil a chuireann an Rannóg Áiseanna Pobail agus Teanga ina Roinn ar fáil, cad é luach na ndeontas a ceadaíodh in 2011, agus é miondealaithe contae ar chontae; agus cad é luach na ndeontas a ceadaíodh in 2012, agus é miondealaithe contae ar chontae. [21084/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Seo a leanas sonraí na ndeontas caipitil a chheadaigh mo Roinn in 2011 agus in 2012 i leith áiseanna pobail, teanga agus caitheamh aimsire sa Ghaeltacht:

Contae	2011	2012
Dún na nGall	€132,400.00	€123,637.00
Maigh Eo	€0.00	€41,753.00
Gaillimh	€85,501.00	€981,992.30
Ciarraí	€0.00	€91,757.00
Corcaigh	€0.00	€147,244.00
Port Láirge	€0.00	€10,169.00
An Mhí	€0.00	€0.00
Iomlán	€217,901.00	€1,396,552.30

Census of Population Publication

241. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the efforts he has made to publish the 1926 census; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21172/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): As the Deputy is aware, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to enabling the publication of the 1926 Census records. A 1926 Census Working Group has been formed comprising officials from my Department, the National Archives and the Central Statistics Office. The group has met to consider how best to enable the publication of the 1926 Census records. Under current legislation, (the Statistics Act, 1993), census data must be withheld for 100 years. If the records were to be released before the expiry of 100 years a change in legislation would be required to allow for the early release. Following discussions with the CSO, the Minister is of the opinion that the extensive preparatory work required to facilitate the release of the data into the public domain can commence in advance of the legal restriction being addressed. The CSO

and the National Archives have agreed to facilitate the preparatory work on the Census records.

Irish Film Board

242. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to the recent publication of the 2011 annual report and accounts of the Irish Film Board, if he will provide his assessment of the performance and governance of the IFB. [21182/13]

243. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to the recent publication of the 2011 annual report and accounts of the Irish Film Board, if he will confirm the average salary paid to staff in 2010 and 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21183/13]

244. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to the recent publication of the 2011 annual report and accounts of the Irish Film Board, if he is concerned at the volume of lending provided by the IFB to its board members. [21184/13]

245. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to the recent publication of the 2011 annual report and accounts of the Irish Film Board, if he is concerned at any of the expenses incurred. [21185/13]

246. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to the recent publication of the 2011 annual report and accounts of the Irish Film Board, if he will provide an assessment of the relevant skills and experience of the new chairman of the IFB who he recently appointed (details supplied). [21186/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 242 to 246, inclusive, together.

As can be seen in its Annual Report and Accounts, the Irish Film Board has a successful year in 2011. The Irish film industry continued to build on its excellent international reputation garnering significant recognition and acclaim as new Irish features were selected for major international festivals and Irish talent picked up awards and received nominations for some of the industry's highest accolades.

Highlights included the Irish short film THE CRUSH that became the 7th Academy Award nominated Irish short since 2002, Irish projects were selected for some of the world's most renowned festivals including Berlin, Sundance, Toronto, Tribeca and Cannes where Rebecca Daly's debut feature THE OTHER SIDE OF SLEEP was selected for the prestigious Directors Fortnight and THIS MUST BE THE PLACE was in official competition.

THE GUARD had an extraordinary year. Following its world premiere at Sundance, it was selected for numerous prestigious festivals including Berlin, Edinburgh and Tribeca and was phenomenally well received when it was released in Irish cinemas. It became the most successful independent Irish film in Irish box office history.

The Irish Film Board (IFB) is a statutorily independent agency. The allocation of support to projects, its staffing arrangements, expenses and other arrangements are matters for the IFB itself. In fact, details of the IFB's recusal policies for dealing with applications by members of the Board for project support are provided the annual report itself.

On 23 April last, Mr Bill O'Herlihy, Chairman Designate of The Irish Film Board gave evidence before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht

in relation to his vision and strategy for the Irish Film Board. Mr O'Herlihy made a lengthy statement to the committee and answered all questions put to him by the members of the Joint Committee in a frank and forthright manner and to their satisfaction.

North-South Implementation Bodies

247. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will approve the lease agreement between Waterways Ireland and Longford County Council with respect to Abbeyshrule Tidy Villages, County Longford who have applied for grant funding from Longford Community Resources. [21199/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): As the Deputy will appreciate, Waterways Ireland is an implementation body established under the British Ireland Agreement and therefore, the proposed lease agreement between Waterways Ireland and Longford County Council with respect to Abbeyshrule Tidy Villages, Co Longford falls to be considered under the relevant North / South procedures.

I am advised that this process is expected to be completed next month.

Departmental Properties

248. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi-Unit Development Act within his Department. [21239/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): It is not possible to collate the information requested in respect of my Department in the time-frame permitted for a Parliamentary Question but it will be sent directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

With regard to bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group, the Deputy will appreciate that the matters raised are part of the day-to-day operational responsibilities of the bodies in question. I am arranging, therefore, for the terms of the Deputy's Question to be transmitted to the heads of relevant bodies with a request that they provide information, to the extent feasible, directly to the Deputy.

An Teanga Gaeilge

249. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta ó leasaíodh Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003 le hAlt 62 den Acht um an Dlí Sibhialta (Forálacha Ilghnéitheacha), 2011 chun nach gá Achtanna den Oireachtas a fhoilsiú go comhuaineach i ngach ceann de na teangacha oifigiúla a thuilleadh ach go bhfuil cead ag an Rialtas Acht den Oireachtas a fhoilsiú ar an idirlíon i mBéarla amháin anois, an dóigh leis go bhfuil an córas níos éifeachtaí anois; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [21282/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Din-

ny McGinley): Ar an gcéad dul síos, ní mór dom a shoiléiriú don Teachta nach bhfuil feidhm reachtúil agamsa maidir le foilsiú Achtanna den Oireachtas.

Ceadaíonn an leasú a rinneadh ar alt 7 d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003 le halt 62 den Acht um an Dlí Sibhialta (Forálacha Ilghnéitheacha), 2011 gur féidir Achtanna den Oireachtas a fhoilsiú ar an idirlíon i gceann amháin de theangacha oifigiúla an Stáit sula ndéantar iad a chló agus a fhoilsiú go comhuaineach i ngach ceann de na teangacha oifigiúla.

Cinntíonn an leasú seo go bhfuil Achtanna den Oireachtas ar fáil chomh luath agus is féidir tar éis iad a bheith sínithe ag an Uachtarán. Ní athraíonn an leasú seo ar aon bhealach an dualgas reachtúil maidir le cló agus foilsiú Achtanna den Oireachtas go comhuaineach i ngach ceann de na teangacha oifigiúla mar atá sonraithe in alt 7(1) d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003 (arna leasú le halt 62 den Acht um an Dlí Sibhialta (Forálacha Ilghnéitheacha), 2011). Tuigtear dom go bhfuil an fhoráil leasaithe ag feidhmiú go héifeachtach chun an leagan achtaithe d'Achtanna an Oireachtais a chur ar fáil le linn don tiontú oifigiúil a bheith á réiteach.

Wildlife Protection

250. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in view of the post-mortem investigations into dolphins found dead off the Mayo coast; if he will now investigate the spate of dead seals as revealed by the Irish Seal Sanctuary. [21506/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Seals are protected under the Wildlife Act and their habitats require protection under the EU Habitats Directive.

In the winter months, officials of my Department responded to information received from the Irish Seal Sanctuary and others on dead seals on the Waterford and Wexford coasts. As set out in my reply to PQ Number 379 of 26th of February 2013, these deaths were investigated by my Department.

My Department has not had recent reports of significant seal deaths. Departmental officials working in coastal areas remain vigilant and will continue to work closely with other law enforcement authorities in such situations.

Hydraulic Fracturing Policy

251. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if Forfás is pre-empting the publication of the Environmental Protection Agency report on hydraulic fracturing by suggesting that the development of a new energy framework to facilitate the development of gas storage and new and diverse sources of gas, for example, fracking to ensure that Ireland has cost effective, secure and diverse electricity fuel into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21227/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is an independent Agency, is in the process of finalising Terms of Reference to engage the appropriate expertise to undertake scientific research into the potential environmental impacts of unconventional gas exploration and extraction. The key questions to be addressed by this research are, whether this technology can be used while fully protecting the environment and human health, and what the best environmental practice in using this technology might be. A

report in this regard is not anticipated before early 2015.

In the meantime, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and I have both publicly confirmed that no application proposing the use of this technology would be considered nor would exploration licences in this regard be granted prior to publication of the EPA report and consideration of its findings.

Statements with regard to the development of new and diverse sources of gas do not alter this position in any respect.

Hydraulic Fracturing Policy

252. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if landowners are informed if their land is in a licence option area for hydraulic fracturing; the way they are informed; the timescale in which they are informed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21228/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): As I have advised on a number of occasions, if any company were to apply for an exploration licence that proposes hydraulic fracturing their application would be subject to an environmental impact assessment including a public consultation phase.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive plays a central role in the assessment of such applications as it ensures that the public is involved in the decision-making process.

The public consultation phase will afford local community groups and the general public an opportunity to comment on any project and its potential environmental effects, including potential socio-economic impacts before a decision is made.

Departmental Properties

253. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi-Unit Development Act within his Department. [21241/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not own or rent any residential or mixed residential/commercial property. In terms of buildings occupied by my Department, such properties are held in the ownership of or rented by the Office of Public Works on behalf of the Department and my Department is not a member of any property management company.

The operation of any owned or leased property by agencies under my Department is an operational matter for the individual agency in the first instance and I have no function in this regard. I have notified the agencies under the aegis of the Department of the question and have requested them to respond directly to the Deputy with their replies.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

254. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the status of an application by Emerald Pipeworks and-or PiPiper for consent to run fibre optic cable from County Mayo to County Galway in ducting laid alongside the Bord Gáis pipeline network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21269/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The telecommunications duct network referred to runs alongside the Bord Gáis Éireann pipeline network from Bellanaboy in County Mayo to Ballymoneen in County Galway, which also consists of a spur off the main network to Castlebar and Westport, County Mayo.

Since this duct network was funded by my Department, State Aid approval is needed in order to bring the network into use. My Department is currently engaged in a State Aid process with the European Commission with a view to bringing the duct to market and my officials are working to bring the matter to a conclusion as quickly as possible.

It is my intention that the network would be completed as an open access network that would be available to allow licensed telecoms operators to provide services along this network.

No application has been received from any party for consent to run fibre along the duct network concerned.

Household Benefits

255. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if it is intended that the proposed broadcasting charge will replace the TV licence charge as part of the household benefits package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21376/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Exemptions from the liability to pay the existing TV licence arise by virtue of eligibility for the Household Benefits Package, which automatically gives the right to a free licence. Exemptions from the liability to pay the existing TV licence arise by virtue of eligibility for the Household Benefits Package, which automatically gives the right to a free licence. That said, I would like to emphasise that the proposed charge would replace the existing TV licence system and it is my expectation that the current exemptions in relation to pensioners and those entitled to the Household Benefit Package will continue to apply.

Internet Safety Issues

256. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if websites promoting eating disorders, also referred to as pro mia and pro ana websites, can be censored here if the target market of the site is considered to be under the age of 18; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21422/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): As Minister for Communications Energy and Natural Resources, I have policy responsibility for providing a supportive legislative and regulatory environment to facilitate the development of high quality communications infrastructure and services. However, I do not have sole responsibility for addressing how that infrastructure is used. Responsibility of certain potentially

harmful content rests with a number of Departments and Agencies including with the Department of Justice and Equality and the executive agency of that Department, the Office for Internet Safety.

It is clear that there are no simple answers to the challenges posed by the positioning of certain potentially harmful content on Internet websites, not least because of the international basis of services and because any possible policy response falls across a range of Departments.

In recognition of this complexity my Department maintains open and regular contact with all Departments and State agencies. My Department also monitors international developments with a view to ensuring domestic policy within its remit reflects best practices and that the regulatory framework is amended as necessary.

You will be aware that the Joint Committee on Transport and Communications recently held a number of hearings on the use of the Internet and its potential effect on people. I look forward to receiving the report of the committee in due course.

Salmon Hardship Scheme

257. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 279 of 11 December 2012 and 423 of 30 June 2009, the reason the information promised in relation to the 1,171 applicants for the salmon hardship scheme has not been provided by An Bord Iascaigh Mhara on the Loughs Agency. [21433/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): As stated in my earlier replies on this issue the information requested by the Deputy is not held in my Department.

As advised in my reply to Parliamentary Question No 279 of 11 December 2012, I have passed the Deputy's question to An Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) and the Loughs Agency requesting that they reply directly to the Deputy.

I will again advise the bodies concerned of the interest of the Deputy in the matter and request that they reply directly to the Deputy.

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee

258. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the qualifications of each member of the local electoral area boundary committee; the fees paid to each member to date since their appointment; the fees that remain outstanding; if the positions on the committee were advertised; when he will make their recommendations available to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21096/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I established a Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee on 15 November 2012, in accordance with sections 28, 32 and 33 of the Local Government Act 1991, to review and make recommendations on the division of each council area, other than Cork City, into local electoral areas, and to make recommendations on the number of members of each council to be assigned to each local electoral area. The Committee was requested to submit its report as soon as possible and, in any event, not later than 31 May 2013.

The Committee members are Mr G Kearney (Chair), former Secretary General in the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Professor Gary Murphy, Head of the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University; Mr Peter McCann, former Principal Officer in the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; Mr J Beirne, former Director of Services in Mayo County Council; Ms Marian Vickers, Chief Executive, Northside Partnership Dublin. No fees are payable to the members of the Committee. Expenses, which arise in the case of one member of the Committee, are payable in accordance with normal Civil Service rates.

As required under the Local Government Act 1991, I will publish the Committee's report after it has been submitted to me.

Planning Issues

259. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on a submission (details supplied) regarding quarries; his plans to address this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21154/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In response to the Judgment of the European Court of Justice in case C215/06, a new Section 261A was inserted into the Planning and Development Acts 2000 - 2112. Under this Section each planning authority was asked to determine which quarries in its administrative area would, having regard to the dates of implementation of the EIA Directive and the Habitats Directive, respectively, have required an EIA, a determination in relation to EIA, or an appropriate assessment in relation to possible effects on the integrity of a European site, but which were not subject to such assessment/determination. Where a planning authority determined that a quarry comes within this category, the planning authority is required to make a further decision in relation to the planning status of the quarry, including registration status. Flowing from this decision, the planning authority must then either require an application for substitute consent or take enforcement action requiring the quarry to cease operations. The determination of the planning authority that EIA, a determination in relation to EIA, or an appropriate assessment were required but not carried out/made is reviewable by An Bord Pleanála, as is the decision on the planning/registration status. While the process has been challenging for some quarry operators, my Department has engaged extensively with industry representatives to ensure that the provisions, which were required for purposes of compliance with the ECJ judgment, are implemented fairly and consistently. I am considering making a number of small modifications to the practical operation of the 261A process to ensure its effectiveness.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

260. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has given consideration to the approval to proceed to construction for the extension of Cornalgha reservoir and the water treatment plant at Moneyduff as part of the north Leitrim regional supply scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21164/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 provides for the development of a comprehensive range of new water services infrastructure in County Leitrim. The Programme includes contracts under construction and to commence to the value of some €29 million in

County Leitrim during the period of the Programme.

The North Leitrim Regional Water Supply Scheme is included in the Programme as a scheme to advance through planning. This scheme included a Design Build Contract for the upgrade of the existing Water Treatment Plant at Moneyduff. However, it did not include the Cornalaghta Reservoir Extension.

I understand from Leitrim County Council that they have recently submitted an Environmental Impact Statement to An Bord Pleanála for the scheme. The Council must await certification from An Bord Pleanála before they can proceed with the tender process for the upgrade of the existing Water Treatment Plant at Moneyduff.

The Council has also submitted a proposal to my Department for the inclusion of the Cornalaghta Reservoir Extension as a contract to start in the existing Water Services Investment Programme at an estimated cost of €0.369 million. This submission is being examined in my Department and a decision will be made as soon as possible.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Provision

261. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has given consideration to the approval to proceed towards the provision of improved sewerage infrastructure in nine towns and villages (details supplied) in County Leitrim. [21165/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 provides for the development of a comprehensive range of new water services infrastructure in County Leitrim. The Programme includes contracts under construction and to commence to the value of some €29 million in County Leitrim during the period of the Programme.

The Programme aims to prioritise projects that target environmental compliance issues and support economic and employment growth. A key input to the development of the Programme was the assessment of needs prepared by local authorities, including Leitrim County Council, in response to my Department's request to the authorities in 2009 to review and prioritise their proposals for new capital works in their areas. These were subsequently appraised in my Department in the context of the funds available and key criteria that complemented those used by the authorities. Inevitably, through this process, certain projects that had been proposed had to give way to others that were more strategically important at that time.

The Leitrim Towns and Villages Sewerage Scheme – Bundle No. 2 (9 Villages – Drumshanbo, Ballinamore, Carrigallen, Dromod, Glenfarne, Leitrim Village, Mohill, Rossinver and Manorhamilton) was not amongst the priority contracts and schemes selected for inclusion in the current Programme.

Progress under the Water Services Investment Programme was reviewed in mid-2011 and through this process, consideration was given to any newly emerging priority contracts and schemes submitted by local authorities for addition to the Programme. Leitrim County Council applied to have the scheme (7 Villages – Drumshanbo, Ballinamore, Carrigallen, Dromod, Leitrim Village, Mohill and Manorhamilton) included in the Programme but again the scheme was not determined as being appropriate by my Department for inclusion in the Programme at that time. The Council's submission did not request the inclusion of Glenfarne or Rossinver Villages.

A revised submission, again not including the villages of Glenfarne or Rossinver, for the inclusion of the scheme into the Water Services Investment Programme was submitted by the Council and a letter issued to them from my Department on 5 April 2013 requesting that the Council undertake a focused review of the Preliminary Report. In particular the Council was asked to take account of recent small scheme funding provided by my Department under the Rural Water Programme (RWP).

Under this programme an allocation of almost €1.25 million towards Wastewater Compliance Works to address Environmental Protection Agency wastewater discharge authorisation requirements was notified by my Department to Leitrim County Council in March 2013.

Responsibility for the administration of the RWP has been devolved to local authorities since 1997. The selection and approval of individual scheme proposals for advancement and funding under the programme, within the overall priorities set by my Department and subject to the block grant allocations provided, is therefore a matter for the water services authorities. Accordingly, the letter of 5 April requested that the outcomes of this investment should be taken into account in any new submission by the Council.

Water Services Provision

262. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm that County Leitrim has the most group water schemes supplied by the local authority's public mains per capita in this country; if his Department has alongside Irish Water adopted any strategy towards the advancement of a policy by local authorities of taking in charge these schemes coupled with consideration of a particular policy for same. [21166/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Responsibility for the administration of the Rural Water Programme, under which funding may be provided towards the connection of group water schemes to local authority public mains and towards the takeover of group water schemes by local authorities, has been devolved to local authorities since 1997.

The selection and approval of individual scheme proposals for advancement and funding under the programme, within the overall priorities set by my Department and subject to the block grant allocations provided, is therefore a matter for the water services authorities. The provision of Information on the number of group water schemes supplied from local authority public mains would, accordingly, be a matter for individual local authorities.

Under the Water Sector Reform Programme the primary focus of Irish Water will be on the delivery of services to customers on the public water and wastewater networks. My Department will remain responsible for the overall policy and funding of the non-public sector, including the group water sector.

In order to facilitate the establishment of a new public water utility to take over responsibility for the delivery of water services, a number of work-streams have been set up under the Water Sector Reform Programme to assist with the transition of services to Irish Water. One such work-stream is dealing specifically with issues relating to the Group Water Sector. The objectives of this work-stream are to ensure that there is clarity of roles and responsibility for the group water sector and other components of the Rural Water Programme and to develop a medium term strategy for the sector.

