

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

10. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on the July provision programme for children with autism and if siblings with autism will be entitled to one-to-one provision to meet their individual needs as stated in section 7 of the terms and conditions of the 2011 July provision scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32209/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Terms and Conditions document for the 2011 home based July Provision scheme has been superceded by revised terms and conditions in 2012 and in 2013. The 2013 revised Terms and Conditions document makes it clear that the vast majority of July Provision applications are for 1 child. In each case an individual tutor is sanctioned by my Department. In a small number of cases however there will be more than one child in the family who are eligible for home tuition. In these circumstances a combined allocation is made to qualifying siblings. One-to-one provision therefore is not an entitlement of the scheme but is reflective of the fact that the tuition is provided in the qualifying child's home. Home based tuition is intended to compensate for the absence of school based provision where one teacher is allocated to a class of six pupils. It is therefore appropriate that a tutor can provide collective tuition to siblings following individualised programmes in the home at the same time in the same way that a teacher can provide collective tuition in a classroom.

Education Statistics

11. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his response to the latest OECD Education at a Glance report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32265/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I welcome the publication of the 2013 edition of this annual publication, Education at a Glance, by the OECD. I am a strong believer in the value of good comparative international data as one source of information among many to support informed policy making in education. The report is an extensive one, covering a wide range of themes including educational completion rates, educational expenditure, the social gains from education and school characteristics, based mainly on data up to the 2010-11 school year. Several positive achievements of the Irish educational system are evident

in the report. We have higher completion rates to the end of second level education than other countries for the 25-34 year age group in the OECD (Ireland: 85%; OECD 82%) and completion of third level education among the 25-34 year group was particularly high here (Ireland - 47%; OECD - 39%). Expenditure per student at all levels of education in Ireland was above the OECD average. The report shows our PTR and class sizes in primary schools to be broadly in line with the OECD average: the PTR is 15.7:1 in Ireland just above the OECD average of 15.4:1 and average class sizes are shown as 23.9 versus 21.3 across the OECD.

Question No. 12 answered with Question No. 9.

Third Level Fees

13. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that no plans for a graduate tax, student loan or student voucher system in relation to university fees will be considered in budget 2014. [32006/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I have already signalled my intention to increase the student contribution to €2,500 for the next academic year and to increase it by €250 each year thereafter until the 2015/16 academic year when the contribution will stand at €3,000. The contribution is paid by the Exchequer in respect of students who qualify under my Department's student grant scheme. I have no intention to go beyond the previously announced €250 increase for the students in the forthcoming Budget. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is also undertaking a study on the sustainability of the current funding system for higher education. This study was initiated at my request and an initial report has been published. This report makes it clear that immediate work is required to prepare for a longer term approach to a system that can be maintained through a sustainable funding base capable of addressing the continual expansion of the sector while protecting quality of education. The HEA is continuing its work in this area, which will help inform the decision-making as to the future funding of the sector and I will be advised further as this work progresses.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

14. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason school guidance counsellors were not informed by Student Universal Support Ireland that the closing date for higher education grants had been brought forward to 1 August. [32220/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The closing date for new student grant applications to Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) for the academic year 2013/14 will be a month earlier than last year. The system opened for applications three weeks earlier also. The decision to bring forward the opening and closing dates was taken in consultation with my Department and was implemented to facilitate earlier decisions on grant applications. Guidance Counsellors were, in fact, informed by SUSI of the change of closing date. SUSI announced the change in its presentation to the Annual Conference of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors in March this year. In addition, SUSI contacted its own database of guidance counsellors who registered for the "Student Grants Information Week" initiative. Finally, a senior representative of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors is a member of the SUSI stakeholders' Advisory Group and updated all members on these developments.

Graduate Statistics

15. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the recent OECD Education at a Glance report showing that Irish graduates are more likely to be unemployed in comparison with other countries, and the noted lack of progression from education to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32164/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The rates of graduate unemployment reflect the higher than average overall rates of unemployment in this country. There continues to be a strong correlation between educational attainment and unemployment. The data in the OECD report referred to by the Deputy focus on the situation in 2011. In particular, the report says that the unemployment rate in 2011 was 7.1% for people with a third level education, 15% for those with a Leaving Certificate and 21.7% for those with below upper secondary attainment. The report is a timely reminder of the scale of the unemployment crisis created under the last Government. It is worth remembering that in the three years to March 2011 a net 250,000 jobs were lost in the private sector in Ireland under the last Fianna Fail – Green Party Government. We are rebuilding our economy brick-by-brick, making it stronger, ensuring that successes gained are here for the long term. Since entering into office, the current Government is working very hard to tackle all forms of unemployment, particularly the unfortunate trends in long-term unemployment and youth unemployment. We have developed detailed strategies on several fronts - the Pathways to Work plan will help activate the long-term unemployed and the Action Plan for Jobs will, I hope, help create the right conditions for job creation within the economy. More recently, the Irish Presidency of the European Union oversaw the agreement of an €8bn fund to help tackle youth unemployment across all Member States. Within the field of education, I have worked hard to increase the number of retraining places available. A number of enterprise-targeted focus education and training schemes are available to jobseekers and the Government intends to bring them under one umbrella brand called Skills Plus. Skills Plus covers the Springboard, ICT Skills Conversion, Momentum, JobBridge and the Skillnets Jobseeker programmes. All of these initiatives have been introduced since 2011 and provide for targeted upskilling and reskilling programmes of one year or less in duration that are focused on the skills needs of industry. Almost 30,000 places are being provided for jobseekers across the full range of programmes in 2013. Further information on the range of Skills Plus programmes is available at www.skillsplus.ie.

Question No. 16 answered with Question No. 9.

Value for Money Reviews

17. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans regarding smaller rural schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32250/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I recently received the report of the Value for Money Review of Small Primary Schools and I am currently considering it. I intend to discuss the report's contents with my Government colleagues prior to its publication. The terms of reference of the Review acknowledge the important role that primary schools play in their local communities. The Government is very aware of this role and will be cognisant of this in considering the report's findings.

School Staffing

18. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that guidance counsellors in many schools are reporting that up to 70% of their

case load is now taken up by pastoral care and counselling with higher incidents of self-harm, drug abuse, children suffering from depression, abuse and the effects of family breakdown; and if he will respond to fears that the dismantling of guidance services in schools is putting the lives of young persons at greater risk. [32218/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I have already acknowledged to the House that bringing guidance within quota is challenging for schools. However the alternative was to adjust the PTR staffing allocations. The budget decision sheltered the impact for all DEIS post-primary schools by improving their standard staffing allocations – a fact which is often overlooked in this debate. Guidance is a whole school activity and schools have autonomy on how best to prioritise their available resources to meet the requirements in relation to guidance and the provision of an appropriate range of subjects to students. This operates at local school level. The representative organisations for School Principals and school management developed a framework that assists schools on how best to manage the provision of guidance from within their staffing allocation. This approach puts a greater emphasis on group-work and class-based activity at senior cycle and maximises the amount of time available for those pupils that need one to one support. In addition, my Department published Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention, which I launched jointly with Minister Kathleen Lynch last January. The guidelines are informed by consultation with key Education and Health partners and by the findings of current research. They provide practical guidance to post-primary schools on how they can promote mental health and well-being in an integrated school-wide way and they also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk of suicidal behaviour.

Public Procurement Regulations

19. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to change the procedures in place for stationery procurement in primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32272/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Public Service Reform Plan, published in November 2011, recognises the key strategic importance of public procurement and provides for the development of a new policy framework for procurement. This work is now being led by the newly appointed Chief Procurement Officer, Paul Quinn. Under his leadership, a new national procurement office for the public sector is being established. Paul Quinn is currently working with officials across the public sector, including those in my Department, to put in place new sectoral and centralised procurement arrangements. Arrangements for procurement of goods and services for the public sector, including stationery, are being considered in that context.

Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 6.

Institutes of Technology Issues

21. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide details of the proposed reorganisation of third level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32259/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): On 30th May of this year, I responded to advice on reconfiguring the system submitted to me by the Higher Education Authority. The HEA advice and my letter to the Chair of the Authority in response and which

sets out my full intentions in relation to policy in this area are published on my Department's website. The reconfiguration of the system will build on existing alliances and synergies. Consolidation of the institute of technology sector into a new modernised technological sector will now proceed. Three applicant groups of institutes who have expressed an interest in applying for designation as technological universities can now proceed towards the second stage and full merger. Three regional clusters have been named in Dublin/Leinster, the South/South East and the West/mid/north West. Institutional heads will develop regional plans which will eliminate duplication of provision and create better progression and transfer opportunities for students in the region.

State Examinations Issues

22. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on the report he has ordered the State Examinations Commission to make into the typographical errors and mistakes that were made on leaving certificate papers; and if he will provide details of the way answers to these questions will be assessed in view of these mistakes. [32211/13]

25. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the circumstances of the mistakes that were reported in the leaving certificate maths papers; if his Department has carried out an investigation into what happened; if he has taken steps to ensure that the issue does not arise again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32016/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 22 and 25 together.

The State Examinations Commission was established as an independent agency in 2003 to deal with all operational issues relating to State Examinations. The SEC acknowledges that these errors may have caused confusion and distress for some candidates and has apologised publicly. Although the SEC has in place a range of procedures to enhance reliability and to minimise error, it is an unfortunate fact that errors can occur on examination papers from time to time. On occasion, errors are not detected in advance and come to light during or after the sitting of the examination. In the context of any identified error, the SEC, as a matter of course, reviews its existing processes and procedures in order to implement measures to strengthen the quality assurance underpinning the preparation of examination papers. I have asked the SEC to report to me on this issue. I expect to receive their report in August.

Questions Nos. 23 and 24 answered with Question No. 9.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 22.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

26. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Student Universal Support Ireland applications outstanding; the number of applications that are currently under appeal; the impact on students accessing exam results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32275/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I understand from Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that there are 133 cases where a decision on an application

has not yet been made. A number of difficult and complex cases arise every year in the course of administering the scheme. I am assured by SUSI that communication with applicants in these cases is being afforded priority to ensure that they are brought to conclusion expeditiously. 492 or 6% of appeals remain to be decided in the SUSI appeals process. I understand from SUSI that these cases are within the 30-day limit prescribed by legislation and are being afforded the highest priority. Regarding the payment of fees, where a student has informed the institution that a decision is awaited from the grants system, I understand that SUSI has a facility in place allowing institutions to liaise with it directly to confirm the status of an individual application, so that students can access their examination results.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

27. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to retain workable levels of pupil-teacher ratios in all schools throughout the country, primary and post-primary, private and public, religious and non-denominational, keeping in mind the need to maintain adequate capitation levels; if he accepts that variations already exist in this regard within both the private and the public school sector and between both and the desirability of the need to recognise the difficulties faced at this time of economic stress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32224/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Decisions about staffing and capitation levels for schools have to be considered in the context that my Department, like all other Government Departments, is operating in the context of a budgetary programme that is designed to put the public finances on a sustainable footing. A particular challenge in the education sector is the on-going significant increases in demographics across all levels which are resulting in a requirement for up to 900 additional teachers in the coming school year. I acknowledge the challenges faced by schools in managing the overall impact of budgetary measures over the last 4 years. Budget 2012 provided for an overall reduction of 2% in the funding for capitation and related grants to primary and second level schools in 2012 and 2013 and a further reduction of 1% in 2014 and 2015. In the most recent budget the Government confined staffing measures to the fee-charging sector and protected schools in the free scheme from any changes in pupil-teacher ratios. The DEIS scheme for disadvantaged schools was also fully protected with no overall changes to staffing levels or funding as a result of the budget.

Third Level Funding

28. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will respond to objections raised by staff of Dublin Institute of Technology regarding the provision of Shell funding towards the new visual arts degree in Erris, County Mayo, which is being offered by DIT and Mayo County Council. [32217/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The position is that higher education institutions, including Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), are autonomous bodies and their day to day operational affairs including issues such as the provision of on-line courses are the responsibility of the management authority and governing body of the Institute. However, I understand that the HEA has been in contact with the Institute and has been advised that this course is being made available following an approach made to DIT by Mayo County Council to replicate an existing programme that they offer in Sherkin Island, Co. Cork. DIT has agreed to develop the programme, which can commence in September 2013 subject to sufficient numbers of interested and qualified applicants. I also understand that DIT is in on-

going discussion with colleagues in the relevant department's of the Institute in relation to the delivery of the new programme.

Industrial Disputes

29. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the contingency plans he has in place to deal with any industrial action by teachers in the autumn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32264/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The revised proposals put forward by the Labour Relations Commission for the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016 arise from an intensive and difficult set of negotiations between the Public Services Committee of ICTU and the Government that took place against a backdrop of continuing significant difficulties in the finances of the State. The INTO has accepted the terms of the Agreement. The TUI has indicated its intention to ballot on the proposals in September. The ASTI is to put a similar proposal on balloting to its Central Executive Council. Union members now have an important decision to make. In my view, it is better for us all to allow them the time and space to reflect and come to that decision without any perceived pressure from any side. In light of that, I do not think it would be helpful to this ongoing process for me to comment at this time.

Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta

30. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna céard é an beartas faoi neamhspleáchas na Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [26106/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Tá mo chinneadh polasaí déanta agam COGG agus an CNCM a chomhshuí. Chuir mé an Chomh-aireacht ar an eolas faoi seo agus phléigh mé go hiomlán leo é an tSamhain seo caite. Táim cinnte gur fearr a n-éascófar le feidhmiú mholtaí na straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-30, de bharr iad a bheith comhshuite, agus ina theannta sin le feidhmiú Acht na Gaeltachta, 2012, agus leis an leasú curaclach atá ar siúl faoi láthair ar an mbunoideachas agus ar an iar-bhunoideachas. Beidh tuilleadh deiseanna ann chun sineirgí a chur ar siúl idir obair COGG de réir mar a ghineann sé acmhainní agus obair na CNCM de réir mar a fhorbraíonn sé curaclaim. Tá a bord, a buiséad agus a lucht foirne féin ag COGG.