Property Taxation Application

263. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the purpose of the local property tax; if he will itemise its envisaged usage in public expenditure, with particular reference to rural counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21210/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Under section 157 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, commencing in 2014, the Minister for Finance will pay into the Local Government Fund an amount equivalent to the Local Property Tax paid into the Central Fund during that year. Questions concerning the use of Local Property Tax revenue raised in 2013 should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

The Government has indicated an intention to move, from 2014, to 80% retention of all Local Property Tax receipts within the local authority area where the Tax is raised. The remaining 20% of the Tax collected nationally will be re-distributed on an equalised basis to local authorities within the context of the annual allocations of General Purpose Grants. It will be a matter for the relevant local authority, whether rural or urban, to determine the precise allocation of revenues from the Local Property Tax.

I expect the Local Property Tax to have multiple benefits, including a more sustainable and resilient system of funding for local authorities and therefore a sounder financial footing for the provision of essential local services; greater local scope for financial decision making concerning service provision - in particular, the inclusion of the local variation mechanism from 2015 will further increase the autonomy of local authorities; and, a strengthening of democracy at local level with a more active relationship between local authorities and local electorates. A stronger democratic relationship and clearer lines of accountability can only have a beneficial impact on service provision from the perspective of the service user.

Rural Development Programme Funding

264. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is a grant available for the reconstruction of damaged outbuildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21221/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Axes 3 & 4 (LEADER) of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 will continue to provide financial resources for allocation to qualifying projects up to the end of 2013. Two of the objectives of the RDP are to identify and provide appropriate amenity and leisure facilities to local communities not otherwise available to them and to support the renewal of rural villages and towns. Accordingly, it may be possible to obtain funding to reconstruct damaged outbuildings however this will depend on the proposed use of such buildings post reconstruction. Outside of any potential application of the reconstructed buildings in an enterprise context the subsequent use of such structures would have to be open to all members of the community in order to be eligible for RDP funding.

There are 35 Local Development Companies contracted, on my Department's behalf, to deliver Axes 3 & 4 (LEADER) of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) throughout the country and these groups are the principal decision-makers in relation to the allocation of project funding. Such decisions are made in the context of the local development strategy of the individual groups and in line with Departmental operating rules and EU regulations. In order

to determine the specific eligibility of any project under the LEADER elements of the RDP it is advisable to contact the Local Development Company in the area concerned. Contact details for all LDCs can be found on my Department's website at www.environ.ie.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Collection

265. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 784 of 16 April 2013, the reason the full rate of non-principal private residence charge is being charged for 2013 when those properties are also liable for the local property tax in view of the fact that this constitutes double taxation of the one property; the reason the NPPR was not at least reduced to 50% to correspond with the introduction of 50% of the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21229/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Property Tax is being introduced on a half year basis this year, and accordingly, 50% of the Tax is payable in 2013. This year will also be the final year of the operation of the Non Principal Private Residence Charge.

The Non Principal Private Residence Charge and the Local Property Tax operate under different mechanisms: the Charge is incurred on the basis of a flat rate of €20 0 per liable property per annum; the amount of Local Property Tax incurred in respect of a liable property is based on that property's value. Therefore, it is not appropriate to assume equivalence between the Charge and the Tax.

Departmental Properties

266. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi-Unit Development Act within his Department. [21244/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The information is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Planning Issues

267. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, on a county-by-county basis, the number of times An Bord Pleanála overturned a refusal of planning permission by a local authority since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21265/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The information sought in respect of decisions made in 2011 is set out in the annual report of An Bord Pleanála for that year. This is available on the

Board's website at www.pleanala.ie. The Board's Annual Report for 2012 is not yet available.

Leader Programmes Administration

268. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will outline the proposed new arrangements for the delivery of the Leader programme in the Mayo north east area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21270/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I have informed Mayo North East Leader Partnership (MNELP) of my decision in principle to allow a limited resumption of its activities under the Rural Development Programme once contracts and administrative procedures have been agreed with my Department and put in place. Under the new arrangements, MNELP will continue to be the deciding authority for the approval of projects and my Department will carry out the administrative checks required under the European Commission Regulations. My Department is currently working with Mayo North East LEADER Partnership to outline the operational details of the systems to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of the RDP going forward.

Leader Programmes Administration

269. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will outline the current situation in respect of the delivery of the Leader programme in the north Mayo Gaeltacht area which was previously administered by MFG; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21271/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Axes 3 & 4 (LEADER) of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 is managed by my Department and provides funding to support the development of sustainable rural communities all over Ireland. This support is currently available to almost all Gaeltacht areas through Local Development Companies contracted to deliver the RDP.

These companies continue to facilitate access to significant financial resources for both enterprise support and community type interventions and will continue to take applications for funding until the end of 2013.

With regard to the North Mayo Gaeltacht area, which is not currently covered by the RDP, my Department is working to determine a delivery mechanism to ensure full coverage for all the Gaeltacht areas, including North Mayo, that is practical and complies with both national and EU regulations. I am confident that this process is nearing completion.

Water Services Funding

270. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has received an application from Kildare County Council for funding to provide for a water softening programme at the River Barrow abstraction plant; if his Department will approve such a funding request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21278/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Ho-

gan): Kildare County Council sought approval to procure water conditioning equipment as part of the Barrow Abstraction Scheme which is being funded under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 . This application was approved in late April 2013 .

Local Authority Housing Provision

271. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the criteria for rent increases by local authorities in the shared ownership scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21339/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under the shared ownership scheme a house is acquired by a local authority and leased to a shared owner, who purchases at least 40% of the value of the house and rents the remaining equity from the local authority. The local authority finances the transaction by borrowing from the Housing Finance Agency. The shared owner must purchase full ownership within 25 years. For transactions commenced on or after 1 January 2003, the annual rent is calculated at 4.3% of the value of the local authority equity and the rent is increased by a fixed 4.5% on 1 July each year. The rent is used to repay the cost of the local authority equity to the Housing Finance Agency and, depending on the level of mortgage interest rates obtaining, may also increase or decrease the capital outstanding on the local authority share at the end of each year. These arrangements represent a significant improvement on the previous terms of the scheme for the shared owner.

The rental formula applied under the scheme is not comparable to rents in the private rented sector, which are determined by the operation of the market. Therefore, movements in private sector rent levels would have no relevant bearing on the calculation of the rental element under shared ownership.

Local authority mortgage holders – including those who purchased under shared ownership – also benefit from extremely keenly priced interest rates which generally run at around 0.5% lower than the best rates available in the market.

The Government's 2011 housing policy statement announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme, in the context of a full review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

That review is now almost concluded and I have also asked the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency to provide me with a standalone analysis of the shared ownership scheme, including identification of the main difficulties and recommendations for mitigating measures.

Any future changes to legislation governing affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme, will be made in the context of both pieces of work and I expect to make announcements in this regard in the near future.

Local Authority Housing Provision

272. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the options available to a person in the shared ownership scheme when making a will in relation to the property; the options available to the benefactors of the will if the local authority holds equity in the house at the time of the death of the person; if the local authority can insist on the sale of the property or if a relative of the deceased person can live in the

property by meeting the terms of the original agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21340/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the shared ownership scheme a house is acquired by a local authority and leased to a shared owner, who purchases at least 40% of the value of the house and rents the remaining equity from the local authority. The local authority finances the transaction by borrowing from the Housing Finance Agency. The shared owner must purchase full ownership within 25 years.

The making of a will and subsequent issues pertaining thereto are matters for an individual’s legal advisors and I have no function in this regard.

The Government’s 2011 housing policy statement announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme, in the context of a full review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. That review is now almost concluded and I have also asked the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency to provide me with a standalone analysis of the shared ownership scheme, including identification of the main difficulties and recommendations for mitigating measures.

Any future changes to legislation governing affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme, will be made in the context of both pieces of work and I expect to make announcements in this regard in the near future.

Household Charge Purpose

273. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will respond to the following query regarding the distribution of monies collected from the household charge (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21352/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government Management Agency is administering the Household Charge system on a shared service/agency basis for all county and city councils. I am advised that, as of 2 May 2013, in excess of €12.5 m has been raised in respect of the Household Charge. The proceeds of the Charge are being re-distributed on an equalised basis to local authorities within the context of the annual allocations of general purpose grants.

Queries concerning local road maintenance programmes and the usage of general purpose grants should be directed to the relevant local authority, in this instance Fingal County Council. However, I am satisfied that in all local authorities, including Fingal, general purpose grants are making an essential contribution to the funding of local services.

Illegal Dumping

274. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 193 of 24 April 2013, if he will clarify if he intends to introduce legislation to assist local authorities with issuing fines for dumping in private developments; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that management companies have no authority or power to fine alleged offenders who are exploiting this loophole; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21388/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Under section 32(1A)(a) of the Waste Management Act 1996, it is the responsibility of the original waste producer or other waste holder to have waste collected, or to make appropriate arrangements for treatment, in accordance with the waste hierarchy.

In addition, section 35 of the 1996 Act provides that a local authority may make bye-laws requiring a holder of household waste to present such waste, specifying sorting measures, quantities, location, times and other relevant matters. As such, it is a role of the relevant local authority to regulate the presentation of waste for collection, in alignment with the national, regional and local policy framework, for all categories of dwelling.

Section 3 of the Litter Pollution Act makes it an offence for any person to deposit any substance or object so as to create litter in a public place or in any place that is visible to any extent from a public place. In addition, the section provides that it is an offence to deposit commercial, household, industrial or municipal waste in any place for collection by or on behalf of a local authority or by another person in such circumstances as to create litter or lead to litter in any public place or any place that is visible to any extent from a public place.

Penalties for more serious dumping offences provided for under the Waste Management Acts are substantial. Persons who are found to be responsible for, or involved in, the unauthorised disposal of waste are liable to a maximum fine of €3,000 on summary conviction and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months, and to a maximum fine of €15 million on conviction on indictment and/or imprisonment for up to 10 years.

Following a review of legislation in this area and notwithstanding the significant penalties currently in place, the Government recently approved proposals I brought forward for new legislative provisions to introduce on-the-spot fines for incidences of fly-tipping or small-scale illegal dumping. These new legislative provisions will now be submitted to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting. While I will keep the legislation on this area under review, I currently have no proposals to introduce further legislation empowering private companies to impose fines.

Water Meters Installation

275. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the contract for the installation of water meters has been awarded in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21427/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I refer to the reply to Question No. 402 of 30 April 2013 which sets out the position in this matter.

Local Government Reform

276. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on work being carried out by his Department to implement proposals for regional structures outlined in the Government's action programme on local government reform, including the rationalisation of ten regional bodies into three new regional assemblies; if eligibility for EU funding programmes will be maintained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21531/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Wide-ranging and detailed legislation is required to provide for the range of measures set out in the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, including those relating to regional structures. Work on drafting the Local Government Bill 2013 is proceeding satisfactorily and I am firmly committed to ensuring that the Bill will be published in good time to enable enactment well ahead of the 2014 local elections. Responsibility in relation to EU funding programmes rests primarily with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Garda Vetting Applications

277. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a Garda vetting clearance will be granted in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21122/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda Authorities that no vetting application has been received in respect of the individual concerned. In the circumstances, I can only suggest that the person contacts the registered organisation involved.

Personal Insolvency Act

278. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person and their spouse apply for insolvency, will entering into an insolvency agreement affect their spouse's qualified financial adviser qualification; and if it will affect other employment opportunities with AIB, Bank of Ireland or other State-owned banks or other companies. [21206/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Personal Insolvency Act 2012 does not require that a person's employment be affected by entering into an insolvency arrangement. However, certain professions may be governed by bodies where personal finances may be subject to regulation requirements.

Therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the possible consequences of a person entering into an insolvency arrangement. It would, rather, be a matter for the relevant professional body and/or employer, as the case may be. I should also note that the specifics of individual cases whereby persons may be seeking an insolvency arrangement are a matter for the Insolvency Service of Ireland rather than for me as Minister

Coroners Service

279. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the results of a post mortem in respect of a person (details supplied) will be provided to their family without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21428/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Under the Coroners Act, 1962, a Coroner is a statutory officer exercising quasi-judicial functions in relation to which he/she is independent and neither I nor my Department has any role in the coronial process. I understand that many factors influence the time it takes for post-mortem reports to be received by a Coroner from the pathologist concerned. In this particular case, I am advised that enquiries by the pathologist are ongoing in order to complete her report. The family in question should contact the Kerry North Coroner's Office directly, where they can request a preliminary report, and

where they will be informed of any developments.

DNA Database

280. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the recent developments in the establishment of a DNA database; the date on which he expects legislation to be published regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21098/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database System) Bill, which is included in the Government Legislation Programme for this term, will provide for the establishment of a DNA database to serve as a source of high quality intelligence for criminal investigations. Work on the preparation of the legislation is well advanced but has been delayed due to the need to address some complex European law issues. I expect to be in a position to publish the Bill in June and am determined that it will be enacted this year.

Garda Equipment

281. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the variations of speed camera vans that are in use here require clear identification; if the vans are meant to be adequately marked; the regulations and guidelines surrounding the identification of the vans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21100/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that there is no legal requirement for members of An Garda Síochána to use marked vehicles when conducting speed enforcement, or that the vehicles be visible to oncoming traffic. As a matter of Garda policy safety camera vans operated by the outsource service provider, GoSafe, are fully marked when enforcing speeding offences. I am further informed that Garda safety camera vans are used both overtly and covertly. Similarly, speed enforcement may be carried out by Garda personnel when using marked and unmarked cars and marked motorcycles.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Staff

282. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the legislation used in the appointment process to the recently announced Equality Board. [21104/13]

283. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the independent panel appointed to select commissioners and the chief commissioner has been stood down; and if this is the case the way he will ensure that the process to appoint the chief commissioner to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC, will be independent, transparent and compliant with the UN Paris principles. [21105/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 282 and 283 together.

Legislation to set up the new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) is expected to be published before the end of the summer term and, in the meantime, the members of the new Commission will take up their positions on the two existing bodies that are being merged, the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission. This will both fill the existing gap at 'board' level in the two organisations and ensure that the two organisations can

begin operating as a cohesive whole. These appointments are being made on the basis of the existing legislation, which in the case of the Equality Authority is the Employment Equality Act 1998.

As I indicated when announcing the 14 persons recommended by the Selection Panel for appointment as members designate of the new IHREC, the Selection Panel has reported that it has not proved possible to recruit a Chief Commissioner at this time. The terms on which this post was advertised included a requirement that the person appointed should not have served on either the Equality Authority or the Human Rights Commission. The requirement was considered essential to ensure that the new Chief Commissioner would bring balance and neutrality to the position in a sensitive merger context. The Selection Panel suggests also that the full-time nature of the position and the length of the contract (5 years) may have been issues that militated against a successful recruitment. The position was designated as a full-time one in view of the Paris Principles preference for full-time Commissioners.

I consider this issue requires time for reflection and consultation and that the debate in the Houses of the Oireachtas on the Bill to establish IHREC will be an opportunity to explain the difficulty that has arisen and to invite suggestions. Therefore, I intend to reflect on how to progress recruitment of a Chief Commissioner in the light of the debate on this issue in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Once the Bill is enacted, I will bring my proposals to Government.

I am very grateful to the members of the Panel for their unstinting public service work on essentially a voluntary basis. I consider that the experience of the process requires a critical review of the selection process set out in the General Scheme of the Bill as published. The scale of the task as it unfolded required that the Panel engage back-office assistance from the Public Appointments Service (PAS). In the light of the experience gained, I consider that future selection of persons to serve as members of the IHREC should be vested in the PAS. The PAS has existed in its different forms since the foundation of the State, to ensure integrity and impartiality in the appointment of civil servants and other public servants and is independent in the discharge of its functions and would thus fully meet the Paris Principles' requirement for a selection process independent of Government. This is a change in the selection process as originally adopted in the General Scheme which I consider is now required in the light of experience. I note that use of the PAS was one of the other options considered by the Working Group set up to advise on practical arrangements for establishment of IHREC in its report.

Supreme Court Rulings

284. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he intends to bring legislation forward to deal with the outcome of a Supreme Court case (details supplied) in view of the fact that the court stated that the Oireachtas could legislate if it was satisfied that measures with appropriate safeguards could be introduced. [21124/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Supreme Court in its judgment in *Fleming v Ireland and Others* (delivered on 29 April last) upheld the constitutionality of section 2(2) of the Criminal Law (Suicide) Act 1993. Section 2(2) provides for the offence of assisted suicide. While acknowledging the tragic situation of the appellant, the Court held that there is no constitutional right to commit suicide or to arrange for the ending of one's life at a time of one's choosing. The Court further held that it is not possible to identify a constitutional right for a limited class of persons which in this case would refer to disabled persons suffering severe pain arising from a terminal and degenerative illness, who have the capacity to consent and wish to have the assistance of a third party to end their lives. Submissions to the effect that the prohibition on assisted suicide was discriminatory and contrary to the European Convention

on Human Rights were also rejected. As a consequence of the judgment, the offence of assisting another to take his or her life remains in place and I have no plans to amend the legislation.

Crime Statistics

285. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the broadcast of the Prime Time investigation entitled Riches from Rags on 25 April, 2013, which chronicled scores of alleged thefts from charitable clothes bins across the State, if he will confirm the number of individual crime reports that have been registered on the PULSE system and when the crime reports were registered on PULSE; and the way such alleged thefts are shown in crime statistics reported by the Central Statistics Office. [21187/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that it is not possible to provide the number of individual reports taken by Gardaí relating to charitable clothes bins across the State as they are not recorded on PULSE in a specific incident type. I am further informed that each offence would have to be examined manually to identify if it related to a clothes bank or not and would require a disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources to compile. The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. I have requested the CSO to provide any relevant information which may be available directly to the Deputy, having regard to the situation outlined above concerning the recording of such incidents.

Crime Statistics

286. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question 900 on 16 April, 2013, the way a member of the public who has reported a crime to An Garda Síochána can be confident that the crime has been entered onto the Garda PULSE system. [21188/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The General Crime Counting Rules and the Technical Notes referred to in my reply to Parliamentary Question 900 of 16 April 2013 provide detailed information on the recording of crime. The most recent publication in which this information is provided is the CSO Recorded Crime for the fourth quarter of 2012. As stated previously, supervisory ranks within An Garda Síochána review all incidents recorded on PULSE to ensure that the correct crime classification is recorded. Further to this supervision, the Garda Information Service Centre (GISC), the central authority for recording crime incidents on PULSE, also monitors and reviews PULSE information to ensure the crime classification is correct. The Deputy will also be aware that the Garda Commissioner, in response to recent questions concerning this matter, has provided strong assurances to the public that all crimes reported to the Gardaí will be fully and thoroughly investigated and offenders brought to justice wherever possible.

Courts Service Issues

287. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of summonses issued at the behest of An Garda Síochána in each of 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; if there are any trends which are of concern to him; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [21189/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have requested reports from the Garda authorities and the Courts Service in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as the reports are to hand.

Garda Corruption

288. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prosecutions initiated against current or former members of An Garda Síochána under section 62 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005. [21190/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have sought the relevant information from the Garda authorities and I will communicate further with the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Properties

289. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi Unit Development act within his Department. [21249/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that neither my Department nor any agencies under its aegis, own or rent properties that fall within the scope of his Question. I have no responsibility to the Dáil in respect of statutorily independent agencies which can vest, lease or rent property in their own name nor for properties leased or provided to my Department by the Office of Public Works.

Garda Deployment

290. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the level of Gardaí currently servicing a station (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21254/13]

291. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a Garda Sergeant will be appointed to a Garda Station (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21255/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 290 and 291 together.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, throughout the organisation and I have no direct function in the matter. This allocation of resources is constantly monitored in the context of demographics, crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies in place on a District, Divisional and Regional level to ensure optimum use is made of Garda resources and the

best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

As of 31 March 2013, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the personnel strength of the Mayo Garda Division was 304. Specifically in relation to the Foxford area, I am informed by the Garda authorities that there were 2 Gardaí assigned to that Station on the same date. These resources are further augmented, where appropriate, by Gardaí from national units such as the Garda National Drug Unit and the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

Garda Districts

292. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will explain the proposed new County Mayo Garda Districts on a DED by DED basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21256/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner completed a comprehensive review of the district and station arrangements and set out, in his Policing Plan for 2013, a revised district and station network. He has informed me that, in relation to the Swinford and Claremorris Districts, these will be amalgamated into the new enlarged District of Claremorris. This amalgamation will be implemented during 2013. As a consequence of the amalgamation, the Foxford Garda sub-district, which is currently part of the Swinford Garda District, will be amalgamated into the Ballina District. This will not affect the policing service provided to the community of the Foxford Garda sub-district which will be augmented on a 24 hour basis by personnel assigned to Ballina Garda Station.

Personal Insolvency Act

293. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has considered giving authorisation to persons other than solicitors and accountants who pass relevant exams to act as personal insolvency practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21264/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question 498 on 23rd April, 2013. The position remains as stated:

All Personal Insolvency Practitioners (PIPs) will be authorised and regulated by the Insolvency Service of Ireland, in accordance with Part 5 of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 - Sections 159 to 169. In Part 5 of the Act, Section 163 sets out how an individual may make application to carry on practice as a Personal Insolvency Practitioner, and Section 164 the matters which the Insolvency Service must take into account in deciding whether an applicant should be authorised as a PIP or whether authorisation is to be refused. The Insolvency Service of Ireland will shortly publish the Regulations under Section 161 of the Act in regard to the authorisation and regulation of personal insolvency practitioners. The Regulations will set out the necessary criteria in regard to qualifications. As I have previously stated, I expect that accountants, lawyers and a broad range of financial advisors may wish to seek regulation as practitioners, but it will not be confined to these professions. All potential applicants, in addition to their existing professional qualifications, will have to demonstrate evidence of the applicants' satisfactory knowledge of the provisions of the Act and the law generally as it applies in the State relating to the insolvency of individuals and in particular statutory provisions relating to such persons.

Citizenship Ceremonies

294. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) in County Dublin, will be called to attend a citizenship ceremony [21330/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy will shortly be invited to attend a citizenship ceremony on 20 May, 2013 at which I intend to grant her application for a Certificate of Naturalisation.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Charities Regulation

295. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide an update on the implementation of the Charities Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21336/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Charities Act 2009 was designed to support and enhance public trust in charities by providing for the statutory registration and regulation of charities operating in Ireland by an independent Charities Regulatory Authority.

The decision was taken in 2011, because of the urgent need to make savings in Government expenditure, to defer full implementation of the Charities Act. This decision was taken for financial reasons and it has remained Government policy to provide for the implementation of the Charities Act 2009.

My Department has therefore examined methods of how best to implement the Charities Act in the current financial climate. As part of this process, in January of this year I published for consultation outline proposals for implementing key provisions of the Act. The consultation document invited the views of stakeholders and members of the public on proposals for the implementation of the Act on a phased and low cost basis. I was very pleased with the outcome of this consultation. Some 160 submissions, containing much valuable feedback, were received in response.

My Department is currently reviewing the submissions received and I look forward to publishing the results in due course and a further indication of the Government's timeframe for the introduction of an operational Charities Regulatory Authority and full implementation of the Charities Act 2009.

Visa Applications

296. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide the number of persons that have applied for, and the number of persons that have received a visa under the visa investment scheme programme and the start-up visa scheme. [21337/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Immigrant Investor Programme and the Start-up Entrepreneur Programme were opened for applications in April 2012. Since then, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service have received 27 applications for the Start-up Entrepreneur Programme and 10 Applications for the Immigrant Investor Programme. Fourteen applications have been approved under the Start-up Entrepreneur Programme, seven applications have been refused, one applicant gained an alternative status and the remainder are still under consideration. Three applications have been approved under the Immigrant Investor Programme and the remainder are still under consideration.

To date the total investment committed under both Programmes is of the order of €10.5 million and that it is projected that 270 jobs will be retained or created on foot of these investments in the ICT, recycling and financial services areas. In addition two organisations, one educational and the other a charity, are receiving substantial endowments to support and develop their activities.

Asylum Applications

297. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will outline the way the Common European Asylum System will ensure that the European Union has a fair and effective system for processing asylum applications that is also robust and not open to abuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21449/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is provided for in Title V of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) which states that the Union shall constitute an area of freedom, security and justice. Article 78 of the TFEU provides that the Union shall develop a common policy on asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection with a view to offering appropriate status to any third-country national requiring international protection in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement and the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees.

Measures relating to the CEAS are covered by the EU Treaty Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice. The Protocol allows either Member State to opt into EU measures pursuant to Title V of the TFEU. The principal EU instruments which comprise the CEAS are the Dublin Regulation and three Directives dealing with reception conditions, asylum procedures and qualification. At the present time Ireland participates in the Dublin Regulation, the 2004 Qualification Directive and the 2005 Asylum Procedures Directive.

The Dublin Regulation provides that an application for asylum (international protection) lodged by a third country national in a Member State shall be examined by a single Member State which shall be determined in accordance with the hierarchy of criteria set out in Chapter III of the Regulation. These criteria are based on the general principle that responsibility for examining an application should primarily lie with the Member State which played the greatest part in the applicant's entry into and presence in the territories of the Member States with some exceptions designed to protect family unity. In an area without controls at the internal borders of the Member States, a mechanism for determining responsibility for asylum applications lodged in the Member States was needed in order, on the one hand, to guarantee effective access to the procedures for determining refugee status and not to compromise the objective of the rapid processing of asylum applications and, on the other, to prevent abuse of asylum procedures in the form of multiple applications for asylum submitted by the same person in several Member States with the sole aim of extending his or her stay in the Member States.

The 2005 Asylum Procedures Directive contains provisions dealing with:

- a) basic principles and guarantees, including access to the procedure, the right to remain in the Member State pending the examination of the application, the personal interview of an asylum applicant and guarantees for unaccompanied minors;
- b) procedures at first instance, including the examination procedure, prioritisation and acceleration of any examination, inadmissible applications, the safe country of origin concept, subsequent applications and failure to appear; and
- c) procedures for the withdrawal of refugee status and appeals procedures.

The 2004 Qualification Directive contains provisions dealing with:

- a) the assessment of applications for international protection, including assessment of facts and circumstances on an individual basis;
- b) qualification for being a refugee, including cessation and exclusion clauses;
- c) qualification for subsidiary protection, including cessation and exclusion clauses; and
- d) the content of international protection, including protection from refoulement, residence permits, access to employment, education, social welfare and health care.

My Department and the independent bodies under the aegis of my Department, i.e. the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, have considerable experience in the operation of the legal framework comprising the CEAS instruments in which Ireland participates. On the basis of this experience I am of the view that this legal framework does allow for a fair and effective system for processing asylum applications that is also robust and capable of preventing the institution of asylum being resorted to for purposes alien to those for which it is intended.

Charity Clothes Bank Thefts

298. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the penalties that apply for those convicted of theft from charity bring banks; if he is considering strengthening the laws in this area, in view of the significant loss of revenue this theft causes to charities; if he intends to regulate charity collectors who call door to door to collect for charities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21458/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Theft is an offence contrary to section 4 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001. A person convicted upon indictment of theft is liable to imprisonment for up to 10 years and/or an unlimited fine. There are no plans to amend section 4 of the 2001 Act.

I am concerned about the reported practice of some collectors of clothing and bric-a-brac who convey the impression in their promotional literature that they are a charity, when this may not actually be the case. This may lead some people to donate to such collections in the belief that they are supporting a charity and helping to alleviate hardship. This is unfair both to donors whose intention in donating such items is to help those in need, and to bona fide charities that may lose out on donations as a result. It is an offence under section 6 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act, 2001 to make gain or cause loss to others by deception.

In addition to these existing measures under the Criminal Justice Acts, the Charities Act

2009 also contains measures aimed at preventing the abuse of charitable status. Under section 46 of the Charities Act, it is an offence for an organisation that is not a registered charity to describe itself or its activities in such terms as would cause members of the public to reasonably believe that it is a charitable organisation. This section cannot be commenced until the statutory Register of Charities, also provided for under the Charities Act, is in place.

While further implementation of the Charities Act and creation of the Register of Charities have been delayed for financial reasons, the Government remains committed to progressing the implementation of the Act and putting in place a dedicated regulatory framework for charities in line with the provisions of the Act. My Department has been examining how best this can be done in the current financial climate. As part of this work, my Department recently undertook a consultation on key issues, including the creation of the Register of Charities. The submissions received are currently being reviewed and I look forward to publishing the results in due course and giving a further indication of the Government's timeframe for the introduction of an operational Charities Regulatory Authority and full implementation of the Charities Act 2009.

Garda Stations Closures

299. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the green man phone mechanism is being removed from all Garda stations, that is, not just Garda stations that are closed but stations that are still operational and are now seeing the green man being removed from the doors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21522/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Decisions in relation to the deployment of Garda equipment and resources are operational matters for the Garda Commissioner.

In this context I am informed by the Garda authorities that the decision to discontinue the provision of public access call boxes at Garda stations has been based primarily on the results of an operational review which established that, on average, a large majority of these facilities had less than one call per day. In addition, I understand that the decision took account of the fact that mobile phones are in very wide use throughout the country.

Garda Equipment

300. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a directive has been issued telling Gardaí that they are no longer allowed to buy new batteries for their flash lamps which they need for their night patrols; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21523/13]

302. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, in view of the lamps that are used for road checks at night by the traffic corps which require batteries, a directive has issued informing An Gardaí Síochána that they are no longer allowed to buy new batteries for these lamps which are needed for their night patrols; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21532/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 302 together.

The provision and deployment of Garda equipment is undertaken by the Garda Commissioner. In that context I am informed by the Garda authorities they are satisfied that the ar-

rangements which have been made for the supply of lights used by Garda personnel, including batteries, are satisfactory and meet the operational requirements of the Force.

Subsidiary Protection Applications

301. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for subsidiary protection in respect of a person (details supplied). [21524/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 31 March, 2009, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against him. In addition, he was notified of his entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006. The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome.

In the event that the application for Subsidiary Protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made. Once a decision has been made, this decision and the consequences of the decision will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

The case of the person concerned is amongst many to be considered at present and it is not possible to provide a specific indication as to when this case will be finalised.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Question No. 302 answered with Question No. 300.

Passport Controls

303. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality following the recent installation of automated passport checks in Dublin Airport, if data on the entry of Irish citizens into the State is retained; if so, the length of time for which such data is retained; the persons that would have access to such data and the purposes of same. [21574/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Services (INIS) recently commenced a six month trial of automated border control gates (e-gates) at Pier A/D of Terminal One in Dublin Airport. The e-gates offer certain categories of arriving passengers (passport holders from EU states - including Ireland, EEA states and Switzerland who are over 18 years of age and hold a first generation biometric passport i.e.

with an electronic chip which contains the holder's facial image) a 'self-service' type channel to clear immigration control.

The gates' systems operate by first reading the passport to establish that the holder is a person who is entitled to use the gate. Persons under 18 years of age or a person who is not a passport holder from the geographical areas mentioned above will be automatically refused entry to the gates. For those persons who can use the gates, the facial image contained in the passport is compared electronically to a live photograph taken at the gate to verify that the person presenting at the gate is the person to whom the passport was issued. For the trial period, once the comparison is made, the passport data is deleted except for some anonymised data which will be used for statistical purposes.

Ministerial Transport

304. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the total costs involved in the operation of the Government jet for the years 2008 to 2012. [21373/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Ministerial Air Transport Service (MATS) is primarily provided by the Gulfstream IV and Learjet 45 aircraft, which were specifically acquired for that purpose. My Department follows the normal practice in the aviation business of costing aircraft by reference to the cost per flying hour under either of two headings:

- The direct cost which includes costs which are additional to those associated with having the aircraft and which only arise when the aircraft is flown including maintenance, fuel and support services such as catering costs, cleaning services and airport handling charges.

- The total cost which is the direct cost plus the costs associated with having the aircraft, including depreciation and personnel costs.

Details of the hourly costs for each aircraft in 2011 and 2012 are contained in the tabular statement:

Aircraft	Average Direct Cost Per-Hour €	Average Total Cost PerHour €
Gulfstream IV	3,270	3,790
Learjet 45	1,940	4,200

Details of the hourly costs for each aircraft in 2009 and 2010 are contained in the tabular statement:

Aircraft	Average Direct Cost Per-Hour €	Average Total Cost PerHour €
Gulfstream IV	4,050	7,890
Learjet 45	1,270	2,950

Details of the hourly costs for each aircraft in 2008 are contained in the tabular statement:

Aircraft	Average Direct Cost Per-Hour €	Average Total Cost PerHour €
Gulfstream IV	3,500	7,100
Learjet 45	1,000	2,100

Details of hours flown in respect of MATS missions, per aircraft type, for the five years in question are contained in the tabular statement:

Year	Type	Hours
2008	Gulfstream IV	357.50
	Learjet 45	248.67
2009	Gulfstream IV	220.42
	Learjet 45	239.17
2010	Gulfstream IV	186.83
	Learjet 45	160.75
2011	Gulfstream IV	120.50
	Learjet 45	72.42
2012	Gulfstream IV	206.08
	Learjet 45	131.83

In addition, a CASA maritime patrol aircraft and a AW 139 helicopter have been used infrequently for Ministerial travel when no MATS aircraft were available for operational or technical reasons. The last occasion these aircraft types were used for Ministerial travel was in October 2011 and February 2011 respectively.

Army Barracks Closures

305. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Defence if any arrangement for the future use of Columb Barracks, Mullingar, County Westmeath has been agreed upon; the options that may be available to organisations who wish to express interest in using the premises [21195/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Since the announcement of the Government decision on barrack closures my Department has written to each Government Department, various agencies and local authorities seeking expressions of interest in acquiring any of the properties including Columb Barracks to benefit the local community as a whole but with particular emphasis on job creation measures. Whilst some discussion has taken place in relation to Mullingar Barracks no substantial progress has been made towards achieving a sale to date. I would of course be happy to discuss with any interested group proposals they may have for the use and development of the site for the benefit of the local community. However any proposal involving the long term administering of multiple leases and fulfilling the many responsibilities of a landlord cannot be accepted given the current resources available in my Department.

Question No. 306 answered with Question No. 103.

Departmental Properties

307. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi-Unit Development Act within his Department. [21242/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): There is no property either rented or owned by my Department or agencies under the aegis of my Department to which the provisions of the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 apply.

Naval Service Vessels

308. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Defence his plans to replace vessels in the naval fleet over the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21431/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): A strategy for the replacement of Naval Service Offshore Patrol Vessels is currently in train. A contract was signed in October, 2010 with Babcock Marine in the United Kingdom for the provision of two new Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV's). The acquisition of these modern new vessels, combined with a continuous process of refurbishment and repair on the other vessels in the fleet, will ensure that the operational capability of the Naval Service is maintained at a satisfactory level and that the most up to date equipment is available to Naval Service personnel. The cost of the provision of the two new ships is €108m, exclusive of VAT. In addition, the cost of providing a weapons system for the ships, similar to the systems on LE Roisin and LE Niamh, is €7.8m, exclusive of VAT. The construction of the first ship is well advanced in Appledore, UK. In addition, the process of the cutting of steel for the second ship began recently in the shipyard. As per the contract, the first ship is scheduled for delivery in early 2014. The second ship will follow one year later.

I am satisfied that the equipment issued to the Naval Service is in keeping with the most modern requirements and the highest international standards. The ongoing investment in the Naval Service will ensure that this remains to be the case.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

309. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Defence if he will outline his plans for the future and maintaining of the Reserve Defence Force's base on Bere Island, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21432/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Bere Island is a Defence Forces training resource used by both the Permanent Defence Force and the Reserve Defence Force. There are no plans to change the status of the facility and military training will continue on the Island.

Defence Forces Strength

310. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he is satisfied regarding the current strength of the Defence Forces including the Reserve at Army, Navy and Air Corps level; if any particular weaknesses have been brought to his attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21551/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, at 31 March 2013, the latest date for which details are available, was 9,189, comprising 7,375 Army, 781 Air Corps and 1,033 Naval Service personnel. This is against the agreed stabilised strength for the Permanent Defence Force of 9,500. No specific weaknesses have been brought to my attention. However, in the context of the current strength of the Permanent Defence Force being below the agreed stabilised strength, it is my intention that targeted recruitment will continue within the resource envelope allocated to Defence. With regard to the Reserve Defence Force, the total strength at 30 November 2012, the latest date for which figures are available was 4,978. This figure comprises 4,773 Army Reserve and 205 Naval Service Reserve personnel. Up to date strength figures for the Reserve Defence Force will be available once the ongoing process of the re-organisation of the Reserve

is complete and I will provide this information directly to the Deputy at that point.

A major re-organisation of the Permanent Defence Force has recently been completed. In addition, and in response to the findings of a Value for Money Review which was published in late 2012, the Reserve Defence Force is also being reformed and re-organised. These changes will ensure that the Defence Forces organisational structures are configured to maximise required capabilities.

The combination of the measures I have outlined will ensure that the Permanent Defence Force can continue to deliver required operational outputs for all approved Aid to the Civil Power and approved Aid to the Civil Authority requests. The Permanent Defence Force will also continue to meet Government requirements for overseas peace support operations. The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment, is also available for deployments in response to emergencies and crises.

Defence Forces Equipment

311. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the extent to which the upgrading of equipment has taken place in the Army, Navy and Air Corps; the degree to which any particular deficiencies have been identified; the proposals, if required, in response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21552/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The acquisition of new equipment for the Defence Forces remains a focus for me as Minister for Defence. However, it is imperative that the Department and the Defence Forces, similar to all other Government Departments, must take into account the current difficult economic environment we are now operating in. The budgetary situation will continue to dictate the level of funding available for new equipment and upgrades. Decisions will be made accordingly on a strictly prioritised basis with a view to maintaining the capability of all roles assigned by Government to the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. A particular focus is maintained in ensuring that modern and effective equipment is available for overseas peace support operations. In this regard, the personal equipment, which the individual soldier has at his/her disposal in Lebanon and on other overseas missions is second to none and compares very favourably with the equipment in use by other countries.

Investment in new equipment and upgrading of existing equipment for the Defence Forces is provided for under various subheads of the Defence Vote relating to Defensive Equipment, Transport, Aircraft, Naval Service Ships and Stores and Communications and Information Technology Equipment.

I am advised that the provision allocated in 2013 specifically for the purchase of defensive equipment and ammunition is €26.5m. This allows for the acquisition of a range of priority defensive equipment and munitions such as Force Protection Equipment, a new Ground Surveillance Radar system, a replacement programme for the 12.7mm Heavy Machine Gun and the continued implementation of a Rifle Enhancement Programme for the Steyr Rifle which has been in service for nearly 25 years.

The Rifle upgrade programme is a multi annual programme which represents one of the most significant investments the Government is making in terms of the impact it will have on Defence Forces personnel at the coal face. The project is currently the subject of a number of tender competitions, the results of which will dictate the value of the programme going forward. The provision for 2013 also provides for the upgrade and refurbishment programme of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal HOBOT robots. This is one of the most important current

programmes for the Defence organisation given the increased levels of call outs witnessed in recent years by the Defence Forces.

With regard to the Naval Service, my Department, in conjunction with the Naval Service, is overseeing the acquisition of two new Offshore Patrol Vessels. The cost of the provision of the two new ships is €108m, exclusive of VAT. In addition, the cost of providing a weapons system for the ships, similar to the systems on LE Roisin and LE Niamh, is €7.8m, exclusive of VAT. The construction of the first ship is well advanced in Appledore, UK. In addition, the process of the cutting of steel for the second ship began recently in the shipyard. As per the contract, the first ship is scheduled for delivery in early 2014. The second ship will follow one year later. In relation to the Air Corps, there are no plans for the acquisition of new aircraft at present but this has to be seen in the context of significant expenditure on the Air Corps in recent years.