School Staffing

31. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason his Department wrote to the National Council for Special Education on 30 May regarding the 75% resource teaching allocations it was asked to delay communicating this information to schools for three weeks; and if he will respond to criticism that this resulted in considerable uncertainty for school authorities who would have found it difficult to put in place staff for September at such short notice. [32210/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department wrote to the NCSE on 30 May 2013 to confirm that the NCSE should allocate resource teaching hours at an allocation rate 10% below the allocation made for the 2012-13 school year. This was because the demand for low incidence resource teaching had again risen, to remain within the Employ-

ment Control Framework agreement and to ensure there would be sufficient resource teaching posts to make equivalent allocations for all qualifying children. While this letter did not request the NCSE to delay communicating this decision to schools, in a follow up discussion between my officials and the NCSE, my officials requested that the announcement of the Resource Teacher and Special Needs Assistant allocations would be made at the same time, as had happened the previous year. The NCSE initially published details of the allocations for SNAs and resource teaching hours for the 2013-14 school year on Wednesday, 19 June last. I have subsequently authorised the NCSE to restore the level of resource teaching allocations which can be provided for students with special educational needs to the 2012-13 levels. There will not now be any reduction to resource teaching time for children on the level which applied last year.

Student Support Schemes Issues

32. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the Student Universal Support Ireland application system was not available online earlier than its launch in May when many sixth year students had broken up for the school year; and if he will respond to the view that having the system available earlier would have allowed counsellors additional time to help students with their college applications. [32221/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): This year the online application system, which included a new online renewal system, opened on 20 May 2013, three weeks earlier than last year. This earlier opening date provided first-time applicants and renewal students with the opportunity to apply earlier than in previous years. Student Universal Support Ireland aims to build on this progress and move towards opening the system significantly earlier in future years. I am informed by SUSI that the contribution made by Guidance Councillors in the student grant application process, particularly in the Leaving Certificate year, is invaluable. A senior representative of the Institute of Guidance Councillors sits on the SUSI stakeholders' Advisory Group. Their presence on this group provides an opportunity for the views and experience of guidance councillors to feed into the strategic planning for the continued development of the grants process.

Special Educational Needs Expenditure

33. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the impact of the special needs assistant cap on access to special needs support from next September in view of the increase in demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32273/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the level of resources being devoted to supporting children with Special Educational Needs has been maintained at €1.3 billion this year. This includes provision for 10,575 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and nearly 10,000 Learning Support and Resource Teachers. These resources have been protected despite the ongoing severe financial position and a requirement to make expenditure savings across a range of areas. There has been no reduction in the overall number of SNA posts being provided for schools for the coming school year. This provision remains at 10,575 posts, which will ensure that all children who qualify for access to SNA support for the coming school year will receive access to such support.

It is important to note that the level of SNAs required to support children with special educational needs changes from year to year in line with the enrolment of different children with different care needs. The care needs of individual children can also change from year to year.

The NCSE takes these factors into account when allocating SNAs to schools. Therefore, even if the number of students receiving SNA support rises, this does not necessarily mean that the required number of SNAs to support their care needs should rise by a similar percentage. In June 2012 the NCSE reported that the number of children requiring support for the 2012/2013 school year was in the order of 20,000 and the most up-to-date current figures is that for December 2012 of 21,972.

The initial allocation of SNAs for the coming school year will support about 22,000 pupils. This is at about the same level supported in December 2012, despite the passing of 6 months. To date the NCSE has allocated over 10,490 SNA posts to schools which leaves over 80 posts available for allocation during the school year. The NCSE has advised that they have processed all applications for SNA support this year and have allocated the level of SNA support to schools that it considers will meet the care needs of all qualifying pupils. These allocations have been made in line with DES policy and there has been no change in the policy or its application this year.

Details of the SNA allocations which have been made to schools by the NCSE for the 2013/2014 school year are now available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, which provides details of the SNA allocations for each school on a school by school and per county basis.

Student Support Schemes Issues

34. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will intervene to stop third level institutions employing debt collectors to pursue student debt, in view of the serious difficulties that arose from the processing of grants through Student Universal Support Ireland in the 2012-13 academic year. [32215/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will appreciate that third level institutions are autonomous bodies and I have no role in their day to day operational affairs. Those matters are the responsibility of the management authority and governing body. In relation to the specific issue of debt collectors, as referred to by the Deputy I understand that the debt that some institutions are trying to collect are those relating to student fees. All students are liable to pay fees or student contribution unless they qualify for some element of a fee grant under the Student Grant Scheme. Regarding the payment of fees, where a student has informed the institution that a decision is awaited from the grants system, I understand that SUSI has a facility in place allowing institutions to liaise with it directly to confirm the status of an individual application. It is understood from SUSI that their experience is that where there is a decision is awaited, and institutions have been in contact with them, the institutions are dealing with these cases in a sensitive and understanding manner.

National Council for Special Education

35. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on reports that children with special educational needs from middle-class backgrounds continue to receive more support at school than those from working-class areas as a result of having enhanced access to private psychological assessments when compared to schools dependent on the State funded National Educational Psychological Service. [32213/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published its Policy Advice on Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs on 17th May, 2013. This is a very significant report which is based on a

review of best practice in both national and international research and follows a wide process of consultation with children with Special Educational Needs, parents, representative groups, educational partners, voluntary bodies and advocacy groups. The report refers to the limited availability of assessments in some areas and indicated that there was parental concern with regard to the assessment process and the waiting time for health or educational assessments. The report found that a serious consequence of the limited access to professional assessment is that access to supports which require an assessment to trigger a support may become dependent on the ability of the parent or the school to fund private assessments and that some schools and parents have greater capacity to source private reports. The report concludes that diagnosis should not be a prerequisite or determinant for the allocation of additional resources for a child or young person with special educational needs which should instead be based on the needs of the child, irrespective of category of disability. Instead, greater use should be made of school-based data and school performance in decision-making related to resource allocation. One of the principal recommendations of the policy advice is that a new model should be developed for the allocation of additional teaching resources to mainstream schools, based on the profiled need of each school, which will ensure that a more equitable resource allocation system will be in place for students, which will be based on their educational needs as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability. I have requested the NCSE to proceed immediately to establish a Working Group to develop a proposal for consideration in relation to a revised allocation mechanism.