I am satisfied that the level of resources and equipment available to the Defence Forces enables the Defence Forces to carry out their roles both at home and overseas in an efficient and effective manner.

Defence Forces Operations

312. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he is satisfied regarding the ability of the Defence Forces to meet the challenge of any emergency that might arise of security of natural disaster nature; the degree to which the Army, Navy and Air Corps can meet the challenge of such situations; if the necessary telecommunications and logistical equipment is adequately available in the event of such situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21553/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): My priority as Minister for Defence is to ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible. The involvement of the Defence Forces in responding to emergencies or security issues arises from requests for assistance from An Garda Síochána in an Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) role or from other agencies of the State in an Aid to Civil Authority (ATCA) role. In relation to security, primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order rests with An Garda Síochána. However, one of the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence (2000) is to provide ATCP which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. A wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies and the Defence Forces hold regular coordination and liaison meetings with An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

In relation to ATCA, the Framework for Major Emergency Management sets out the structure for enabling the Principal Response Agencies (An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and Local Authorities) to prepare for, and make a coordinated response to, major emergencies and the Defence Forces respond within that Framework. Representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both my Department and the Defence Forces, also ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment, commensurate with operational requirements, is available for deployments in response to emergencies and crises. I am satisfied that Defence Forces personnel have the most modern and effective range of equipment, including telecommunications and logistical equipment, needed to fulfil all roles that are assigned to them by Government in any emergency situations that may arise.

Questions - Written Answers
Defence Forces Personnel

313. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the extent to which the number of women serving at all ranks, in the Army, Navy and Air Corps has increased over the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21554/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The tables set out the number of women by rank serving in the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps at 31 December for each of the years 2003 to 2012, and at 31 March 2013, the latest date for which figures are available. These figures show that at 31 March 2013 there were a total of 565 serving in the Permanent Defence Force, a figure which equates to 6.15% of the overall strength of the Permanent Defence Force on that date. This compares favourably with a figure of 4.6% of women serving in the Permanent Defence Force on 31 December 2003. The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and to the full participation by women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. Unlike many other national armed forces, the Defence Forces have no restrictions as regards the assignment of men or women to the full range of operational and administrative duties. All promotions and career courses are open to both genders on merit.

The Defence Forces prides itself on providing a gender neutral working environment. Policies on equality are being constantly communicated to all ranks. The military authorities are alert and vigilant to this issue and are committed to addressing this matter in a continuing and proactive manner.

TABULAR STATEMENT

STRENGTH OF WOMEN IN THE ARMY 2004 - 31 MARCH 2013

-	LT	MAJ	BRIG	COL	LT	COM-DT	CA PT	LT	TO-TAL	SM	BQMS	CS	CQMS	SGTS	CPLS	TO-TAL	PTES	CA-DETS	TO-TAL
-	GEN	GEN	GEN		COL				OF-FRS							NCOS			
31-Dec-03					1	11	30	33	75			3	1	10	87	101	206	15	397
31-Dec-04					1	14	35	33	83			2	1	10	100	113	220	18	434
31-Dec-05					1	16	38	33	88			3	1	10	103	117	225	18	448
31-Dec-06					1	14	43	41	99			3	1	15	104	123	224	9	455
31-Dec-07					1	18	44	40	103			3	1	23	102	129	216	8	456
31-Dec-08					1	21	48	41	111			3	1	32	108	144	200	13	468
31-Dec-09					2	19	43	47	111			3	1	32	109	145	194	12	462
31-Dec-10					1	18	41	51	111			2	1	33	109	145	200	11	467
31-Dec-11					2	19	46	45	112			2	1	35	119	157	194	4	467
31-Dec-12					2	26	43	43	114			2		33	120	155	209	4	482
31-Mar-13					2	26	41	43	112			2	1	40	111	154	199	4	469

TABULAR STATEMENT

STRENGTH OF WOMEN IN THE AIR CORPS 2007 - 2012

-	LT	MAJ	BRIG	COL	LT	COM-DT	CAPT	LT	TO-TAL	SM	BQ MS	CS	CQ MS	SG TS	CP LS	TO-TAL	PTES	CA-DETS	TO-TAL
-	GEN	GEN	GEN		COL				OF-FRS							NC OS			
31-Dec-03							1	2	3			1			7	8	9	1	21
31-Dec-04							2	1	3			1			9	10	7	1	21
31-Dec-05							2	1	3			1		1	11	13	5	1	22
31-Dec-06							2	2	4			1		1	11	13	14	1	32
31-Dec-07							3	2	5			1		1	10	12	15	1	33
31-Dec-08							2	2	4			1		3	10	14	13	1	32
31-Dec-09							4	1	5			1		4	10	15	12	1	33
31-Dec-10							4	2	6			1		4	9	14	12		32
31-Dec-11							2	3	5			1		4	13	18	7		30
31-Dec-12							2	2	4	1				4	13	18	8		30
31-Mar-13							2	2	4	1				6	10	17	7		28

TABULAR STATEMENT

STRENGTH OF WOMEN IN THE NAVAL SERVICE 2007 - 2012

-	LT	MAJ	BRIG	COL	LT	COM DT	CA PT	LT	TO-TAL	SM	BQ MS	CS	CQ MS	SG TS	CPLS	TO-TAL	PTES	CA-DETS	TO-TAL
-	GEN	GEN	GEN		COL				OF-FRS							NCOS			
31-Dec-03							2	14	16						1	1	44	5	66
31-Dec-04							3	16	19						2	2	36	2	59
31-Dec-05							6	11	17						3	3	37	2	59
31-Dec-06							8	10	18						7	7	38	6	69
31-Dec-07							10	8	18						7	7	40	6	71
31-Dec-08						2	10	11	23						9	9	35	3	70
31-Dec-09						2	10	11	23						9	9	34	6	72
31-Dec-10						2	10	14	26						8	8	34	2	70
31-Dec-11						3	13	12	28						11	11	28	1	68
31-Dec-12						6	12	10	28					2	10	12	28	2	70
31-Mar-13						6	12	10	28					2	10	12	27	1	68

Maritime Surveillance

314. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the discussions, if any, he has had with his European colleagues in the context of a European contribution towards the costs associated with coastal surveillance from the point of view of security and-or prevention of terrorism and-or prevention of trafficking and drug smuggling in view of the extensive Irish national coastline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21555/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Naval Service conducts routine maritime surveillance patrols on a daily basis throughout Ireland's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The primary day-to-day tasking of the Naval Service is to provide a fishery protection service in accordance with the State's fishery protection legislation and our obligations as a member of the European Union. In its fishery protection role, the Naval Service is committed to having at least three vessels on patrol at any one time. However, when on patrol Naval Service vessels are multi-tasked in the sense that they also undertake general surveillance, security and other duties, often in conjunction with An Garda Síochána and the Revenue Commissioners who have primary responsibility for the prevention of people trafficking and drug trafficking respectively. Naval Service patrols are complemented by assistance provided by the Air Corps. The Air Corps' Maritime Squadron carries out aerial surveillance within the Irish EEZ using the two CASA maritime patrol aircraft which were acquired in 1994 under the terms of the 1991 to 1995 Fishery Protection Programme. These aircraft are equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance and communication equipment which offers aerial assistance to the Naval Service. The EU has provided funding towards the cost of purchase and upgrade of these aircraft.

Funding is available from the EU under the Fisheries Control Programmes to strengthen fishery surveillance systems in Member State countries. The Naval Service and the Air Corps, through my Department and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, apply on an annual basis for EU funding for projects that enhance their fisheries surveillance role. In recent years, my Department has received €0.325m (2010) and €1.073m (2011). The ship replacement programme accounted for €0.9m of the 2011 funding.

In relation to maritime surveillance generally, an Inter-Departmental Maritime Surveillance Working Group, chaired by the Department of Transport, was established under the auspices of the Marine Co-ordination Group. The Working Group is working towards the creation of a common information-sharing environment to enhance safety and security within the Irish maritime domain.

In addition, Ireland, along with six other EU Member States, participates in the EU Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N) which is an international co-ordination force that has led to a greater focus on intelligence exchange amongst countries to tackle large drug shipments by sea.

Overseas Missions

315. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the extent to which payment for costs incurred by the Defence Forces in respect of UN or EU overseas deployments remains up to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21556/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The UN reimburses some personnel and Contingent Owned Equipment costs in respect of contributions of personnel to UN led operations. Rates of reimbursement, fixed in accordance with UN categories of equipment and personnel, are agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ireland and the UN

for each mission. The only mission for which Ireland is currently entitled to reimbursement of some troop and equipment costs, is the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Since 1 January 2012, the total amount received from the United Nations in respect of contributions towards troop and other costs associated with the participation of Defence Forces personnel in UNIFIL is calculated at €13.4m. The amount currently owing to the Department of Defence by the United Nations is calculated at €9.9 million approximately. This amount includes €3.5 million in respect of the current UNIFIL mission and €6.4 million in respect of repatriation costs of equipment from the MINURCAT mission in Chad. The amount owing in relation to the MINURCAT mission is currently the subject of ongoing negotiations with the UN. Ireland is not entitled to any reimbursement in respect of Defence Forces participation in EU-led missions as all troop contributors to such missions are responsible for their own costs.

Question No. 316 answered with Question No. 85.

Defence Forces Properties

317. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he expects to be in a position to maintain the comprehensive network of military installations throughout the country in order to ensure adequately and a high level of preparedness for any eventualities of a security or national emergency nature; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21558/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): My Department's property portfolio is kept under constant review to ensure that adequate facilities are available for the Defence Forces to carry out the duties assigned to them by Government. As the Deputy is aware I have indicated to the House previously there are no plans for further barrack closures.

Targeted recruitment will ensure that into the future the Permanent Defence Force can continue to deliver all operational outputs required by Government in the domestic environment as well as for overseas peace support operations. The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment is also available for deployments in response to emergencies and crises. To this end I am satisfied that the Defence Forces are adequately resourced.

Question No. 318 answered with Question No. 85.

Defence Forces Properties

319. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the number and location of the various military installations throughout the country which are currently fully operational, those that have been earmarked for closure in the coming years; the extent of the savings projected arising from proposed closures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21560/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The military installations including permanently occupied barracks currently fully operational are set out in the following table. Whilst my Department's property portfolio is kept under constant review, as I indicated to the House previously there are no plans for further barrack closures. In addition to these installations a number of other smaller properties are used by Reserve Defence Force (RDF) Units throughout the country. As the Deputy is aware a major re-organisation of the Reserve is being implemented which has resulted in a new organisational structure for the Army Reserve based on a "Single Force" concept where Defence Forces Units have Permanent and Reserve elements. These

Units are based in Permanent Defence Force (PDF) installations throughout the country and in 16 locations outside of those installations. As a result a number of smaller properties currently occupied by the Reserve are being closed and will be disposed of. In accordance with standard practice my Department has contacted the various Government Departments and State Agencies to establish if those bodies have an interest in acquiring any of these properties. When my Department has exhausted all possible sales to other State Agencies and Government Departments the remaining properties will be disposed of by public tender/auction with the proceeds being used to fund the upgrading of Defence Forces equipment and infrastructure. As a result of these closures there will be some small savings on utilities and maintenance but it is not possible to quantify those savings at this stage. However, this new model for the Reserve will offer significant advantages in terms of training, improved interoperability and will enhance the overall capability of the Defence Forces. These changes will reduce direct expenditure on the Reserve by €11 million, whilst maintaining the budget for Reserve training activity.

FULLY OPERATIONAL MILITARY INSTALLATIONS

County	Installation
Cork	Kilworth Camp, Kilworth
	Naval Base, Haulbowline
	Collins Barracks
Donegal	Finner Camp, Bundoran
Dublin	Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel
	Cathal Brugha Barracks
	McKee Barracks
	St. Bricin's Hospital
Galway	Renmore Barracks
Kildare	Defence Forces Training Centre, Curragh Camp
Kilkenny	Stephens Barracks
Limerick	Sarsfield Barracks
Louth	Aiken Barracks, Dundalk
Meath	Gormanston Camp
Westmeath	Custume Barracks, Athlone
Wicklow	Glen of Imaal
	Kilbride Camp

Air Accident Investigations

320. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces have completed their investigation into the heavy landing by the Air Corps air ambulance on 19 June last; the results and recommendations on foot of the investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21563/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): In accordance with relevant legislation, my colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and I agreed that the Air Accident Investigation Unit (AAIU) in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport should investigate this accident. The AAIU has now completed its investigation and its Report, which was

published on 4 April 2013, is now available on the AAIU website (www.aaiu.ie).

The Report contains seven Safety Recommendations of which five relate to the Air Corps. Of these, two were implemented prior to the publication of the Report, whilst the remaining three are currently in the process of being implemented by the Air Corps.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

321. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will allow farmers to submit their single farm payment applications to their local district veterinary offices in view of the fact that it will speed up the process, as farmers are under pressure as a result of the fodder crisis, many of whom have to currently travel very long distances to be able to hand in their forms at central offices; if he will take into consideration that the online service is not a viable option for a large number of farmers who need a Department office within a realistic commutable distance for applications as complex and as important as the single farm payment and who urgently require their payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21095/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In order to improve its service to farmers, the Department has decided that it will acknowledge – either by text message or by post – all SPS application forms received in 2013. This is intended to assist those farmers, who had forgotten to submit their application as happens in many instances every year. In some instances, farmers are unaware that they had forgotten to submit their application until they are informed that no application has been received when they make enquires about the non-issue of their payments during the autumn.

In order to be in position to carry out this process, it was necessary to provide that 2013 SPS forms together with entitlement related applications should be submitted directly to the Department's Single Payment Unit, Portlaoise.

Forms may be submitted on-line, hand delivered or returned by post in the pre-addressed envelope sent out to every 2012 applicant under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme. An Express Post receipt is attached to each return envelope sent out and provides an acceptable proof of postage for retention by the applicant. A registered post receipt is also an acceptable proof of postage if such is required by my Department.

The submission of on-line Single Payment Scheme application forms has increased dramatically since the introduction of this facility in 2007 and amounted to over 65,000 applications in 2012 about half of all application forms. I am hopeful that the upward trend in the number of such applications will be maintained this year and I strongly urge farmers to use this option themselves or with the assistance of an approved agent. Such applications are easily traced, are acknowledged electronically and are more readily processed for payment.

The change in the procedure for the submission of paper applications will mean that many application forms will be received on an earlier date in the Single Payment Unit than in previous years. This in turn will greatly assist the early scanning of forms and the issuing of acknowledgements to farmers and indeed the processing to completion of such applications.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

322. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

if the remaining and outstanding agri-environment option scheme payments will be issued to farmers in consideration of the crisis the farmers are currently experiencing regarding the fodder shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21103/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the EU Regulations governing all area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check of all applications, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any AEOS payment can issue.

Successive EU audits have made it absolutely clear that compliance with the Regulations must be strictly adhered to and that all administrative checks must be passed and eligibility conditions met before payment issues. As a result, my Department is obliged to ensure that individual payments will not issue until all aspects of a farmer's application are in order, all outstanding documentation provided and all queries resolved. In most instances where payments are outstanding there remains an outstanding query on the application. These queries are being resolved on an ongoing basis and officials in my Department will have contacted the applicants concerned with the intention of issuing payment as soon as possible. I am of course conscious of the difficulties facing the farming community at present and this is why I am prioritising outstanding payments, including AEOS, and ensuring that they issue as soon as possible.

I am conscious that farmers are experiencing difficulties given the current fodder shortage. Payments are being processed as promptly as possible. Approximately 1,500 AEOS payments issued over the last 10 days, while close to a further 600 AEOS payments valued at just over €1.3m is expected to issue within the next week.

Sea Lice Controls

323. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the years that the lice control protocols have been in place for salmon cage installations, the number of cases in which there has been legal action or financial penalties brought against salmon cage operators that repeatedly fail to keep to the required levels; the penalties that can be imposed by his Department for such breaches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21108/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland's sea lice control protocols are operated by the Marine Institute and involve regular inspections of marine fin fish sites by Marine Institute Inspectors (sites are inspected 14 times per annum). Results of inspections are provided to the farm operators within 5 working days. Results are also reported to my Department and to other interested parties such as Inland Fisheries Ireland. Overall results and trends are published annually. Notices to treat are issued to operators if lice levels are found to be above treatment trigger levels.

These protocols are considered to be more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

- The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.
- Data obtained as a result of inspections is published and made widely available.
- Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

In 2008, the State introduced a new Pest Management Strategy, supplementing the control regime already in place. This has resulted in a steady decline in average sea lice numbers on farmed salmon since its inception.

Ireland's sea lice protocols have been the subject of detailed investigation by the EU Commission in response to a complaint from a member of the public in respect of the effects of sea lice on wild salmon. On 11 October 2012, the Commission closed its investigation of this complaint in the State's favour following its examination of all relevant matters. The Commission has also indicated that it regards the sea lice protocols operated in Ireland as representing best practice internationally.

Fish farm operators are required to comply fully with directions to treat fish and with other directions regarding lice control. In situations where treatment has not been sufficient to bring lice levels below treatment trigger levels the operators have been directed to take additional measures. These actions include additional sustained treatments, early fallowing of sites and accelerated harvesting. My Department is advised by the Marine Institute that fish farm operators have complied with all directions issued on this matter.

Sea Lice Controls

324. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason data of lice levels relating to salmon cage installations is only available from the Marine Institute two to three years after the event; if the data can be made publicly available within a month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21109/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Reports regarding the results of sea lice inspections are circulated on a monthly basis to stakeholders, including Inland Fisheries Ireland, Fishery owners representatives and Salmon Watch Ireland.

In addition, all data in relation to sea lice inspections is published annually. The complete results for the inspection programme in 2012 has been published (Irish Fisheries Bulletin No. 41) and is available in printed form or to download from the Marine Institute website at www.marine.ie. All previous reports are also available for download.

The annual reports are made freely available and contain all the inspection results, details of trends and issues and a full explanation of the monitoring and control process.

Sea Lice Controls

325. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if treatment levels are set at 0.5 lice per salmon in salmon cage installations, regardless of numbers of salmon in cages; in view of the fact that there will be at least 7.2m salmon in the proposed cages in Galway Bay, will the same treatment level take account of this number of fish and that consequently the levels of lice from these salmon breeding and proliferating, will be catastrophic to any wild salmon or sea trout traversing the bay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21110/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) has submitted an application to my Department for an Aquaculture and a Foreshore Licence for the cultivation of Finfish near Inis Oirr in Galway Bay. The application and its accompanying Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is currently being considered in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the 1933 Foreshore Act as amended.

The legislation provides for extensive consultation with stakeholders, including Inland Fish-

eries Ireland, which has responsibility for wild salmon stocks. The legislation also provides for a period of general public consultation. The public consultation stage of the process is now complete and submissions received are under active consideration by my Department.

All matters associated with the application including the impact, if any, on wild fish stocks, will be given very careful consideration by my Department.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on this application which is under active consideration as part of a statutory process.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

326. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the REP scheme payment for 2012 will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21135/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in February 2009 and received payments for the first three years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. These checks for 2012 payments have now been completed and the 75% year 4 payment amounting to €3180.92 issued for payment on 18th April 2013. The remaining 25% balancing payment amounting to €1136.04 issued for payment on 1st May 2013.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

327. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Galway may expect to receive a response regarding an appeal submitted under the agri-environment options scheme. [21138/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application form for the 2011 Agri-Environment Options Scheme on 16th May 2011 having completed the Form B option, indicating that he had no designated lands.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During this administrative checking process it was discovered that some parcels contained designated areas.