Traveller Community Issues

36. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is appropriate for the statistics section of his Department to contact schools to request in writing from the parents of Traveller children confirmation of their ethnic status in order to qualify for the higher capitation grant; and if he considers this method of data collection at odds with the concept of integrating Traveller children into a mainstream school setting. [32214/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The statistics section of my Department recently contacted schools to remind them (as was always the case) that parental consent is required in the identification of a pupil as a member of the Traveller community. The statistics section also recommend to schools that they collect this information using a consent form. The current policy, in relation to Traveller education, is underpinned by the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy which was launched in 2006. The Report covers all aspects of Traveller Education from pre-school right through to further and higher education within a lifelong learning context. The primary aim of the report is to ensure a quality, integrated education for Travellers underpinned by the principles of inclusion and mainstreaming with an emphasis on equality and diversity and the adoption of an intercultural approach. In keeping with the recommendations of this report allocation of resources is underpinned by the principle of “individual educational need” rather than “Traveller identity”. In line with this approach the majority of recommendations in relation to mainstreaming of educational provision have been implemented at this stage. As there are still some Traveller specific supports provided it is necessary to collect specific data in order to determine these resources.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

37. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a guarantee that he has shelved plans to include assets such as farmland and business premises in the means tests for third level students. [32212/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that, following agreement in principle by the Government to broaden the current means testing arrangements for student grants by way of inclusion of the value of capital assets, I set up a dedicated implementation group to bring forward detailed proposals. I have received a draft report from the implementation group. This is currently under consideration and I will be consulting further with my Cabinet colleagues. The Deputy will appreciate that, until a collective Cabinet decision has been taken, it is not possible to say what assets may be included in any new means testing arrangements for student grants.

Child Care Guidelines

38. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied with the implementation of Síolta and Aistear; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32269/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Síolta and Aistear Frameworks represent a comprehensive set of national practice guidelines which support the development of quality early childhood care and education in Ireland. Both Frameworks are based upon extensive research evidence on best practice in early childhood education and care and also have been developed through extensive consultation with all interested parties including parents, teachers, the broad range of staff working in early childhood care and education settings and children themselves. Implementation of these Frameworks to date has involved: Raising awareness of the contents of each framework through publication and dissemination of information, e.g., Síolta and Aistear manuals and guidelines; Aistear tip sheets for parents; Aistear Toolkit (online); Collaboration with City and County Childcare Committees, Voluntary Childcare Organisations in the development and delivery of the Síolta Quality; Assurance Programme field test. This was a unique collaboration across Voluntary Childcare Organisations and other agencies all of whom worked with my Department in developing a mentoring model for the implementation of Síolta. Establishment of the Aistear in Action Initiative (a collaboration between NCCA and Early Childhood Ireland). The Aistear Tutor Initiative (a collaboration between NCCA and the network of Education Centres). This Initiative will see 26 summer courses on Aistear available to primary teachers through the Education Centres. Given that the implementation of Síolta and Aistear had to be done within existing resources, I am satisfied that these resources were utilised to the maximum extent possible.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

39. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason it is taking until 2015 to implement the national policy on educating children with autism; and the reasons behind the lengthy delay for implementing a national policy for children with autism. [32208/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy may be aware that, mindful that greater clarity on my Department's policy on the education of children with autism would be useful for schools and parents, my Department is currently in the process of preparing a comprehensive statement of existing policy within the boundaries of one document. While this policy document is in preparation, the Deputy is assured that national policy for the education of children with autism is being fully implemented in a timely and consistent manner. My Department's policy on the education of children with Autism resides within the overall policies on the education of children with special educational needs. In the main these policies

are not condition-specific. In this context, the Autism policy, whether expressed in a multiple of documents or in a single document, should not be viewed as a separate 'stand alone' policy. The new policy statement will not be exclusive. Policies are subject of necessity to change from time to time. Also, the new statement will neither alter nor add to existing policy. It will reflect the current policy in a coherent and articulate manner for the benefit of schools and parents. As the Deputy is aware I have now requested the NCSE to prepare Policy Advice on the Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and it is not expected that the report will be finalised until early 2015. The time frame required is reflective of the wide consultation process which will be a feature of the preparation of the advice. I have specifically requested the NCSE to consult widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties. Furthermore the NCSE has commissioned research which will not be finalised until mid to late 2014 and I expect that this research will inform much of the work in preparing the policy advice. It is for these reasons that the advice is not expected until 2015.

Institutes of Technology Funding

40. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will outline in tabular form the capital funding which has been allocated to institutes of technology over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32281/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows:

INSTITUTE	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Athlone Institute of Technology	5,659,071.39	4,621,199.08	4,343,807.38	14,624,077.85
Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown	616,807.40	338,759.25	0.00	955,566.65
Institute of Technology, Carlow	5,392,533.53	541,529.24	13,566.85	5,947,629.62
Cork Institute of Technology	2,937,236.31	2,966,694.03	213,150.41	6,117,080.75

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INSTITUTE	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Dublin Institute of Technology (Incl Grangegorman)	4,871,187.70	8,274,426.52	2,755,027.61	15,900,641.83
Dundalk Institute of Technology	4,113,934.92	660,891.00	0.00	4,774,825.92
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	1,593,475.38	342,393.00	1,026,627.35	2,962,495.73

INSTITUTE	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (Incl Castlebar)	2,212,641.38	1,144,606.42	56,847.42	3,414,095.22
Letterkenny Institute of Technology (Incl Killybegs)	10,211,731.30	2,394,266.92	1,444,776.88	14,050,775.10
Limerick Institute of Technology (Incl TRBDI)	1,648,969.60	858,802.00	0.00	2,507,771.60
Institute of Technology, Sligo	5,877,201.17	2,970,334.87	150,307.33	8,997,843.37
Institute of Technology, Tallaght	1,956,523.87	1,539,507.41	0.00	3,496,031.28
Institute of Technology, Tralee	999,669.25	469,017.00	18,160.00	1,486,846.25
Waterford Institute of Technology	5,539,974.93	1,795,969.16	632,264.57	7,968,208.66
TOTAL	53,630,958.13	28,918,395.90	10,654,535.80	93,203,889.83

NOTE

1. INCLUDES EXCH, FUND, PRTL

School Textbooks

41. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are plans for the widespread introduction e-books in schools nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32282/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Encouraging the deployment of high-quality curriculum-relevant digital resources is a clear priority for the ICT in Schools programme. In this context, I am fully aware of developments in the digital textbook publishing industry and I believe that the digital format can complement other formats and modes of learning to greatly enhance teaching and learning. It is important for schools, in conjunction with parents, to retain local autonomy in deciding whether to recommend their pupils purchase e-books and how best to manage their integration into classroom practice over the medium and long terms. In making this decision, each school should consider all the available information and in this regard the Professional Development Service for Teachers, which now incorporates the ICT in Schools function, is available to advise schools. A detailed advice sheet on the adoption of e-books will be available from my Department shortly.

Educational Tours

42. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the arrangements for supervision of students during school organised Gaeltacht residential trips and classes; if his attention has been drawn to a reported major breakdown in supervision following an organised school trip to Donegal with 38 students from a school (details supplied); if he has been notified that the school principal has removed himself from the board of management investigation because of a reported conflict of interest; the responsibility his Department has in such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32017/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am aware of the media reports in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy. The issues raised by the Deputy are matters to be dealt with at local school level rather than centrally by my Department. The general position from my Department's perspective is that an educational tour should provide a significant benefit in the educational, intellectual, cultural and social development of pupils taking part. It is a matter for each individual school to decide on the suitability of any proposed school tour having regard to these requirements. The Board must exercise all reasonable care in respect of the pupils involved and take all necessary steps to ensure that sufficient supervision is in place and that all appropriate and necessary safeguards in respect of the welfare and safety of participating pupils are in place.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

43. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the case of a student (details supplied) who cannot access their examination results due to difficulties with Student Universal Support Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32245/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) in relation to the student referred to by the Deputy that on 25th June, 2013 they contacted the college by e-mail confirming that the student registration fee would be paid and further requested that the student examination results be released.

School Completion Programme

44. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the proposals put forward by the SCP co-ordinator of the Dominican Campus school completion programme with the support of the three primary schools; if he has considered the proposals and when he will respond to the proposals. [32052/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has received a request from the School Completion Programme (SCP) Coordinator of the Dominican Campus School Completion Programme for funding to create a new post of Traveller Education Support Worker to serve those schools.

The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published in 2006 recommends that the development of community initiatives aimed at Travellers as education workers should be considered and that any such initiative would require clarity of role vis-à-vis existing services such as Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and should only be pursued in a co-ordinated manner with other relevant state agencies.

The School Completion Programme is administered by the Department of Children and

Youth Affairs, while the Home School Community Liaison scheme is administered by the National Education Welfare Board which operates under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Accordingly the request of the Dominican Campus SCP has been referred to that Department for attention.

Education and Training Boards Issues

45. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the impact of the move from Dún Laoghaire to Tallaght, Dublin, for the staff of Dún Laoghaire Vocational Education Committee and the delivery of services in the area; if he has considered the impact on education services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32244/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In June 2011, the Government decided to reduce the overall number of vocational education committees (VECs) from 33 to 16, to merge particular VECs, including the VECs covering County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire, and to approve in principle the preparation of a new Bill to replace the existing VEC legislation. The VECs were dissolved on 1 July last and were replaced with Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

The new ETBs will strengthen locally managed education and enhance the scale of local education and training. This represents a major component of the public service transformation agenda. The new configuration paves the way for exciting new provisions that will provide for the establishment of SOLAS, the dissolution of FÁS and the transfer of training functions to the newly formed Education and Training Boards. In October 2011, I decided on the headquarter locations for the new ETBs. In relation to the merger of Co. Dublin VEC with Dun Laoghaire VEC, I decided that the headquarters for the new ETB will be in Tallaght. In arriving at this decision, I considered a range of factors including the need to ensure that the location of a VEC headquarters will, to the greatest extent possible, facilitate staff redeployment under a redeployment scheme within the context of the Croke Park Agreement and the need to operate at lowest cost having regard to the accommodation available in existing locations.

In terms of these criteria, I was aware that redeployment of staff from Dun Laoghaire to Tallaght is possible under the Croke Park agreement. However, I expect that the offices in Dun Laoghaire will remain open for some time and that the approach to redeployment will be measured and considered. I am satisfied that, properly managed, the move will positively impact on education services offered by the new ETB.

School Textbooks

46. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to assist families with the cost of school books; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32267/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am very conscious that the cost of textbooks is a considerable burden on families. Since becoming Minister for Education and Skills, I have attempted to take steps to reduce the burden on families. Shortly after coming into office I met with members of the Irish Educational Publishers' Association and impressed on them the need to limit the cost of textbooks. I have also stressed to them the real need to avoid placing schools and families in a position where textbooks are altered unnecessarily. The Association responded positively to my approaches and agreed a voluntary Code of Practice among their members. The Code commits the publishers to limit the publication of new editions and to maintaining editions of books in print unchanged for at least six years.

The publishers have also given assurances to me that they will sell textbooks to schools at discounts so that schools can purchase textbooks in bulk to stock textbook rental schemes. All these developments are welcome, and I look forward to seeing the members of the Association implement these commitments. The Department provided approximately €15m in total to first and second level schools by way of book grants in 2012 and the same level of funding will be provided in 2013.

As the Deputy may be aware I launched new “Guidelines for Developing Textbook Rental Schemes in Schools” on 28th January last. These Guidelines provide practical advice to primary and post-primary schools on how rental schemes can be established and operated. The aim of the Guidelines is to help as many schools as possible to start such book rental programmes.

The publication of these Guidelines follows a survey of schools by the Department, and which I published in May 2012. This had a 99% response rate at primary level, and showed that 76% of primary schools operate a book rental scheme. At second level, the response rate was lower, at 44%. Of those which did respond, 88% of those in the VEC sector and 73% of those in the Community & Comprehensive sector operated a book rental scheme. I believe these results show that we have a good foundation to build on across the country. I hope that schools that are not yet operating book rental schemes will be encouraged to use the Guidelines to introduce them. If they do, it will result in substantial savings for parents. Schools which already have rental schemes can save parents up to 80% of the cost of buying new books. A special “Guide for Parents” was also published, to inform them of how the schemes operate and how parents can help schools to establish and run them. I have been very clear in my support for book rental schemes. All of us who are parents know how expensive textbooks can be and what a burden it places on already hard pressed families at the start of every school year.

I am pleased to see the high level of book rental schemes in operation at primary level and I believe that these Guidelines will encourage this practice across all schools in our education landscape.

I also published a Report on Textbook Rental Schemes in Schools and the Allocation of Textbook Grants by the Department of Education & Skills in May 2012. This report presented four policy options to encourage schools to establish textbook rental schemes. None of the options are ideal, each one involves a trade-off of advantages and disadvantages. I will continue to monitor the number of schools operating book rental schemes, and if it proves necessary consider further steps to encourage schools to do so.

Educational book publishers are independent private companies not under the direct control of my Department. Apart from a small number of prescribed texts at second-level, mainly in the case of language subjects, decisions on textbooks are taken at school level. Individual schools need to adopt a more cost-conscious approach to the selection of books in their classes.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

47. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the case of a school (details supplied) in County Wexford which has recently lost 2.5 special needs assistants even though two new children with special needs are due to start at the school this September; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32246/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS), is responsible for processing applications from

schools for special educational needs supports, including the allocation of resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools. The NCSE operates within my Department's established criteria for the allocation of Special Education supports and the staffing resources available to my Department.