My Department subsequently rejected the application as the scheme Terms and Conditions had not been complied with. A letter issued to the person named on 12th March 2012 setting out this decision and providing the person named with an option to submit an appeal. An appeal was received in AEOS Section on 29th March 2012. Following the receipt of this appeal, officials in my Department requested additional information related to the designation of these lands from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The reply received from the National Parks and Wildlife Service confirmed that the person named had been notified that lands on his holding were designated. Following a review of the file and taking into account the information received, my Department issued a letter to the person named on 26th October 2012 upholding the original decision to reject the application from the scheme. This letter also gave the person

named the option to appeal the decision to the Agricultural Appeals Office. To date, there is no record of an appeal having been received in the Agricultural Appeals Office.

Inland Fisheries Issues

328. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that repair works to a fallen bridge on the border of south Tipperary and Waterford is being delayed until August-September by the Inland Fisheries; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this road is closed and will remain closed until August-September unless these works are carried out and that this is causing inconvenience to the road users in the area; if permission will be granted to allow works be carried out in the coming weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21145/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The subject included in this question is not under the remit of my Department.

Nitrates Usage

329. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of the current fodder crises, if all farmers will be allowed to use fertiliser with an increased amount of nitrogen and phosphates up to a maximum level of 10% above the levels agreed in the nitrates directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21150/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The rules governing the use of nitrates and phosphates are set out in the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Waters) Regulations 2010 commonly referred to as the Nitrates Regulations. Responsibility for these Regulations rests with my colleague, Deputy Phil Hogan, Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government.

These Regulations transpose the EU Nitrates Directive into law in Ireland with the objective of the Regulations being the protection of ground and surface waters including drinking water sources, through the application of measures to reduce the risk of nutrient enrichment from Agriculture to water.

The unusually wet weather in 2012 resulted in reduced fodder being available on many farms for last winter. The cold and wet weather in the early part of 2013 led to greatly reduced grass growth this Spring, culminating in an acute shortage of fodder.

Clearly the long-term answer to recent fodder shortages is increased grass production as soon as possible. I have asked the advisory services to prioritise advice to farmers in the period ahead and to focus on the optimum use of fertiliser in generating feed for the national herd.

I understand that sales to date this year of fertiliser are running significantly behind the corresponding levels of recent years. This indicates that, in the short term at least, there is significant scope for farmers to increase fertiliser usage, where appropriate, taking their location, soil fertility and other relevant factors into account, without exceeding the limits set out in the Nitrates Regulations.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

330. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a disadvantaged area payment has not been made to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21169/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While the person named submitted details of stock on his holding in 2012, this information does not confirm that the holding satisfies the definition of an Equine Breeding Enterprise for the purposes of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. Consequently, no payment is due to the person named in respect of the 2012 Scheme.

Forestry Premium Scheme Payments

331. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2013 forestry premium scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21200/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Forest Service has written to the applicant to clarify an anomaly in the Department's records regarding the applicant. As soon as clarification is received from the applicant, the Forest Service will review the matter with a view to processing the annual premium payment.

Coillte Teoranta Harvesting Rights Sale

332. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way he will ensure that the rural recreation aspect of the work of Coillte will be protected in the event of the forest crop being sold to private interests; his views on whether that this sale will threaten the current open access policy and lead to restrictions on access to this land; and if his plans include provisions which will ensure public access to Coillte land for recreational purposes. [21214/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Further to the Government decision that a concession for the harvesting rights to Coillte's forests be considered for sale, NewERA, Coillte, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have worked to examine the financial and other implications of developing the potential of Coillte's forest assets. Substantial work has been undertaken on the identification of the forestry assets involved, the determination of their value and the consideration of a number of issues associated with the proposed sale of the harvesting rights. The future management of the estate, the maintenance of existing amenities and public access to recreational land are some of the issues being considered as part of the analysis.

I am aware that Coillte currently manages 10 Forest Parks and over 150 recreation sites throughout Ireland and that their forests provide a range of recreational opportunities for the general public continuing a long tradition of open access to state owned forests. I am also conscious that such recreational facilities are also very valuable resources as tourism attractions in the various regions. In view of the importance of such recreational opportunities for citizens for ongoing recreation and for visitors during their stay in Ireland, any sale will take account of public access to recreational land. As stated by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in his contribution to the Dáil debate on this issue on 26th February last, it is the Government's intention that appropriate provisions would be included in any sale of Coillte harvesting rights to allow for the maintenance of the company's current open forest policy. While the consideration process is at an advanced stage, no decision has been taken, as yet. The outcome of the

overall analysis will be considered by the Government upon its completion.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Appeals

333. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal of a penalty on a REP scheme payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21224/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2008 and received payments for the first four years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. These checks have now been completed for 2012 and the 75% year 5 payment amounting to €5,885.58 issued for payment on 10th December 2012. The remaining 25% balancing payment amounting to €1,961.85 issued for payment on 18th December 2012.

The person named has submitted an appeal in respect of his 2011 REPS payment. Following an on farm inspection the person named was notified in writing on 12th April 2012 of a penalty linked to the erection of a greenhouse in close proximity to an archaeological feature under Measure 7 “*Protect features of historical and archaeological interest*” of the Terms and Conditions of the rural Environment Protection Scheme. The person named has appealed this decision and the appeal is currently under review. A decision will be made shortly and will issue to the person named.

Question No. 334 withdrawn.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

335. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made in relation to an agri-environment option scheme 3 plan lodged by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21235/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Agri-environment Options Scheme from the person named was received in my Department on 7 December 2012 and an acknowledgement letter has issued to the person named. The processing of all applications is nearing completion and I expect to be in a position to inform all applicants of the outcome shortly. In the event that any queries arise on the application of the person named during this process officials in my Department will be in direct contact with the person named.

Departmental Properties

336. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi-Unit Development Act

2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi-Unit Development Act within his Department. [21238/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Neither my Department nor the non commercial State Bodies funded by my Department, own or rent any properties in commercial complexes in which management companies are in place at this time.

In relation to the commercial State Bodies, this is an operational matter for the bodies themselves.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

337. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made on the application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare for the disadvantaged area scheme 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21257/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases were impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011 and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard.

The person named subsequently availed of the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. My Department has recently been advised of the successful outcome of this appeal. The person named is being notified of this in writing and payment will issue at an early date.

Fodder Crisis

338. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend the transport subsidy scheme for the importation of fodder in view of the continued difficulties being faced by farmers; if he will extend this scheme to cover marts and private merchants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21346/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In light of the continuing fodder problem, I announced last week that the duration of the Imported Fodder Transport Scheme has been extended until Friday 10 May.

I am satisfied that the volume of imported fodder is making a real difference on farms and assisting farmers through the current shortage. The extension of the scheme for a further week will build on this and ensure that further supplies are imported with the benefit of the transport subsidy.

Apart from this initiative on the fodder transport scheme, I have addressed the issue of credit facilities with the banks and the co-ops. The banks have been requested to take a flexible approach towards extending credit to farmer customers at this difficult time. The co-ops responded already with the introduction of interest free credit to farmers for the purchase of fertiliser in the month of May, which will be a key component in addressing this year's fodder problem.

I am keeping the matter under constant review.

Single Payment Scheme Expenditure

339. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the allocations made from the National Reserve for the years 2007 to 2012; and the numbers applying for such allocations on a county basis for each year. [21375/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The following table details the National Reserve allocations made by my Department for the scheme years 2007 – 2012. In addition this table includes the number of individual applications made on a county basis.

County	2007 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2007 Amount Allo- cated	2008 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2008 Amount Allo- cated	2009 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2009 Amount Allocated	2010 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2010 Amount Allocated	2011 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2011 Amount Allo- cated	2012 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2012 Amount Allocated
		€		€		€		€		€		€
CARLOW	193	2141 78.86	25	7519 6.86	12	61359.34	12	27578.99	13	3829 9.76	16	34782.62
CAVAN	163	1175 50.21	33	3534 1.68	31	52943.48	20	31667.66	21	1453 9.9	17	17695.66
CLARE	90	5987 5.55	55	1570 94.27	29	39915.39	21	50085.34	19	3520 5.92	21	41654.28
CORK	598	4854 01.17	155	5212 00.62	124	276311.02	79	129785.84	65	1739 73.64	45	66693.61
DONEGAL	2129	12535 57.11	96	1245 04.17	69	59910.92	61	47846.69	53	7230 4.52	39	32988.59
DUBLIN	55	4707 9.47	14	2234 0.04	3	10000	1		4	1290 0.8	9	11413.66
GALWAY	1115	6952 76.46	67	1571 64	45	57552.5	50	52139.07	52	9270 1.6	36	48790.9
KERRY	1044	5823 62.45	96	1640 17.41	77	128331.76	52	74363.1	57	6603 7.14	37	19535.02
KILDARE	155	1365 04.48	15	6740 0.05	9	47760.86	9	27608.72	7	1848 8.67	22	63818.02
KILKEN- NY	124	1273 37.3	36	1353 70.51	20	33090.04	17	38189.71	17	3738 0.4	25	39305.07
LAOIS	75	7974 1.34	23	1357 54.31	16	42728.87	20	54783.01	18	3766 2.22	14	10147.23
LEITRIM	311	1829 15.29	28	3014 8.45	32	15015.36	22	18642.46	23	1856 6.56	18	7509.61
LIMERICK	55	8586 9.37	27	1202 69.12	31	70429.69	20	25468	29	3525 7.04	20	28873.81
LONG- FORD	51	3117 2.69	17	3512 2.77	17	58942.24	12	18103.48	11	2125 2.47	11	15532.42
MAYO	1415	7367 66.9	66	8312 1.49	41	15423.49	43	56686.27	61	6917 3.03	38	32305.2
MEATH	204	1681 65.41	21	5796 5.52	12	42840.25	25	60568.77	28	7266 7.22	29	61704.72
MONAG HAN	98	7743 1.58	51	5042 9.28	32	42738.88	16	24978.93	21	3481 8.14	19	28056.32
OFFALY	103	8272 0.93	20	7493 4.87	19	37355.46	17	26769.34	18	4234 5.52	13	36633.37
ROSCOM- MON	434	3391 50.12	49	7706 5.08	31	34031.63	24	25089.62	21	4469 1.34	22	34630.6
SLIGO	280	1951 77.97	42	5965 1.83	22	26764.32	19	12699.62	13	1415 5.62	27	32107.33

Questions - Written Answers

County	2007 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2007 Amount Allo- cated	2008 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2008 Amount Allo- cated	2009 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2009 Amount Allocated	2010 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2010 Amount Allocated	2011 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2011 Amount Allo- cated	2012 Ap- pli- ca- tions	2012 Amount Allocated
		€		€		€		€		€		€
WATER- FORD	120	1290 78.49	23	8284 7.66	22	52508.13	21	49641.21	5	1411 7.55	13	25086.38
WEXFORD	265	3211 76.48	40	1038 67.76	28	73308.85	33	99493.03	29	6634 4.38	33	58121.56
WICKLOW	311	2598 47.49	15	1880 1.11	7	29215.63	9	29724.84	9	1522 2.2	5	15750.15
LOUTH	112	7385 0.09	13	3509 9.21	11	22326.18	7	24529.73	9	715 1.4	13	38547.94
TIPPER- ARY	221	2958 12.18	76	3028 94.59	53	230479.24	53	135459.59	43	8985 3.81	49	96695.74
WEST- MEATH	163	1731 36.43	24	8008 2.83	24	65817.17	22	44450.92	19	4588 5.37	15	17317.19
Totals	9884	6951 135.82	1127	2807 685.49	817	1627100.7	685	1186353.94	665	1190 996.22	606	915697

Farm Inspections

340. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farm inspections that have taken place in 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; and the amount of moneys which have been expended by his Department in relation to these inspections in each year. [21386/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Due to the volume of the information requested by the Deputy, it was not possible to provide it in the required time. I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

341. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has carried out any study or assessment to quantify any mitigating effects that arise regarding greenhouse gas emissions due to open grassland farming, the extensive hedgerow system and forestry in the State. [20502/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department, on an ongoing basis, provides funding to Teagasc and to Irish third level institutions for research into the best ways to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions through the land based sectors and forestry. In 2012 I announced the provision of more than €30 million to fund the latest round of research projects, €7M of which is climate related. The Department continues to monitor ongoing research both nationally and internationally in an effort to find suitable mitigation technologies and approaches.

One of the larger projects my Department has funded is the ‘*Gaseous Emissions and Land Use Network – GHG Ireland*’. This network aims to bring together, for a 4 year initiative, all principal investigators working in the field of agricultural climate change research. The main focus of the network is to improve our understanding of carbon stock changes in agricultural soils so that we can contribute to the development of a more robust inventory, and underpin future accounting for these categories. My Department, together with Dept of Environment Community and Local Government, has put a huge effort into negotiating a more favourable outcome on this decision.

There is close co-operation between my Department and the EPA to ensure that our respective environmental research programmes on greenhouse gas emissions are complimentary. Ireland is also engaged with the EU Joint Programming Initiative – Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change (JPI-FACCE). The first multi-country research under the JPI FACCE programme was launched at the start of 2013. Ireland is involved with other EU countries, and the USA, Canada and New Zealand also participate.

Ireland is a founder member of the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases which was established in December 2009. The objective of this Alliance is to pool the resources of like-minded countries and so enable the agriculture sector to continue to reduce emissions. The work of the Alliance is focused on three Research Groups; Livestock, Crops and Rice. Teagasc represent Ireland on the Livestock and Crops Research Groups.

In recent years, a number of important reports have been initiated on these issues including the project '*Celticflux*' was funded by the EPA under STRIVE. It provided measurement and modelling of greenhouse gas fluxes from grasslands and a peatland in Ireland; a hedgerow mapping project by Teagasc where all mature hedgerows wider than 2m have been mapped. This project found that approximately 450,000 Ha, or 6.4%, of the country is covered by hedgerows, individual trees, small woodland patches and scrub - nearly the equivalent area of Co. Tipperary. This map database will be freely available via the Teagasc website in the near future.

An '*Additions and refinements to the Irish forest carbon accounting and reporting tool*' project which involves multidisciplinary collaboration between several national institutions, will focus on applying improved estimates of CO₂ emission factors to afforested organic soils and organo-mineral soils; refining the modelling of soil carbon stocks and changes in mineral soils using a spatial framework; detecting deforestation and disturbance events from medium resolution hypertemporal optical satellite imagery and characterising them using higher spatial resolution optical and microwave images; developing methodologies to investigate the fate and management of forest deadwood carbon pools after disturbance events; and constructing algorithms to quantify changes to deadwood carbon.

The combined outputs from these research activities will be assimilated into CARBWARE, thereby improving the national reporting capacity. Close collaboration with the Irish GHG network will ensure standardisation of outputs, with delivery of geodatabases derived from the research to support DAFM and Forest Service forest management.

The results of this research, allied with data on land and forestry activity that is supplied by my Department through the Central Statistics Office, inform the work of the Environmental Protection Agency which has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the national inventory for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. One of the most important components of this inventory is the estimation of carbon sequestration of Irish land use.

Clearly, Ireland is deeply committed to research that is aimed at improving parameters of production, environment, and socio-economics. It is vital that the results of this research are implemented with the help of our stakeholders in agri-food, so that we can guarantee the supply of sustainable food into the future. while combating climate change.

International and EU Focus:

At the highest international level, the Department of Agriculture has actively participated in meetings and conferences of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) over the past number of years. Throughout this process, Ireland has been the main driver within the EU for a UNFCCC decision on agriculture and is leading the EU effort which seeks the establishment of a work programme on agriculture.

Ireland has also been raising the issue of agriculture at EU Commission level. In this regard Minister Hogan and myself as well as officials of our two departments, have worked closely together. We both met with the Commissioner for Climate Change in September 2011 and both our departments have continued to press the issue in 2012. In October the Commission said that they “understand and acknowledge” the “nature and carbon efficiency of the agriculture sector in Ireland, as well as its importance on economic and social grounds”. This represents a significant step forward for Irish agriculture following a great deal of work in the past 18 months.

Ireland, through my Department currently holds the lead negotiator role for the EU on agriculture for the UNFCCC sessions. The Bonn session, in June 2013 during our Presidency of the EU, presents an opportunity to further raise the profile of agriculture both within and outside the EU, with the aim of advancing the discussion further, including to Ministerial level at the next UNFCCC Conference of the Parties in Warsaw next November.

It is important to acknowledge the help and assistance of the D/ECLG, as lead Department on climate change, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Teagasc and the EPA in this regard. Significant advances have been made as a result of a great deal of work by all concerned. There is a lot more work to do, but we are seeing some positive movement at UNFCCC and EU levels and I can assure you that we are fully committed to continue this work in meeting the challenges ahead.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

342. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive their agri-environment options scheme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21417/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the Agri-environment Options Scheme with effect from the 1 November 2010 and full payments totalling €237.59 and €3,786.06 issued in respect of 2010 and 2011 respectively.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. The person named was selected for a ground inspection which took place on 20 September 2012. During this inspection, issues of non-compliance with the terms and conditions of the scheme were noted in relation the Tree Planting – Standard action which resulted in a penalty being imposed. A letter issued to the person named informing his of this penalty and giving him the option to appeal the decision. My Department is currently processing the application on this basis and I expect payment in respect of the 2012 scheme year to issue shortly.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

343. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will take steps to expedite an application for agri-environment options scheme payment due to a farmer (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21436/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the Agri-environment Options Scheme with effect

from the 1 November 2010 and full payments totalling €830.24 and €4,928.07 issued in respect of 2010 and 2011 respectively.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks for the 2012 scheme year issues were identified in relation to the claimed areas on the Natura action which resulted in a penalty being imposed. Officials in my Department are currently finalising the application on this basis and I expect payment in respect of the 2012 scheme year to issue shortly.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

344. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21438/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following recent direct contact by my Department with the person named, an outstanding matter regarding the application of the person named under the 2011 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has been resolved. Payment will issue in the coming days directly to the nominated bank account.

Animal Diseases Issues

345. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will ensure his Department will provide the most up to date advice and guidance regarding an advance of the next breeding season schmallenberg disease in order to keep losses to a minimum as both sheep and cattle farmers mainly in the south of the country suffered considerable losses this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21439/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is continuing to monitor developments in relation to this recently discovered virus which is spread by midges.

It is expected, that as the vector active season progresses over the summer there will be significant spread of the virus and infection. The effects of the spread of the virus will depend on the stage of pregnancy when adult animals are infected. Further spread to unaffected herds/flocks in northern and western counties is very likely to occur during the 2013 vector season but should have relatively little impact in non-pregnant livestock.

It is generally impractical to attempt midge control measures except for valuable breeding stock and it would be hoped that a strategy of exposure of non-pregnant animals may in fact be beneficial pending the development of an effective vaccine. Exposed animals develop a strong immunity and are unlikely to suffer any ill-effects if exposed to the virus on a subsequent occasion. If this viral infection becomes endemic the ill-effects are likely to be confined to pregnant sheep that have not been previously exposed as there is no evidence of clinical disease in adult sheep. Based on Australian experience in vaccinating against a similar virus/disease (Akabane virus infection) it is anticipated that vaccination is likely to be an effective tool in control of the SBV infection. A commercial vaccine is in development and my Department is monitoring developments closely.

Fodder Crisis

346. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend the closing date of the fodder transport subsidy scheme from 3 May 2013 at least to mid May; if he will extend the existing distribution network to livestock marts and private merchants to expedite the alleviation of the fodder crisis across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21440/13]

350. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend the closing date of the fodder transport subsidy scheme from 3 May to at least mid May; if he will extend the existing distribution network to livestock marts and private merchants to expedite the alleviation of the fodder crises here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21525/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 346 and 350 together.

In light of the continuing fodder problem, I announced last week that the duration of the Imported Fodder Transport Scheme has been extended until Friday 10th May. I am satisfied that the volume of imported fodder is making a real difference on farms and assisting farmers through the current shortage. The extension of the scheme for a further week will build on this and ensure that further supplies are imported with the benefit of the transport subsidy.

Apart from this initiative on the fodder transport scheme, I have addressed the issue of credit facilities with the banks and the co-ops. The banks have been requested to take a flexible approach towards extending credit to farmer customers at this difficult time. The co-ops responded already with the introduction of interest free credit to farmers for the purchase of fertiliser in the month of May, which will be a key component in addressing this year's fodder problem. I am keeping the matter under constant review.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

347. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will ensure that the forthcoming single farm payment advance disadvantaged areas, agri-environment option scheme, REP scheme payments are made at an early date in view of the current fodder and cash flow crisis by the farming community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21441/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am acutely aware of the financial and other difficulties being experienced by some farmers as a result of recent unseasonable weather, with difficult conditions experienced on farms last summer having been compounded by an extended winter.

In light of the difficulties experienced by farmers in sourcing fodder supplies, I announced, on 24th April, the allocation of €1 million to fund the Imported Fodder Transport Scheme, which is designed to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage (hay, silage, haylage) from outside the island of Ireland. In light of the continuing difficulties being experienced last week, I extended the duration of the scheme until 10th May. I also confirmed that maize silage is eligible under the scheme. I am pleased to note that since the introduction of this Scheme that significant quantities of fodder have been imported and are reaching those in most need.

In terms of EU payments, it will be recalled that my successful approach to Commissioner

Ciolos for agreement to making an advance payment of the 2012 Single Farm Payment was prompted by the very wet weather experienced throughout last summer. Mindful of ongoing difficulties, I have decided that a formal request should again be made to the EU Commission seeking agreement to pay an advance from 16 October of the 2013 Single Farm Payment which, it being the first day of the new EU financial year, is the earliest potential payment date and almost 2 months ahead of the standard timeline. Payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme are scheduled to begin issuing in September 2013.

Under the EU Regulations governing all area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check of all applications, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any agri-environment payment can issue.

2013 advance payments under REPS and AEOS cannot be made until SPS applications are submitted and validated and a cross check between the area contained in the agri-environment application and the SPS application is successfully completed. Successive EU audits have made it absolutely clear that compliance with both these requirements and EU Regulations must be strictly adhered to and eligibility conditions met before any payment issues.

While my Department commits to commencing agri-environment payments as early as possible, due to the requirement to complete these administrative checks, I expect that the 2013 agri-environment scheme payments of REPS and AEOS will commence in the final quarter of 2013.

Approximately 1,500 payments AEOS payments have issued over the last 10 days, while close to a further 600 AEOS payments valued at just over €1.3m is expected to issue within the next week.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

348. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on the appeal for a disadvantaged area scheme payment by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21443/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases were impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011 and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard.

The person named subsequently availed of the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. However, I understand that the Appeals Committee has been in direct contact with the person named and that the additional information sought has recently been supplied to the Committee. The person named will be notified of the outcome, in writing, once the process is completed.

Coillte Teoranta Harvesting Rights Sale

349. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position in relation to the proposed sale of Coillte's harvesting rights (details supplied); his views on the impact this may have for this country and particularly for County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21447/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Further to

the Government decision that a concession for the harvesting rights to Coillte's forests be considered for sale, NewERA, Coillte, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have worked to examine the financial and other implications of developing the potential of Coillte's forest assets. Substantial work has been undertaken on the identification of the forestry assets involved, the determination of their value and the consideration of a number of issues associated with the proposed sale of the harvesting rights. These include, *inter alia*, the possible impact on the timber industry and public access to recreational land.

I am aware of the significance of the timber processing sector both economically, in terms of exports and employment, and socially, in terms of the location of those jobs which are predominantly in rural areas. I am also aware that Coillte currently manages 10 Forest Parks and over 150 recreation sites throughout Ireland and that their forests provide a range of recreational opportunities for the general public continuing a long tradition of open access to state owned forests. In view of the importance of such recreational opportunities for citizens for ongoing recreation and for tourism, any sale will take account of public access to recreational land. As stated by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in his contribution to the Dáil debate on this issue on 26th February last, it is the Government's intention that appropriate provisions would be included in any sale of Coillte harvesting rights to allow for the maintenance of the company's current open forest policy. While the consideration process is at an advanced stage, no decision has been taken, as yet. The outcome of the overall analysis will be considered by the Government upon its completion.

Question No. 350 answered with Question No. 346.

Fodder Crisis

351. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will discuss with all suppliers of feed stuff for animals in order to request them to reduce their prices to try to alleviate the pressure on struggling farmers who cannot afford to feed their livestock at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21533/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In light of the continuing fodder problem, I announced last week that the duration of the Imported Fodder Transport Scheme has been extended until Friday 10th May.

I am satisfied that the volume of imported fodder is making a real difference on farms and assisting farmers through the current shortage. The extension of the scheme for a further week will build on this and ensure that further supplies are imported with the benefit of the transport subsidy.

Apart from this initiative on the fodder transport scheme, I have addressed the issue of credit facilities with the banks and the co-ops. The banks have been requested to take a flexible approach towards extending credit to farmer customers at this difficult time. The co-ops responded already with the introduction of interest free credit to farmers for the purchase of fertiliser in the month of May, which will be a key component in addressing this year's fodder problem.

Grant Payments

352. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if, in view of the farming crisis and the next round of grants to be made available to farmers, the provision of a grant for the purpose of building a hay shed will be made a priority (details

supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21538/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The current programme of on-farm investment schemes operated by my Department closes for applications at the end of this year and provides grant-aid for investments in relation to a number of specific areas such as dairy equipment, sheep fencing/handling and rainwater harvesting. No decision has yet been made in relation to the targeted areas which will be the focus of such grant-aid under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme.

Coillte Teoranta Harvesting Rights Sale

353. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding Coillte harvesting rights (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21545/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Further to the Government's decision that a concession for the harvesting rights to Coillte's forests be considered for sale, NewERA, Coillte, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have worked to examine the financial and other implications of developing the potential of Coillte's forest assets. Substantial work has been undertaken on the identification of the forestry assets involved, the determination of their value and the consideration of a number of issues associated with the proposed sale of the harvesting rights. These include, *inter alia*, the possible impact on the timber industry and public access to recreational land.

In relation to possible impact on the timber industry, the Coillte State Assets Steering Group, comprising of representatives from NewERA, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department, met with the Chairman and other representatives of the Irish Timber Council, on 13th March 2013 at which the industry expressed their concerns regarding the proposed sale of Coillte harvesting rights. I am aware that the Council's main concerns are the continuity of supply of timber to the sawmill sector, the potential prices of timber and the overall implications for their businesses and jobs. The Steering Group is also considering the report, by EPS Consulting for the Irish Timber Council, on "*The impacts on the sawmill sector arising from the proposed sale of Coillte's harvesting rights – February 2013*".

Coillte currently manages 10 Forest Parks and over 150 recreation sites throughout Ireland and their forests provide a range of recreational opportunities for the general public continuing a long tradition of open access to state owned forests. As the Government and I are aware of the concerns expressed about the implications for access to such recreational opportunities, any sale will take account of public access to recreational land. As stated by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in his contribution to the Dáil debate on this issue on 26th February last, it is the Government's intention that appropriate provisions would be included in any sale of Coillte harvesting rights to allow for the maintenance of the company's current open forest policy. While the consideration process is at an advanced stage, no decision has been taken, as yet. The Government is fully conscious of the concerns that have been raised by the general public, recreational groups, the timber processing sector, trade unions and elected representatives in relation to the Coillte sale proposal. The outcome of the overall analysis will be considered by the Government upon its completion.

Coillte Teoranta Harvesting Rights Sale

354. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his

views on the sale of Coillte harvesting rights (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21569/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Further to the Government's decision that a concession for the harvesting rights to Coillte's forests be considered for sale, NewERA, Coillte, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have worked to examine the financial and other implications of a potential transaction. Substantial work has been undertaken on the identification of the forestry assets involved, the determination of their value and the consideration of a number of issues associated with the proposed sale of the harvesting rights. These include, *inter alia*, the possible impact on the timber industry, public access to recreational land, environmental and social impacts and consequential implications for the company.

As part of the consideration process, a number of detailed financial, technical and other specialist reports were prepared for Coillte, by external specialist consultancy bodies, in full consultation with the Board of Coillte and its executive management. The reason for such detailed and extensive consideration is that it is essential that any decision is based on the most accurate, comprehensive information possible. As I have said previously, the Government will proceed with caution in relation to this matter and no final decision has been taken, as yet. The outcome of the overall analysis will be considered by the Government upon its conclusion.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

355. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding single farm payment that were claimed by a person as an individual in 2011, but the farming set up is now run by them through a limited company; if the company can continue to claim the payments originally activated by the individual; the additional measures, if any, they need to take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21576/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Where an individual farmer sets up a limited company the Single Payment entitlements may be transferred to that company provided the main business of the company is carrying on the business of farming. A Transfer of Entitlement application form, available on my Department's website, must be completed requesting the transfer of entitlements. The person must ensure that they include the appropriate paperwork such as the Company Registrar Printout and the Memorandum of Articles of Association. Payments may continue to be claimed by the Company by submitting a valid Single Payment application form which has been signed appropriately and includes sufficient eligible hectares to support the number of entitlements.

The herd number should also be transferred from the individual farmers to the Company.

Child Care Services Provision

356. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there are plans to close the Mol an Óige residential care home and outreach service for children and young persons in Letterkenny, County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21113/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has sought the information requested by the Deputy from the HSE and I will provide the Deputy with the information as soon as it becomes available.

Child Care Reports

357. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has considered the findings of the child law project report which indicates that children in County Donegal are ten times more likely to be put into State care; her views on the report; the plans in place to ensure that there are appropriate facilities in place for the children concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21114/13]

358. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has considered the findings of the child law project report which indicates that children in County Donegal are ten times more likely to be put into State care; her views on the findings; the plans put in place by her to reduce this figure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21118/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 357 and 358 together.

The Child Care Law Reporting Project (CCLRP) is an independent project established under Section 3 of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2007, in accordance with the Regulations made under that Act, with the support of the One Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The aims and objectives of the project are to:

- Provide information to the public on child care proceedings in the courts;
- Conduct research on these proceedings in order to promote debate and inform policy-makers;
- Make recommendations to address any short-comings in the child care system identified by the research;
- Assist in the implementation of these recommendations;
- Promote confidence in the child care system.

The project pursues its aims and objectives by attending the courts where child care cases are heard in order to report on those proceedings while protecting the anonymity of the children and their families, in accordance with a Protocol drawn up by its Director. The CCLRP will publish reports of child care cases for the public and all relevant stake-holders at a frequency and in a form to be determined by the Director. It will also collect and analyse data from the proceedings, publish reports on the nature and outcomes of the child care proceedings and promote a public debate on the issues raised through seminars and conferences.

The project is in its early stages and it would be unwise to reach any firm conclusions based on the very limited information available at this stage. The CCLRP is scheduled to run for five years to seek to determine a range of issues such as that mentioned by the Deputy. Officials from my Department are in touch with the project team and I understand that the intention is for the project to publish its first interim overview report in Autumn 2013. At this time it may be possible to identify any emerging issues requiring policy consideration.

I am not entirely clear as to the origin of the figures quoted by the Deputy. However I can confirm that Court Services statistics indicate that 2 Care Orders and 22 Interim Care Orders were granted in Donegal in 2011. The HSE's Review of Adequacy Report for the same period indicates that the total number of children in care in Donegal in 2011 was 161 (2.6% of child population). This figure is broadly in line with percentages in other parts of the country.

Inter-Country Adoptions

359. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will confirm for each of 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, the number of children adopted by State residents from each of Russia, Commonwealth of Independent States including Russia and from all foreign jurisdictions. [21193/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The statistics on intercountry adoption registrations broken down by country are in the table. Registrations from Russia were as follows: 100 in 2009; 80 in 2010; 124 in 2011; and 49 in 2012.

Total number of adoptions recognised between 2009 and 2012, where the adopters were habitually resident in Ireland and held a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the adoption. (Section 5, Adoption Act 1991 and Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010 refers).

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012
Belarus	0	0	0	0
Cambodia	0	3	0	0
China	10	9	6	1
Colombia	1	0	0	0
Ethiopia	21	75	42	32
India	0	0	0	10
Kazakhstan	7	1	4	0
Mexico	16	10	3	1
Peru	1	0	0	0
Philippines	0	0	1	0
Romania	0	0	0	0
Russia	100	80	124	49
South Africa	0	0	0	0
Taiwan	2	1	1	3
Thailand	6	2	0	2
Ukraine	2	2	0	0
United States of America	4	7	7	19
Uzbekistan	1	0	0	0
Vietnam	136	10	0	0
Total	307	200	188	117

Departmental Properties

360. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department and agencies under its aegis, who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi Unit Development Act 2011; if she will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if she will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and her views on the implementation process of the Multi Unit Development act within her Department. [21240/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can confirm to the Deputy that the provisions of the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011 do not apply to any properties under the control of my Department or its agencies.

Youth Services

361. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 199 of 25 April 2013, if she will investigate the Kerry Diocesan Youth Service funding. [21277/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The overall budget for the youth sector in 2013 is €53.498 million. Within this total funding, €1.75 million has been provided for a new capital funding programme. This funding supports the delivery of a range of youth work programmes and services for all young people, including those from disadvantaged communities, by the voluntary youth work sector. The Youth Service referred to by the Deputy administers a number of youth projects under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme and one Youth Information Service and the allocation provided by my Department for these projects is €511,465 in 2013. Having regard to the savings requirements identified in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, which amount to €5.393 million in 2013, my Department has tried to ensure in the determination process for the allocations that front-line youth services, particularly those for the most vulnerable young people, are protected as far as possible from the impact of any necessary reductions in funding.

There is no doubt that the current budgetary situation is challenging for many organisations. In considering how best to manage within the allocations available, organisations are being asked to consider the scope for reducing administration costs and other overheads and to work closely with their local VEC that administers the funding on behalf of my Department, in order to maintain the front-line services for young people particularly for those young people who may be disadvantaged. My Department is developing a new youth policy framework for publication later this year. The new youth policy framework will aim to enhance the provision of youth services and activities and will, *inter alia*, promote co-ordination between Government Departments and youth sector organisations with a view to maximising the effectiveness of the State funding available to support services for young people in future years.

Foster Care Provision

362. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress made to date in relation to each of the actions set down in the Health Information and Quality Authority report, Inspection of the Health Service Executive Dublin North West Local Health Area Fostering Service in the HSE Dublin North East Region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21338/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): HIQA undertakes inspection of foster care services against the National Standards for Foster Care, under Section 69 of the Child Care Act 1991. The purpose of foster care inspections is to review compliance with regulations and standards for all children. HIQA's inspection methodology includes interviewing HSE managers and social workers, a sample of children, carers and birth parents and review a range of files, including complaints.

Foster care services in the HSE Dublin North West Area have been inspected by HIQA on three occasions since September 2009, most recently in October 2012. Progress was noted

particularly in the area of foster care assessment, approval and training with all general foster carers approved and significant improvements in the area of relative foster carers. Some 96% of children in foster care had been visited by a social worker within the preceding six months. Notwithstanding such progress, I was concerned to note that inspectors found that some deficits identified previously had not been rectified. Allegations made against a small number of foster carers had not been fully resolved. Inspectors found that there were inadequacies in systems to assess risk and to investigate and take timely action in response to concerns. File keeping, data collection and analysis were also found to be lacking.

The inspection also found that sufficient foster carers have not been recruited within the area. This has provided difficulties in making placements and matching children with particular needs with the most suitable carers. Recruitment of foster carers is of concern more generally. It is intended to conduct a national recruitment campaign in the coming months. An Action Plan to address the weaknesses identified was prepared by HIQA. In order to ensure the Action Plan is fully implemented, I have asked the HSE to set up a high-level oversight process to be led by the Head of Quality Assurance to ensure implementation of all the HIQA recommendations. This group is now established and includes Dr. Valerie O'Brien of UCD who has researched extensively in the area foster care. The group will report to me on progress on a monthly basis. I expect to receive the first of these reports shortly. Recently, I met Mr. Gordon Jeyes, who is Chief Executive Designate of the Child and Family Support Agency, to review the actions under way to address the critical issues identified.

Early Childhood Education

363. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if any exceptions may be made for a child (details supplied) in County Kildare whose parents wish to utilise the free pre-school year this year even though the child fall just outside the age limit; the options open to the child's parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21430/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The ECCE programme provides a free preschool year to all eligible children. Approximately 68,000 children are availing of the ECCE programme in the current school year. Children are eligible to avail of the free preschool year if they are aged more than 3 years and 2 months and less than 4 years and 7 months at 1 September in the relevant year. Children born between 2 February 2009 and 30 June 2010 will qualify for the free preschool year in September 2013 and children born between 2 February 2010 and 30 June 2011 will qualify for the programme in September 2014. As the child referred to by the Deputy was born in July 2010, he is below the age range for eligibility for the programme in the 2013-14 school year. If a child qualifies for the free preschool year and is also eligible to enrol in primary school, it is a matter for the parents to choose which option they wish the child to avail of. The objective of the ECCE programme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to eligible children in the year before they commence primary school. To achieve this, services participating in the preschool year are expected to provide age-appropriate activities and programmes to children within a particular age cohort. For this reason, it is appropriate to set minimum and maximum limits to the age range within which children will qualify. There is no provision under the programme to enrol children who are below the qualifying age.

Adoption Records Protection

364. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in rela-

tion to the inter-country adoption costs, if she will request a copy of the report commissioned by the Adoption Authority of Ireland, in relation to a review of the fee schedule and costs being quoted by an Adoption Agency (details supplied), and if the result of the review will be published. [21463/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the Adoption Act 2010, the accreditation of agencies providing adoption services is a matter for the Adoption Authority. The Authority is obliged to fully satisfy itself of the fitness of any persons or body of persons to provide and undertake adoption services. This is covered in some detail by the Adoption Act, 2010 (Accredited Bodies) Regulation 2010. The Authority is examining a number of issues in relation to accredited agencies in general, including the levels of fees being charged by Irish agencies in relation to international norms. The Authority has indicated that the level of fees being charged by one agency, ARC, is in line with international norms. However, the Authority has asked ARC to amend the fee payment schedule to produce a more balanced staged payments structure. The Authority will advise me of the outcome of this examination in due course. My Department is examining the role of accredited agencies under the Adoption Act 2010, including the issue of operating costs. I am anxious to ensure such agencies are underpinned by sustainable financial structures which operate within international norms for adoption. Most importantly, all fee structures should be set at an appropriate level and deliver transparency for all the parties involved.

Capital Expenditure Programme Issues

365. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding childcare capital grant 2013 funding in respect of a group (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21543/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I was successful in securing €2.75m in capital funding in Budget 2013 to support the ongoing improvement of the childcare sector via the 2013 Childcare Capital Programme. This programme is being implemented by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Both community not-for-profit childcare facilities and private childcare facilities currently participating in one of the three childcare programmes implemented by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs were eligible to apply for a grant under the Programme. The closing date for applications was 30th April.

I understand that there has been significant interest in the programme, with almost 1,400 applications with a value of more than €6m submitted before the closing date. Pobal has now commenced the process of appraising all of the applications. Each application is competing on its own merits with every other application received. It is expected that Pobal will be in a position to make recommendations to my Department before the end of June.

Regulatory Impact Assessment Usage

366. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the action he proposes to take in view of the fact that no regulatory impact assessment was conducted objectively into the review the draft tobacco products directive despite the fact that all Government Departments are mandated to conduct a regulatory impact analysis to objectively look at legislative proposals and examine the reasons for same; the alternatives to it; the cost and the benefits; his views on whether the failure to conduct the impact assessment means that the Government has failed to take into account the impact of the EU proposals in the draft directive on 120 local jobs in a

Mullingar factory, County Westmeath, despite jobs being a top priority of this Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21090/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In line with the Regulatory Impact Assessment Guidelines (RIA) published by the Department of the Taoiseach, my Department is undertaking a Regulatory Impact Analysis on the Tobacco Products Directive Proposal. A key element of the RIA process is consultation with key stakeholders. As you are aware a Public Consultation on the Tobacco Products Directive took place earlier this year and my Department has consulted and is continuing to consult with other key Government Departments in relation to this matter. As the Deputy is aware this proposal is currently under discussion by all Member States and at this stage no conclusion has been reached on the particular Article of the Directive which relates to the industry referred to in your question.