SNA allocations are made to schools by the NCSE annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support each year. All schools were advised to apply to the NCSE for resource teaching and SNA support for the 2013/14 school year by 15th March 2013. Details of the SNA allocations which have been made to schools by the NCSE for the 2013/2014 school year are now available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, which provides details of the SNA allocations for each school on a school by school and per county basis. Where schools have enrolled children who were not considered at the time that these allocations were made, or where schools are seeking a revision to the quantum of SNA support which has been allocated to them for the coming school year, they should contact the NCSE regarding this matter. In general a revision to SNA allocations will only be made in circumstances where schools have enrolled new pupils or where schools can demonstrate that they do not have sufficient SNA posts to cater for the care needs of all of the qualifying children in their school. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

48. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider a reversal of all the cuts to special needs assistants and resource hours that have been implemented by his Government. [32240/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the level of resources devoted to supporting children with Special Educational Needs has been maintained at €1.3 billion this year. This includes provision for 10,575 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and nearly 10,000 Learning Support and Resource Teachers. These resources have been protected despite the ongoing severe financial position. The ongoing commitment of my Government to protect frontline supports for children with special educational needs is an acknowledgment of the important role played by SNAs and resource teachers in ensuring that children with special needs can progress and develop and be included, where appropriate, in mainstream school settings. Whereas the allocations of SNA support for individual schools may change each year in line with a schools enrolment of children with care needs, there has been no reduction to the overall number of SNA posts being provided for schools for the coming school year. This provision remains at 10,575 posts, which will ensure that all children who qualify for access to SNA support for the coming school year will receive access to such support. The total number of SNA posts allocated to schools for the 2012/13 school year was 10,487 posts. For the 2011/12 school year it was 10,320 posts. The demand for SNAs for the 2013/2104 school year currently stands at 10,490 leaving some 85 posts available for late demand. It is therefore estimated that there will be sufficient SNA posts to provide access to SNA support for all children who require such support in the coming school year. In relation to the allocation of resource teaching support for schools from September 2013, demand for support has risen again this year, due to a combination of demographic growth and increased assessments. Despite the fact that the overall number of posts available to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for allocation to schools had been maintained at existing levels, the allocations initially announced by the NCSE on 19th June were reduced to take into account of the growth in demand, within the maintained number of posts, in order to ensure that equiva-

lent allocations could be made for all qualifying children. The Deputy will be aware that I announced recently that I have now authorised the NCSE to restore the level of resource teaching allocations which can be provided for students with special educational needs to the 2012/13 levels. This will mean that there will not now be any reduction to resource teaching time for children on the level which applied last year. I also committed to ensuring that the resources which will be required to ensure that the allocations can be made to schools at existing levels will be provided, including resources required to meet any late demand expected to arise between now and the start of the school year. The NCSE has now published revised details of the Resource Teaching allocations for all schools, based on existing allocation levels. Details of these allocations are now provided at www.ncse.ie. I am concerned that the scale of increased demand for resource teachers this year, if it were to continue, would make the current system unsustainable. I am asking the NCSE to consider the reasons for the unprecedented 12 per cent rise in applications for resource teacher support this year, which compares with an annual 1.3 per cent increase in the number of students attending school in the current year. The Deputy will be aware that the NCSE recently published comprehensive policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools. I have, as suggested by the Report, requested the NCSE to establish a Working Group to develop a proposal, for consideration, for a new allocation model for teaching supports for children with Special Educational Needs based on the profiled educational needs of children in schools. In the interim, I wish to ensure that children will not be disadvantaged while we move towards a new model which will ensure greater fairness and quality of education for children with special educational needs. That is why I have made the decision to maintain the existing allocation levels this year.

Third Level Participation

49. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether third level institutions need to be more ambitious in opening up undergraduate programmes to Northern Ireland residents; if he is concerned about the insubstantial increase in the numbers of third level students here who are from Northern Ireland compared proportionately with 1997; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32012/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Undergraduate programmes in the universities and institutes of technology are open to students from Northern Ireland, who can apply for a place through the CAO system and who are entitled to access the free fees scheme on the same basis as Irish nationals. Universities and institutes of technology are autonomous statutory bodies and the recruitment of students is a matter for the individual institutions concerned. The International Education Strategy has a particular focus on recruiting students from priority markets outside of the EU, including the USA, China, India Brazil and the Gulf but individual institutions are free to focus their recruitment efforts on any country or region. While CAO applications from students in Northern Ireland have been increasing in recent years, including a 40% increase since 2011, very small numbers of the students from Northern Ireland who apply through the CAO subsequently enrol in higher education institutions in the south. There are a number of reasons for this including a concentration in demand for a small number of programmes such as medicine for which there is a very high overall level of demand, and a lower rate of acceptance by students in Northern Ireland of places in Irish universities compared to Leaving Certificate students. My Department engages with Northern Ireland's Department of Employment and Learning on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual interest, including cross border student mobility.

State Examinations Issues

50. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason geography is being considered for removal as a compulsory junior certificate subject under his reform proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32015/13]

55. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason history is being considered for removal as a compulsory junior certificate subject under his reform proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32014/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 55 together.

Success in learning in the new junior cycle will focus on making greater connections between learning and the development of key skills. Such quality learning will be described through 24 statements of learning. Schools will design their programmes to reflect teacher qualifications and students' identified needs. All junior cycle students will be required to study English, Irish and maths and thereafter schools will have the flexibility and autonomy to choose from 18 other subjects, including History and Geography, and short courses. The vast majority of schools already offer History and Geography and the vast majority of students choose these subjects although they are currently compulsory in only half our schools. The popularity of subjects depends on the quality of teaching, the passion of the teachers for their subjects and the engagement of their students. I see no reason why the popularity of History and Geography will change in the future. Overall, I am in favour of leaving the decision on what is offered at the discretion of the school. Curriculum choice is important in motivating students to learn and to remain in school to completion of senior cycle.

School Staffing

51. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will respond to the claims that the reduction in the number of school guidance counsellors reflects his lack of understanding of the important role they perform in schools and that he is also denying children and young persons access to important supports and services when at school. [32219/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The budget measure that required schools to manage the provision of guidance from within their standard staffing allocation, was introduced as an alternative to adjusting the standard staffing schedule and must be seen in the context of our very difficult budgetary constraints. It is also worth pointing out that, as part of last year's budgetary measures, my Department helped shelter the impact for DEIS post-primary schools by improving their standard staffing allocations – a fact which is often overlooked in this debate. Guidance is a whole school activity and schools have autonomy on how best to prioritise their available resources to meet the requirements in relation to guidance and the provision of an appropriate range of subjects to students. This operates at local school level. The representative organisations for School Principals and school management developed a framework that assists schools on how best to manage the provision of guidance from within their staffing allocation. This approach puts a greater emphasis on group-work and class-based activity at senior cycle and maximises the amount of time available for those pupils that need one to one support. In addition, my Department published Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention, which I launched jointly with Minister Kathleen Lynch last January. The guidelines are informed by consultation with key Education and Health partners and by the findings of current research. They provide practical guidance to post-primary schools on how they can promote mental health and well-being in an integrated school-wide way and they also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk of suicidal behaviour.