Medicinal Products Availability

367. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider reversing the decision made by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics not to make available pirfenidone for patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis based on economic grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21750/13]

369. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a review is planned for the treatment of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis with the drug pirfenidone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21788/13]

370. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 238, 239 and 243 of 18 April 2013, the position regarding the progress of negotiations ongoing in relation to securing Pirfenidone for those diagnosed with Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis; if there is a deadline in place towards finalising these discussions to enable the drug to be provided to patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21938/13]

371. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health if he is concerned at the decision of the Health Service Executive to refuse funding, on economic grounds, for the drug Pirfenidone, which is the only effective treatment for lung fibrosis, a rare and extremely debilitating disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21990/13]

401. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update as to when the drug pirfenidone will be available in the Irish market for sufferers of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21451/13]

402. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will make pirfenidone readily available for sufferers of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis; or if his Department will consider providing funding to sufferers of IPD so they can avail of pirfenidone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21459/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367, 369 to 371, inclusive, 401 and 402 together.

The HSE has received an application for the inclusion of pirfenidone in the GMS and community drugs schemes. The application is being considered in line with the procedures and timescales agreed last year by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) for the assessment of new medicines.

In accordance with these procedures, the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE)

conducted a pharmacoeconomic evaluation of pirfenidone and concluded that, at the submitted price, pirfenidone is not cost-effective for the treatment of patients with mild to moderate idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

The NCPE report is an important input to assist decision making and informs further discussions between the HSE and the manufacturer of the drug. The HSE is currently in negotiations with the manufacturers of pirfenidone and therefore it would not be appropriate to comment further while these negotiations are ongoing.

The HSE assessment process is intended to arrive at a decision on the funding of pirfenidone that is clinically appropriate, fair, consistent and sustainable. The HSE understands that patients and clinicians are very anxious that a decision be made as soon as possible.

Water Fluoridation

368. **Deputy Dara Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to change the water fluoridation policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21568/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Water fluoridation and the use of appropriate fluorides is a major plank of public health policy in Ireland in the prevention and management of tooth decay. In 2002 the Forum on Fluoridation, which was established to review this policy, concluded that the fluoridation of public piped water supplies should continue as a public health measure.

The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health, established in 2004, monitors new and emerging issues on fluoride and its effects. It advises that the balance of scientific evidence worldwide confirms that water fluoridation, at the optimal level, does not cause any ill effects and is the safest and most cost effective method of protecting the oral health of the population. The opinion of the Expert Body is supported by the World Health Organisation; the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the Public Health Service and the Surgeon General of the United States; the World Dental Federation; the International Association for Dental Research; the Royal College of Physicians of England and by major international scientifically validated reviews in many countries. The effects of fluoridation on health and related matters are kept under constant review. *Questions Nos. 369 to 371, inclusive, answered with Question No. 367.*

Medical Card Applications

372. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the review of a medical card will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [21086/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Health Insurance Claims

373. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health if he is considering reducing payments made to doctors if they fail to file private health insurance paperwork on time in view of the fact that it costs the State €61 million per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21094/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Health Service Executive is continuing a drive to reduce the time taken to submit claims to private health insurance companies. It should be noted that the non timely completion of paperwork does not cost the HSE €61m, as the money does get paid. However, it is acknowledged that there is a timing issue and that is what the HSE is focused on. The number of days taken for consultants to complete forms has reduced from an average of 62 days in 2010 to an average of 44 days in 2012 representing an improvement of 29%. The HSE target is 14 working days for consultant sign-off. The percentage of overall insurance debt that is within HSE / Consultant control has decreased from 61% in 2010 to 47% in 2012.

The HSE is focused on:

- Continued roll-out of the Electronic Claims Management System in its hospitals. Twelve sites are currently using the electronic claims system representing 51% of overall national claims. Over 80% of claims will be electronic by the end of Dec' 13. This system will address the deficiencies of the paper based process and will also ensure that standardised work practices are implemented across hospitals.

- Obtaining compliance with the commitment set out in Section 5 (vii) (a) of the document *Consultants - Implementing the Public Service Agreement* that was issued by the Labour Relations Commission on the 17 Sept 2012. This required "a commitment from all consultants to fully complete and sign private insurance forms within 14 days of receipt of all relevant documentation".

- Intense focus by Acute Hospital Management on improving the collection of this key source of funding.

Significant progress has been made in the last two to three years and there is a plan in place to significantly improve the process further. This will encompass hospital processing and consultant sign-off. There remains a significant challenge in improving the speed of payments from insurers and this is something which the HSE is engaging on with both the insurers and the Department of Health.

Medical Card Appeals

374. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; the reasons the person has had their card withdrawn before a decision was made regarding their appeal being decided on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21101/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

National Substance Misuse Strategy

375. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the introduction of the national alcohol strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21106/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that real and tangible proposals are currently being finalised on foot of the recommendations in the National Substance Misuse Strategy report. These proposals cover all of the areas mentioned in the report, including minimum unit pricing, advertising of alcohol, and the structural separation of alcohol from other products in mixed trading outlets. As part of the process of developing these proposals, the Department is continuing discussions with various Departments.

The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy has considered these proposals and I intend to bring forward specific proposals for consideration by Government as soon as possible.

In the meantime, work on developing a framework for the necessary Department of Health legislation is continuing. For example, in conjunction with Northern Ireland, a health impact assessment is being commissioned as part of the process of developing a legislative basis for minimum unit pricing. (Scotland commissioned a similar assessment before drafting its legislation on minimum unit pricing.) The health impact assessment will study the impact of different minimum prices on a range of areas such as health, crime and likely economic impact.

Hospital Staff

376. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of practitioners that are currently employed in the orthodontic unit at Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal; the number of practitioners currently on maternity or other leave; if he is satisfied with the existing levels of staffing and service provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21112/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Home Help Service Provision

377. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed directly by the Health Service Executive to provide home help services in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21115/13]

378. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently employed by private bodies such as bluebird care for the provision of home help services in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21116/13]

379. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the 605,000 home help hours to be provided by the Health Service Executive in County Donegal in 2013 include those to be provided by private companies under a service level agreement by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21117/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 377 to 379, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

380. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Dublin is waiting more than two years for a hernia operation at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin; and the action he will take regarding same. [21119/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2013*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has recently been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to this particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Hospital Procedures

381. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12, who has Dercum disease which has been diagnosed for many years has had to turn to the private hospital system to address the need for surgical procedure to remove lesions which have left them in chronic pain for the past 14 years. [21125/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

382. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when an application for Fair deal will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21136/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services Issues

383. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a consultant will not sign a person (details supplied) in County Cork fit for work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21142/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by

the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Services for People with Disabilities

384. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health if he can provide a list of wheelchair accessible drug rehabilitation and treatment centres in the greater Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21196/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Government is committed to ensuring access and equity of service for people with disabilities, at all levels of the health service. In this regard, the HSE has specific obligations under the Disability Act 2005. As the HSE provides addiction services in partnership with a range of statutory, non-statutory voluntary and community groups as well as projects in Drugs Task Force areas, the question tabled by the Deputy has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Generic Drugs Substitution

385. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health if direction can be given to pharmacists or doctors to preclude substitution of the anti-epileptic drugs under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Bill 2012 when it is enacted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21197/13]

395. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the generic substitution of epilepsy medication (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21391/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 385 and 395 together.

Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Bill, the Irish Medicines Board has statutory responsibility for establishing and publishing a List of Interchangeable Medicinal Products.

In deciding whether to add a group of medicinal products to the List of Interchangeable Medicinal Products, the Board must be satisfied that each medicinal product which falls within the group:

(a) has the same qualitative and quantitative composition in each of its active substances as each of the other medicinal products which fall within the group;

(b) is in the same pharmaceutical form as, or in a pharmaceutical form that is appropriate for substitution for, each of the other products in the group; and

(c) has the same route of administration as each of the other medicinal products which fall within the group.

In addition, the Bill provides that the Board is not permitted to add a group of medicinal products to the List of Interchangeable Medicinal Products where:

- there is a difference in bioavailability between the medicinal products and the interchangeable medicinal products which currently fall within the group of interchangeable medicinal

products which may lead to a clinically significant difference in efficacy between them, and

- any of the medicinal products cannot be safely substituted for any one or more of the other medicinal products in the group.

I would like to emphasise that in making a decision to add a medicinal product to a group of interchangeable medicinal products or a group of medicinal products to the List of Interchangeable Medicinal Products the Board is obliged to have regard to the criteria as set out in the Bill and that these criteria fully reflect the recommendations set out in the Joint Department of Health/HSE report 'Proposed Model of Reference Pricing and Generic Substitution' (the Moran Report, 2010) regarding criteria for interchangeability.

To further enhance the patient safety aspect of generic substitution, Section 13 of the Bill allows a prescriber to indicate on a prescription that a branded interchangeable medicinal product should, for clinical reasons, not be substituted.

I am satisfied that these provisions address the concerns raised. I met with the Irish Epilepsy Association in January and explained this position.

It is also important to point out that generic medicines must meet exactly the same standards of quality and safety and have the same effect as the originator medicine. All of the generic medicines on the Irish market are required to be properly licensed and meet the requirements of the Irish Medicines Board.

Mobility Allowance Eligibility

386. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on an alternative method to the mobility allowance and motorised transport grant in order to provide for the needs of people in a manner that does not run counter to the Equal Status Acts will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21202/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): A Project Group to review the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant has been established to seek an alternative method to provide for the priority transport needs of people with a disability in a manner that does not run counter to the Equal Status Acts. The Group, who will report to Government later this month, have met five times, with the next meeting scheduled for 7th May 2013. The results of the review will be presented to the Government before any final decisions are made on future arrangements. At this stage, I am not in a position to pre-empt the outcome of the review or the decision of the Government.

Dental Services Waiting Lists

387. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive a dental appointment at the dental clinic in Athy, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21209/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Dental services to children up to 16 years are provided by the Public Dental Service of the HSE. The service is targeted at children at key stages in their development. Children are given dental examinations and any follow-up treatment required at these stages. When required, emergency dental treatment is available to all children up to 16 years. The HSE has been asked to examine the specific query raised by the Deputy and to reply to him as soon as possible.

Medical Card Appeals

388. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appeal of a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21226/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Departmental Properties

389. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if his Department and agencies under its aegis who own or rent property in commercial developments are in compliance with their responsibilities under the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011; if he will outline those agencies who have representation on the boards of owners management companies; if he will provide a list of the agency, the relevant management company and its associated property but not the name of the individual representing the said agency; and his views on the implementation process of the Multi-Unit Development Act within his Department. [21247/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Office of Public Works has responsibility for Hawkins House where my Department is accommodated. The sourcing of property on behalf of Government Departments / Offices and Agencies is a matter for the Office of Public Works (OPW). The information sought in respect of Agencies under the aegis of my Department is not routinely collected. Given the resources and time involved in sourcing such information, if the Deputy has a particular Agency in mind my Department would be happy to provide such information on request. The Deputy's question has been referred to the HSE in respect of properties the Executive may have leased in multi-unit developments.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

390. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a progress report on an application to have Fibromyalgia listed on the long term illness list based on the groups submission last year. [21260/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

In addition, people who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the Health Service Executive can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Those who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations.

Thalidomide Victims Compensation

391. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the recommendations of the Heidelberg study into the survivors of thalidomide have not been implemented here; and his proposals for same [21279/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Heidelberg Study is a survey of nearly 900 German survivors of thalidomide, carried out by the University of Heidelberg on behalf of the German Thalidomide Foundation. The report identifies the individual's deterioration in health, their increasing loss of independence and an increased requirement for supports and assistance including medical services, aids and appliances, environmental adaptations, transport.

The Department of Health commissioned a report from the State Claims Agency in 2010 which recommended additional financial and other supports to Irish survivors of thalidomide. The offer was rejected by Irish survivors of thalidomide.

31 Irish thalidomide survivors currently received financial support from the German Foundation and the Irish State. Combining the Irish and German payments, most individuals receive over €2,500 per month, or €575 per week, tax free. Each Irish thalidomide survivor has a medical card and it is open to each individual to apply for the numerous public supports available to people with a disability provided by other Departments such as housing adaptation grants, disabled drivers tax concessions and disability allowance.

Hospital Acquired Infections

392. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the reasons five hospitals were found to have lapses in standards for infection control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21335/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that MRSA rates are at a 6-year low and I would like to assure the Deputy that the management of Healthcare Acquired Infections (HCAIs) is a key patient safety issue for my Department and the Health Service Executive (HSE) and a number of significant initiatives have been developed to address the issue. These include the HSE's National Infection Control Action Plan, launched in 2007 and a National Surveillance System to collect data and provide information to monitor HCAIs; the establishment of the Clinical Care Programme for HCAIs also supports this aim.

In relation to the recent Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) reports on four hospitals my Department and the HSE recognise that the HIQA inspection of hospitals against the National Infection Prevention and Control Standards is an important element of the overall strategy to reduce HCAIs in the delivery of healthcare in Ireland. With regard to hand hygiene the findings of the Authority suggest that hand hygiene best practice needs to become more operationally embedded at all levels. I must emphasise that it is of vital importance that healthcare workers recognise their personal responsibility to protect patients by maintaining their own good hand hygiene.

To improve hand hygiene a series of actions are in place, a key element of which is the HSE's continuing bi-annual hand hygiene audits which occur both in the acute sector and in the long stay area as well. Additionally, from July this year it will be mandatory for all staff to receive hand hygiene training as part of staff induction and a hand hygiene education programme as continuous training.

Other actions include:

- the existing 2005 guidelines on hand hygiene are being revised and will be published this year;
- a hand hygiene e-learning programme is being piloted in Dublin North East;
- a training video for staff on the WHO 5 Moments for hand hygiene concept and national participation in the WHO's annual Hand Hygiene Day on 5th May 2013 with all hospitals engaging in local initiatives;
- revised hand hygiene posters were introduced across the system in the summer of 2012;
- a major section on website on hand hygiene;
- in collaboration with the Department of Education an educational programme for schools - E-Bug;
- a monthly national HCAI implementation group monitors and reviews all HCAI activity in the health system.

The four hospitals audited by HIQA are now being asked to develop quality improvement plans that prioritise changes necessary to fully meet the National Standards for the Prevention and Control of Healthcare Associated Infections. These plans must be published by the hospitals concerned on the Internet within six weeks of the publication of HIQA's reports. The hospitals in question will receive a letter indicating general outcomes and lessons to be learned.

With regard to the prevention of the spread of MRSA it should be noted that the number of cases of MRSA has fallen by 55% between 2006 and 2011 (from 592 to 263 cases) and the downward trend is holding per statistical returns to date (a drop to 242 cases (59% decrease) to end-2012 (provisional figures)). Individual hospital MRSA rates are also collected and published – annually for 2006 and 2007 and quarterly from 2008 onwards. These results provide a good benchmark into the future to enable us to measure effectively the progress of each hospital on their performance in infection prevention and control. The data can be used by individual hospitals to monitor their progress in the control of HCAs and the regular reports allow for public assessment of that progress.

Finally, officials of my Department are currently working on the Licensing of Health Facilities Bill which will provide for a mandatory system of licensing for public and private health service providers. The legislative proposals are being prepared broadly in line with recommendations made in the Report of the Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance and are designed to improve patient safety by ensuring that healthcare providers do not operate below core standards which are applied in a consistent and systematic way. The intention is to have a proportionate system which has the confidence of the public. Standards and other requirements will be enforceable through inspection and imposition of sanctions as necessary. Licensing will be targeted at areas which are not currently subject to regulation. It is expected that outline proposals for the new system of licensing should be finalised in the near future.

Alcohol Pricing

393. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps, if any, he proposes to take to influence a reduction in the price of non-alcoholic beer on sale in the on and off-trade in view of the relatively high price of such products here and the positive contribution lower prices

would have on the demand for alcohol and hence on the very significant costs associated with alcohol-related harm here. [21343/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): My Department has no direct powers to reduce the price of non-alcoholic beer; its price is largely a function of private market forces. The National Substance Misuse Strategy envisaged a minimum unit price for alcohol products only - complemented by a range of other measures in the supply and prevention areas - in order to deal with the misuse of alcohol. It is likely therefore, that these would have a positive influence on the demand for non-alcohol products relative to alcohol products.

Cochlear Implants

394. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the steps that have been taken to put in place a bilateral cochlear implant programme in the State; when he expects such a programme to become operational; if resources have been secured for the programme; the contacts he or his Department had with the Happy New Ear Campaign group in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21378/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Since the national cochlear implant programme commenced seventeen years ago, over 700 patients have received cochlear implants. I am advised that, in 2012, ninety cochlear implants were carried out with 42 children receiving implants and 48 adults. In addition to providing the surgical services, the programme provides a comprehensive assessment service to potential candidates and a rehabilitative service to those actually implanted.

In 2009 a National Review of Audiology Services was carried out by the HSE, to examine the services provided to children and adults nationwide, and to formulate a national plan for the services. The report of the National Audiology Review Group, published by the HSE in 2011, provides the blueprint for the planning, development and delivery of HSE audiology services, from new-born screening to assessment and management of adults and children with hearing problems, including cochlear implantation. Two of the main recommendations in the report include the national rollout of a universal new-born hearing screening programme and the establishment of a bone anchored hearing aid programme. The report also included a recommendation that continued ring-fenced financial support be provided for the cochlear implant programme but at levels which allow for simultaneous bilateral implantation for children.

While no dedicated programme for simultaneous or sequential implantation is being carried out in Ireland at this time, some bilateral implantation has already occurred for patients, mainly very young children with certain medical conditions such as a history of meningitis or blindness. It is estimated that there are approximately 200 children in Ireland today who may be suitable for a second implant. The HSE has advised that it is working closely with Beaumont Hospital to progress plans for both simultaneous and sequential bilateral implantation. The development of the service will require additional resources for Beaumont and these plans will be progressed through the HSE 2014 Estimates process.

I can confirm that Minister of State, Kathleen Lynch intends to meet with the Happy New Ear campaign group later on this month.

Question No. 395 answered with Question No. 385.

Medical Card Applications

396. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo was refused a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21393/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Staff

397. **Deputy Dara Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place with regard to shortage of medical intern places in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21394/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Under the provisions of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007 it is a matter for the Health Service Executive (HSE) to assess, on an annual basis, the number of intern training posts required by the health service. My Department is in regular contact with the HSE in relation to the issue of intern places with the aim, in so far as is possible, of providing a sufficient number of intern places for Irish/EU graduates from Irish medical schools. There are 639 intern posts available for the July 2013 intake. In recent years all EEA graduates from Irish medical schools, who sought an intern post and who met the eligibility requirements, were accommodated. The HSE remain confident that this year will be no exception.

Medical Card Applications

398. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a decision and issue a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21411/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Applications

399. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21413/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Home Care Packages

400. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a home care package application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21442/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Questions Nos. 401 and 402 answered with Question No. 367.