Departmental Expenditure

52. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will respond to the findings contained in the Education at a Glance 2013 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which shows the proportion of public expenditure on education in Ireland fell from 13.7% to 9.7% in the decade between 2000 and 2010; and if the failure of the Government to ring-fence funding for education will prevent the building of a knowledge-based economy. [32205/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Public expenditure on education in Ireland as a percentage of total public expenditure was relatively even over much of the first decade of this century, being 13.7% in 2000, 14% in 2005 and 13.4% in 2009. While the percentage spend reduced significantly to 9.7% in 2010 the main driver of this reduction was the very large increase in public expenditure recorded in 2010 over 2009 as a result of very significant capital transfers to Irish banks arising from the recapitalisation programme. Alternatively, data for expenditure on education when expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) reflects the continued importance placed on education and its role in building a knowledge based economy. Expenditure (public and private) on education was 4.2% of GDP in 2000, 4.7% in 2005 and 6.4% in 2010. This 2010 figure was slightly above average OECD expenditure of 6.3% of GDP and above the EU-21 average of 5.9% of GDP.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

53. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to address the increasing numbers of special needs pupils at primary level, in view of the curtailment in funding to support such pupils; if he has assessed the impact of the curtailment of special needs assistants on children with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32188/13]

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will indicate the extent to which he expects to be in a position to continue to meet the requirements in respect of resource, special needs assistants or other special needs teaching notwithstanding the restrictions imposed on his Department arising from the memorandum of understanding entered into by his predecessor; if he expects to be in a position to address the concerns expressed by parents in the run-up to the forthcoming budget; if he hopes to be in a position to meet in full the requirements of children with special needs currently at school or in pre-school in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32223/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 and 61 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the level of resources being devoted to supporting children with Special Educational Needs has been maintained at €1.3 billion this year. This includes provision for 10,575 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and nearly 10,000 Learning Support and Resource Teachers. These resources have been protected despite the ongoing severe financial position and a requirement to make expenditure savings across a range of areas. There has been no curtailment of SNA posts being provided for schools for the coming school year. This provision remains at 10,575 posts, which will ensure that all children who qualify for access to SNA support for the coming school year will receive access to such support. In relation to the allocation of resource teaching support for schools from September 2013, demand for support has risen again this year, due to a combination of demographic growth and increased assess-

ments. I have authorised the NCSE to restore the level of resource teaching allocations to be provided for students with special educational needs to the 2012/13 levels. There will not now be a reduction in resource teaching time for these pupils for the coming school year. The first tranche of resource teaching posts have now been allocated to schools by the NCSE. A number of additional posts will be required to ensure that allocations can continue to be made for valid applications for resource teaching support received for the coming school year. The full extent of this demand will not be known until September, but it may require the allocation of some 500 additional resource teacher posts. The implications of this for my Department's Employment Control Framework and Vote are currently being raised with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and will also be addressed in the forthcoming process in formulating Budget 2014. I am, however, concerned that the scale of increased demand for resource teachers this year, if it were to continue, would make the current system unsustainable. I am asking the NCSE to consider the reasons for the unprecedented 12 per cent rise in applications for resource teacher support this year, which compares with an annual 1.3 per cent increase in the number of students attending school in the current year. The Deputy will be aware that the NCSE recently published comprehensive policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools. I have, as suggested by the Report, requested the NCSE to establish a Working Group to develop a proposal, for consideration, for a new allocation model for teaching supports for children with Special Educational Needs based on the profiled educational needs of children in schools, and which will aim to ensure that resources are directed to those children and schools who need them most. In the interim, I wish to ensure that children will not be disadvantaged while we move towards a new model which will ensure greater fairness and quality of education for children with special educational needs. That is why I have made the decision to maintain the existing allocation levels this year.

Third Level Fees

54. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a State-funded study on the impact of increasing student registration fees was conducted in recent years; and if so, what the findings revealed. [32007/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As the Deputy will be aware the student contribution will increase to €2,500 for the next academic year and is payable by students who qualify under the free fees schemes. Students who qualify under my Department's student grant scheme have the student contribution paid on their behalf by the Exchequer. Conscious of financial pressures on families tax relief provisions have been put in place so that second and subsequent siblings do not have to bear the full cost. An additional category of "50% Student Contribution" is available under the student grants scheme. Institutions, at my request, have provisions in place to allow students to pay the contribution in two moieties. The HEA is undertaking a study on the sustainability of the current funding system for higher education. This study was initiated at my request and an initial report has been published. This report makes it clear that immediate work is required to prepare for a longer term approach to a system that can be maintained through a sustainable funding base which will be able to address the continual expansion of the sector while protecting the quality of education. The HEA is continuing its work in this area and I will be advised further as this work progresses. The report will help inform decision-making as to the future funding of the sector.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 50.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

56. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an assessment of the impact the changes to pupil-teacher ratios is having on class numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32189/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Pupil teacher ratios for the 2012/2013 academic year are currently being compiled and will be available during the summer of 2013. Figures for the 2011/2012 academic year are available on the Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/>. The staffing schedule is the mechanism used for allocating mainstream teaching posts to all schools. It operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. It currently operates on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 28 pupils with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. My Department publishes annual statistics on class size data for each school. The most recent statistics are for the 2011/12 school year. The national average class size is 24.4 pupils. However, with over 20,700 classes in over 3,100 primary schools throughout the country there will always be variations in class sizes at individual school level. My Department's guidance to local school management is that such variations should be kept to the minimum

Departmental Submissions

57. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will update Dáil Éireann on his Department's review of submissions that may have been received from organisations which represent minority denominational schools in rural areas; if he will acknowledge the roles that such schools play in the preservation of traditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32013/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Organisations representing minority denominational schools have made submissions to my Department on the effect of changes to the staffing schedule for small primary schools and on the possible outcome of the Value for Money Review of Small Primary Schools. My Department takes account of the concerns expressed. In regard to the staffing schedule, how best to sustain provision for widely dispersed and small Protestant communities does present as a particular challenge especially in any locality where enrolment in their schools is declining to single figures and amalgamation is not an option because there is no other school nearby. The Government is intent on fostering pluralism in school provision. Supporting minority churches in maintaining their schools is part of that policy. In regard to the Value for Money Review, it takes account of the ethos of schools, the locations of small schools relative to other schools of a similar type. I recently received the report of the Review and am currently considering it.

Special Education Review

58. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will outline his long-term plan for special needs education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32163/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the level of resources devoted to supporting children with Special Educational Needs has been maintained at €1.3 billion this year. This includes provision for 10,575 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and nearly 10,000 Learning Support and Resource Teachers. These resources

have been protected despite the ongoing severe financial position. The ongoing commitment of my Government to protecting front-line supports for children with special educational needs is an acknowledgment of the important role played by SNAs and resource teachers in ensuring that children with special needs can progress and develop and be included in mainstream school settings. The Deputy will be aware that the NCSE recently published comprehensive policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools. The NCSE have now published their policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools, which is available on the website www.ncse.ie. In preparing this policy advice the NCSE consulted widely with parents of children with special educational needs, representative bodies and the education partners. The NCSE Report is clear that there are many aspects of the current system which parents and schools are very happy with. However, the NCSE also considers that there are concerns in relation to some aspects of our current system, under the headings of Enrolment, Assessments, and the Supports for children with Special Educational Needs and their allocation. The Report makes 28 detailed recommendations which the NCSE feels would help to address these issues. The recommendations in the Report are both interesting and significant. They deserve in-depth and detailed examination and exploration. Accordingly, I have asked my Department to carefully review the recommendations and report back to me on them. The report recommends that under the new resource allocation model proposed by the NCSE in its report, children should be allocated additional resources in line with their level of need, rather than by disability category. I have, as suggested by the Report, requested the NCSE to establish a Working Group to develop a proposal, for consideration, for a new allocation model for teaching supports for children with Special Educational Needs based on the profiled educational needs of children in schools. In the interim, I wish to ensure that children will not be disadvantaged while we move towards a new model which will ensure greater fairness and quality of education for children with special educational needs. That is why I have made the decision to maintain the existing allocation levels this year.