Hospital Services

403. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an evaluation of the performance of University College Hospital Galway's management of diabetic foot disease against the management standards for the condition, set down in the Health Service Executive's 2011 model of care for the diabetic foot; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21462/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The National Clinical Programme for Diabetes, which includes the care of children and adolescents with diabetes and which has been established within the HSE's Clinical Strategy and Programmes Directorate, aims to define the way clinical services for diabetes should be delivered, resourced and measured. A clinician has been appointed to lead on the development of the programme. One of the objectives of the National Clinical Programme for Diabetes is to develop a footcare screening and treatment service to prevent foot ulceration and subsequent lower limb amputation. In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Home Help Service Provision

404. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if home support hours will be reinstated in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny [21501/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

405. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an operation will be arranged without delay in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny [21502/13]

7 May 2013

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2013*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has recently been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to this particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

406. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the Fair deal scheme will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny and if he will expedite the matter. [21503/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Home Help Service Provision

407. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if home help services will be reinstated in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny, if he will expedite the matter. [21504/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Emergency Services Personnel

408. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will outline the details of an incident at Dunsany, County Meath, that led to a member of an Garda Síochána transporting a patient from the scene of a car crash to hospital by ambulance; if he will detail the pre-emergency care staffing levels in the Health Service Executive Dublin North East region for the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; if he will detail the rostering arrangements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21505/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Members of An Garda Síochána are authorised to drive any vehicle deemed necessary in the performance of their duties. On rare occasions, two or more paramedics or advanced paramedics may be required to treat a patient in an emergency ambulance. In these circumstances, members of the emergency services on scene, including gardai, where capable of doing so are authorised by the HSE to drive National Ambulance Service vehicles. Such collaborative arrangements occur where all agencies at the scene of an incident are focussed on a common goal and mission - to preserve life. In relation to the query on staffing levels and rostering arrangements, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

409. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Dublin is no longer eligible to provide chiropody services to public patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21521/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): While there is no statutory obligation to provide a chiropody/podiatry service, such services are provided by the HSE to medical card patients with the greatest needs. In several regions the service is provided by private chiropodists by arrangement with the HSE. Chiropodists/Podiatrists wishing to be added to the list of providers apply to the HSE and are added to the list once it has been established that they are qualified to provide the service. The HSE has been asked to examine the specific query raised by the Deputy and to reply to her as soon as possible.

Health Reports

410. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered the recent position paper by the Fit for Work Coalition; the recommendations for a cross departmental group to engage the expertise and insights of the coalition members in order to develop an intervention programme designed to improve the lives of persons living with musculoskeletal disorders and to reduce workplace absenteeism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21530/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The work of the Fit for Work Coalition will be informative in the development of an implementation plan for Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing. It reflects the ethos and principles articulated in Healthy Ireland as to how the determinants of health and wellbeing will be addressed across the life course.

The Healthy Ireland Framework will provide a leadership role in building and supporting a whole-of-government and intersectoral approach to identify practical ways to strengthen working between sectors to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of all in our society.

The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy, chaired by An Taoiseach, will oversee the implementation of Healthy Ireland. This high level of leadership will actively promote the engagement of Government departments and will oversee, monitor and address common Government policy, agenda, targets and action plans to improve health and wellbeing.

Health Services Provision

411. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he will make an intervention into the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will seek a place in a full-time care facility for them and ensure that they receive the care that they need for recovery. [21537/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service issue this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medical Card Delays

412. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; if further correspon-

dence will be considered; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21539/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

413. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding fees in respect of a nursing home (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21542/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Financial support for long-term nursing home care is provided under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. The Scheme provides support to individuals, not to nursing homes. In order to be an approved nursing home for the purposes of the Scheme all private nursing homes, and voluntary nursing homes which previously received funding for long-term residential care under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, must negotiate and agree a price for the cost of long-term nursing home care with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). This is necessary due to the commitment by the State to meet the full balance of the cost of care over and above individuals' contributions.

The NTPF is independent in the performance of this function and, in carrying it out, it must ensure value for money for both the individual and the State. The NTPF negotiates with each nursing home individually and may examine the records and accounts of nursing homes as part of the process.

The NTPF assesses nursing home process under four criteria:

- costs reasonably and prudently incurred by the nursing home and evidence of value for money;
- price(s) previously charged;
- local market price, and
- Budgetary constraints and the obligation on the State to use available resources in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public. An NTPF pricing agreement is in place with the nursing home referred to by the Deputy. It is scheduled for renewal on 1st July 2013 and NTPF are currently in contact with the proprietors concerning that renewal.

Services for People with Disabilities

414. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided generally for disability services in each of the past four years to disability agencies generally; to St. Michael's House and, in relation to St. Michael's House, the services that have been curtailed; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [21547/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): This Government currently provides funding of over €1.5 billion to the Disability Services Programme through the HSE's National Service Plan for 2013, and is committed to protecting frontline services for people with disabilities to the greatest possible extent.

The Minister for Health is working to ensure that protection is afforded to the disability sector, and the Social Care area as a whole. In 2013 the HSE is seeking to maximise the provision of services within available resources and to maintaining a consistent level to that provided in 2012, by providing the following specialist disability services:

- residential services to over 9,000 people with a disability;
- day services to over 22,000 people with intellectual and physical disabilities;
- respite residential support for over 7,500 people with intellectual and physical disabilities;
- 1.68m hours of Personal Assistant / Home Support Hours.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Cancer Screening Programme

415. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider removing the age limits in place for the free smear test under the National Cervical Screening Programme in view of the incidence of this cancer in younger women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21550/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): CervicalCheck, the National Cervical Screening Programme was introduced in 2008 and offers free smear tests to women aged 25 - 60. The decision to offer smear tests to women aged 25 and over was made following very careful consideration of the benefits to the population and the potential risks to individual women. This involved both Irish and international experts in cervical cancer and screening who examined international evidence and experience as part of the process. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that cervical screening at a population level is only offered to women aged over 25. National cervical screening programmes in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England have all changed the screening age from 20 to 25 in recent years. This measure was taken to prevent too many young women undergoing unnecessary treatment and side effects.

Changes in the cells of the cervix are extremely common in women under 25. In the vast majority of cases, these changes will settle and go back to normal by themselves. If the screening age was lowered to invite women under 25 for smear tests, young women could be subjected to unnecessary treatment that may have potential long-term negative effects on their health and fertility. Cancer of the cervix is extremely rare in women aged under 25. The average age in Ireland for the diagnosis of cervical cancer is 46. In 2010, 310 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer and of these women, just three were aged under 25.

I would encourage all women aged under 25 to be vigilant about their health and go immediately to their family doctor (GP) if they have any concerns or symptoms such as abnormal bleeding. In such cases, it is not a smear test through a screening programme that is needed, but a biopsy. Her GP will make arrangements for her to have one, through a hospital service. Early

detection of cervical cancer, particularly in younger women, is important in effectively treating it. The best way to prevent cervical cancer in women younger than 25 is to encourage 12-18 year olds to avail of the free HPV vaccination being offered to all secondary schoolgirls.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

416. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the financial contribution required from a person on the State pension who is a full-time resident in Mountmellick Hospital, County Laois; the funding they should be left with from their pension on a weekly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21564/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme is a system of financial support for individuals in need of long-term nursing home care. Under the Scheme, nursing home residents contribute towards the cost of their nursing home care based on their means, and the HSE pays the balance. The person's contribution towards the cost of their care is calculated based on 80% of their income and 5% of their assets per annum. If the person is a member of a couple, the assessment is based on half of the couple's combined income and assets. It was announced in Budget 2013 that the asset contribution will be increased from 5% to 7.5% per annum. The legislation underpinning the Scheme must be amended before this change can take effect.

The Scheme contains several important safeguards which ensure that both the person in the nursing home and their spouse/partner, if applicable, are adequately provided for:

1. Nobody will pay more than the actual cost of care.
2. The first €36,000 for a person's assets, or €72,000 for a couple, is not taken into account during the financial assessment.
3. The principal residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of a person's time in care. This three year cap can also apply to family farms/businesses in certain circumstances.
4. Where an individual's assets include land and property in the State, the contribution based on such assets may be deferred and collected from their estate. This is the optional Nursing Home Loan element of the scheme.
5. Individuals keep a personal allowance of 20% of their income, or 20% of the maximum rate of the State Pension (Non-Contributory), whichever is the greater.
6. If there is a spouse/partner remaining at home, s/he will retain 50% of the couples income, or the maximum rate of the State Pension (Non-Contributory), whichever is the greater.
7. Certain items of expenditure, called allowable deductions, can be taken into account during the financial assessment. These allowable deductions include health expenses.
8. There is a financial review mechanism which takes account of the fluctuating value of assets and the fact that cash assets will naturally deplete over time as payments are made to the nursing home etc.

If a person avails of the Nursing Home Loan, the money advanced by way of the loan must be repaid as follows:

- If the repayment arises because of the death of the person in care, it must be repaid within

12 months of the date of death. Otherwise interest will apply from the date of death.

- If the repayment arises because the property is sold/transferred during the person in care's lifetime, it must be repaid within 6 months of the date of the sale/transfer, otherwise interest will apply back to that date.

Hospital Services

417. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the circumstances and the hours family members are required to sit with patients who are terminally ill in Mountmellick Hospital, County Laois; if medical cover or care is provided after 5pm in the evening; the reason family members are required to sit with the patient in the hospital every evening after this time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21567/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

418. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will identify the locations of the public obstetric units across the country which are deemed appropriate locations for any procedures that may arise out of the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Bill 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21577/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): It is the intention of the legislation that all public obstetric units will be deemed appropriate locations for any medical procedures that may arise out of the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Bill 2013.

Ambulance Service Provision

419. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will co-ordinate in arranging a meeting between the Health Service Executive management and National Ambulance Service management with the Save our Ambulance Kenmare Committee (details supplied) who are concerned regarding the future of the maintenance and enhancement of this vital service in their catchment area in view of the current review of ambulance services in south Kerry and if he will ensure that this meeting is set up at an early date. [21579/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The National Ambulance Service (NAS), in line with a Labour Court decision, is in the process of introducing on-duty rostering to replace existing on-call arrangements. This means that on-duty ambulance crews are at their stations or in their vehicles during a shift, rather than having to be summoned to the station in the event of a call-out. Therefore, crews can respond to an emergency call immediately, instead of the average time of over 20 minutes for a vehicle to leave the station under on-call. This change, which was sought by both staff and the NAS, has obvious benefits for patients and response times and represents a clear improvement in service.

The NAS intends to introduce on-duty rostering and dynamic deployment of emergency resources, on a phased basis, across the entire Cork and Kerry region. So far, on-duty and dynamic deployment arrangements have been successfully introduced across County Cork, most recently in West Cork. The NAS informs me that planning for the next phase, in South Kerry,

can now be progressed. This phase will include ambulance stations in Caherciveen, Killarney and Kenmare. As in each phase to date, any decisions on the best model of service for South Kerry will be preceded by detailed consideration of activity, geography, demographics, location of acute hospitals and other facilities, supporting services, wider NAS developments and learning from previous phases, as well as public, clinical and community leader engagement.

The HSE is currently considering the most appropriate model of service delivery for South Kerry, to replace the current on-call, static deployment model and the operation of resources in isolation. No decisions have so far been made and a number of matters need to be progressed before deliberations in relation to South Kerry can be finalised. These include public, staff and clinical (including GP) consultations, continuing national reconfiguration of the control and dispatch system and the ongoing roll-out of the Intermediate Care Service for inter-facility patient transport in the region. A final model will emerge once this process is completed.

In light of the above, all stakeholders should take advantage of the opportunity to participate in the consultation process, as the most effective and appropriate forum to engage with the HSE and the NAS in relation to proposals for changes in emergency service delivery in South Kerry.

Road Maintenance

420. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that repair works to a fallen bridge on the border of south Tipperary and Waterford is being delayed until August-September by the Inland Fisheries; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this road is closed and will remain closed until August-September unless these works are carried out and that this is causing inconvenience to the road users in the area; if permission will be granted to allow works be carried out in the coming weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21146/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities own resources supplemented by State road grants paid by my Department. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is a matter for the local authority. It is also a matter for the local authority to consult directly with Inland Fisheries Ireland in order to progress this project.

Driving Licence Renewals

421. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the current processing times for driver licence renewals nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21157/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Following a Government Decision of May 2011, responsibility for the driver licence service is being centralised under the Road Safety Authority as and from 12 January this year. Noting this, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Road Safety Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Official Engagements

422. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an itinerary of his official engagements in the United States over the recent St. Patrick's Day holiday as part of the Department of Foreign Affairs Promote Ireland programme. [21192/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Minister of State Alan Kelly, represented the Government at St Patrick's Day events in New York and New Jersey. Details of his itinerary are set out as follows.

Wednesday 13 March 2013

Travel to New York; Trade Meeting with Irish Aviation Company.

Thursday 14 March 2013

Meeting with Nuria I. Fernandez CEO of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority; Meeting with Ashwani K. Chhabra Deputy Commissioner of Policy & Planning NYC, Taxi & Limousine Commission at 33 Beaver St; Meeting & Interview with Neil O'Dowd of the Irish Voice; Meeting & Interview with Adrian Flannery of Irish Radio. Net; Meeting with Mid West Regional Authority & Tipperary Association of New York; Attend Bank of Ireland Reception Midtown Manhattan; Attend the Matheson's Reception Jockey Club Manhattan; Attend & speak at Spirit of Ireland Awards (Young Leaders), The American Ireland Fund - The Bowery.

Friday 15 March 2013

Attend the Co-operation Ireland Breakfast – Lower Manhattan; Travel to Newark, New Jersey; Attend and Address the reception for the Newark St. Patrick's Day Parade Grand Marshal in Gibbons Law LLC in Newark; Address the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Newark; Attend and Review the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Newark; Travel to New York; Attend the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick's Dinner.

Saturday 16 March 2013

Meet with various Irish Groups Marching in the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade; Attend and March in New York City St Patricks Day Parade; Dinner with Mid-West Regional Authority and other representatives.

Sunday 17 March 2013

Return to Ireland

Dublin Airport Authority Expenditure

423. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of money spent by the Dublin Airport Authority in 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013 on planning enforcement issues including all associated legal and consultancy fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21201/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The matter raised by the Deputy in relation to the amount of money spent by the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) on planning enforcement issues falls within the operational responsibilities of the DAA and I have referred the question to the company for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities

424. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the economic impact of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21230/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The 48km Great Western Greenway was delivered at a cost of €5,568,000 million and was completed in 2011. The sources of funding for this investment are set out as follows.

Funding source	€
Dept of Transport, Tourism & Sport	3,030,000
Fáilte Ireland	1,910,000
Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	160,000
Mayo Co Council	468,000
Total:	5,568,000

I would direct the Deputy to the Great Western Greenway Economic Impact Case Study undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland for details on the economic impact to the local economy of this Greenway. The Study found that major benefits are being obtained from the Greenway, most obviously through maintaining and creating employment. The Greenway has created considerable demand along the route for a variety of services including accommodation, bike hire, taxi services, tour operators, local shops, bars and restaurants. In terms of putting a monetary value on visits to the route, estimates derived from the Study suggest that all direct expenditure arising from visitors attracted to the Greenway would contribute approximately €7.2m to the local economy in a full year.

Driving Licence Applications

425. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if photographs from local photo kiosks are still accepted for new driving licence applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21232/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): On 12th January 2013, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) became the driver licensing authority for the State and has responsibility for the introduction of the plastic card driver licence. The RSA has decided to operate the service through three outsourced contracts to be managed by a specialist unit based in its headquarters in Ballina. The contracts will cover plastic card licence production, back-office processing and front-office customer interface.

As part of the procurement process for the customer interface contract, all bidders opted to provide photographic images through digitally captured photographs.

The contractors will be fully mobilised to provide the required services later this year. In the meantime, motor tax offices will continue to accept driver licence applications, including paper photographs, on behalf of the RSA.

Tourism Promotion

426. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason meetings of the Mayo North Tourism Committee have not been convened by Fáilte Ireland since last September notwithstanding all The Gathering events which have been organised for the region and the tourism strategies, initiatives and projects which remain to be pursued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21267/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The matter raised is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please contact my private office if a reply is not received within ten working days. I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please contact my private office if a reply is not received within ten working days.

Public Park Access

427. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 676 of 23 April 2013, if he will further elaborate on the legal position in respect of the wide-spread use of quad bikes by young persons specifically in public parks; and the enforcement powers available to local authorities to curb the use of such vehicles in such public open spaces. [21268/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As I indicated in my reply given on 23 April 2013 'public place' for the purposes of road traffic legislation means any public road, and any street, road or other place to which the public have access with vehicles whether as of right or by permission and whether subject to or free of charge.

Public parks come under the management and control of either the Office of Public Works or the local authority in the area concerned and are covered by separate statutory provisions. If the parks are places where the public do not have access to with vehicles, it is a matter for the management body concerned to provide for and enforce relevant governing legislation or by-laws (including the use of quad bikes), as the case may be, to ensure that all persons comply with the permitted use of the park.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

428. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a sports capital grant application (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21349/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The club in question were allocated a grant of €100,000 under the 2005 Sports Capital Programme. I understand that the club have not been in a position to draw down their grant due to difficulties in satisfying the legal requirements of the Programme.

My Department is available to assist the club with any queries it may have.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

429. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Tourism Ireland pays rent on any of their offices outside Ireland; if so the amount paid per year; and the length of time remaining on the lease in each of the offices. [21359/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information sought by the Deputy is published every year in the annual report and accounts of Tourism Ireland Limited, and the 2011 Report and Accounts may be found in the Oireachtas Library.

Dublin Bus Services

430. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when Dublin Bus will receive their 80 extra buses that funding has been agreed for in 2013. [21360/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December 2009, the implementation and development of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), such as the replacement and refurbishment of PSO buses, comes under the remit of the NTA.

I understand, however, that funding is being provided in 2013 by the NTA to Dublin Bus for the purchase of 80 new buses and it is expected that these buses will be ready for delivery in the latter half of 2013. This is part of a rolling programme of bus replacement and refurbishment to ensure the age profile of the fleet is maintained at a safe and reliable level.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rail Network

431. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the Chief Executive Officer of Iarnród Éireann to carry out the following works at (details supplied) in County Dublin at the earliest opportunity. [21361/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): This is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Light Rail Project

432. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total amount of taxpayers' money allocated to the LUAS transport system for each year from 2007 to 2012. [21372/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) on 1st December 2009, the implementation and development of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), such as Luas Light Rail, comes under the remit of the NTA.

Funding has been provided to the NTA for allocation to Luas light rail projects since its establishment in December 2009. In the period 2007-2009 funding was provided directly by my Department to the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA).

Based on figures supplied by the NTA the table sets out Exchequer payments in respect of Luas investment for each year since 2007.

Year	€m
2007	98
2008	140
2009	130
2010	92
2011	14
2012	11
Total 2007-2012	485

Departmental Transport

433. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total costs involved in ensuring transport for Ministers and Government Officials for the years 2007 to 2012. [21374/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The total expenditure for my Department on travel and subsistence for the years 2007 to 2012 and the portion that relates purely to transport are set out in the table.

-	Total Travel & Subsistence Outturn	Travel only Outturn
-	000	000
2007	1,458	768
2008	1,323	670
2009	888	427
2010	931	442
2011	911	456
2012	1,069	474

The Deputy will be well aware that in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, Cabinet Ministers' transport was provided by use of State cars and Garda drivers and therefore is not included in the figures above. For the Deputy's information I am advised that the average cost of the provision of a State Car and Garda drivers during the last government was around €280,000 per annum.

Road Network

434. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the up to date position regarding the proposed development of the N2 Clontibret to the Border road scheme and the A5 road project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21400/13]

7 May 2013

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): At the North-South Ministerial Council plenary on 18 November 2011, it was noted that Irish Government would provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the A5 road project. This is further to £22 million that the Irish Government has already contributed to the project as part of the planning process.

The Northern Ireland Road Service had planned to start construction of the two approved sections of the A5 in autumn last year. However, following publication of the necessary statutory Orders in advance of construction, the Minister for Regional Development's decision to proceed with the A5 was challenged by a group known as the Alternative A5 Alliance.

On 12 March 2013 the Northern High Court rejected the majority of the applicants' grounds of challenge. One of the applicants' grounds was, however, upheld as the judge found that an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive should have been carried out on the scheme. On that basis at a further hearing on 8 April 2013 the judge confirmed he would quash the Orders relating to the A5 scheme.

The project was discussed at the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sectoral on 17 April and the Minister for Regional Development now plans to undertake the environmental assessment required under the Habitats Directive. This is a necessary first step to progress the project. The commitment of the Irish Government as set out in November 2011 to this project remains in place.

With regard to the N2 Clontibret to the Border road project, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.