Special Education Review

59. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide the details of the terms of reference that will apply to the working group that is being established to review the allocation of special educational resources. [32222/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published its Policy Advice on Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs on 17 May, 2013. This is a very significant report which is based on a review of best practice in both national and international research and follows a wide process of consultation with children with Special Educational Needs, parents, representative groups, educational partners, voluntary bodies and advocacy groups. The policy advice makes a number of recommendations as to how students with special educational needs might best be supported educationally in the future. One of the principal recommendations is that a new model should be developed for the allocation of additional teaching resources to mainstream schools, based on the profiled need of each school. I have requested the NCSE to proceed immediately to establish a Working Group to develop a proposal for consideration in relation to a revised allocation mechanism for Learning Support and Resource Teachers. Mr. Eamon Stack, Chairperson of the NCSE and former Chief Inspector in the Department of Education & Skills, has been appointed to chair the Working Group. The National Council for Special Education is currently in the process of establishing the working group and with developing the terms of reference for this group. The Working Group, which will include parents, will begin its work immediately and will report with preliminary views by the end of September. The aim of any new allocation mechanism will be to ensure that Learning Support and Resource Teachers are

targeted at those schools and children who need them most.

Schools Building Projects Status

60. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) in County Dublin may expect to receive funding for much needed refurbishment; when this refurbishment is scheduled to take place in view of the fact that it was due to be re-developed in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32242/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning and is included on the five year school building programme. Stage 2b of the project which includes Planning Permission, Fire Certification, Disability Access Certification (DAC) and the preparation of tender documents has been approved. The school authority has recently been given authorisation to pre-qualify for contractors for the project.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 53.

School Staffing

62. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the principal and board of management at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 2 have permission from his Department to allocate resource hours to mainstream teachers because the school is in an over quota position, thus resulting in a qualified resource teacher losing their job; and if he will confirm that only resource teachers should teach resource hours no matter what the situation or position the school finds itself in. [32207/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Teacher allocations to all second level schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The staffing arrangements at post primary level for the 2013-14 school year have been published and are available on the Department website. In accordance with these rules each school management authority including the school referred to by the Deputy is required to organise its subject options within the limit of its approved teacher allocation. The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012). The deployment of teaching staff in the school, the range of subjects offered and ultimately the quality of teaching and learning are in the first instance a matter for the school management authorities.

Arms Trade

63. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 108 of 11 June 2013, if he will provide an update in the provision of legislation in Irish law for the ratification of the arms trade treaty he intends to bring before Dáil Éireann later this year; the steps that have been taken to date by officials in his Department in this matter to ensure early ratification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32307/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As I stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 108 of 11 June 2013 to which the Deputy refers, the Government wish to see the rapid entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty, ATT, which will take place ninety days following ratification by the fiftieth State. Some of the provisions of the Treaty concern matters that fall within the exclusive competence of the European Union, as they come under the scope of the Common Commercial Policy or affect the rules of the Internal Market. As a result, a Decision authorising member States to ratify must be adopted by the Council before Ireland and its EU partners can proceed to ratification.

A proposal to the Council recommending the adoption of a draft Council Decision is awaited from the European Commission in this regard. The Commission will set out its assessment of the legal position, including whether any European legal instruments need to be amended in order to comply with the terms of the Treaty. Any changes in European legislation identified by the Commission may require corresponding changes in domestic legislation transposing the relevant European laws. This would be a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, whose Department operates Ireland's national licensing unit.

At the national level, I have instructed officials in my Department to begin preparations to ensure that the necessary steps are taken in good time to allow for early ratification. We are considering what measures, if any, must be taken so that the State will be in a position to meet the obligations it will assume under the Treaty as soon as it enters into force. This involves an examination of the provisions of the Treaty to establish whether legislative, administrative and/or policy measures are required to implement them. Contacts are ongoing between my Department and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in this regard. Early ratification by the 28 EU member States, including Ireland, would advance matters considerably toward the ATT becoming a reality on the ground and starting to save lives. I therefore hope that the necessary steps can be taken quickly.

Election Monitoring Missions

64. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No.120 of 11 June 2013, the names of persons whom his Department sent on the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe election observation mission to oversee the presidential elections in Mongolia on 26 June 2013; the costs that each person will incur; if he will outline in tabular form the expenses of each person; the activity of the mission during the election and to report on their outcome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32333/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): International election monitoring missions play an important role in the promotion of democracy and human rights. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade maintains a roster of observers for election monitoring missions. We aim to ensure that, when requested, Ireland is represented at an appropriate level in international observation missions for both elections and constitutional referendums. Irish observers participate primarily in missions organised by the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. However, they have also been involved in missions organised by the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the Carter Centre.

A list in tabular form of the persons sent on the election observation mission to observe the Presidential elections in Mongolia, as Short Term Observers, STO, is set out as follows.

-	Role	Forename	Surname	Cost
Mongolia	STO	Theresa	Reidy	€5528
Mongolia	STO	Joseph	Scanlon	€5528
Mongolia	STO	Ronán	O'Brien	€5528

The election observation mission to Mongolia is ongoing. The observers are required to submit a report on their return to Ireland at the end of the mission.

Human Rights Issues

65. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding human rights at Falun Gong and the organ transplant industry in China; if there is evidence of this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32491/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government closely follows human rights issues in China, including reports of organ harvesting, and is concerned about the situation. Freedom of expression is an issue which is discussed regularly with the Chinese authorities during both bilateral and multilateral meetings. In March 2012, Ireland and China took a major step forward in strengthening our bilateral ties with agreement on The Strategic Partnership for Mutually Beneficial Cooperation. The Strategic Partnership reaffirms the commitment of Ireland and China to respecting and safeguarding human rights.

As indicated in the joint statement, Ireland and China will conduct exchanges of expertise in governance and rule of law on the basis of equality and mutual respect. Through the formal framework of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, which was established in 1995, the EU continues to share with China its experience in the field of human rights protection and promotion, and to urge China to take clear steps to improve the human rights situation. The latest session of this dialogue took place on 25 June 2013 and provided the EU with the opportunity to express its concerns about a wide range of human rights issues in China, including the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, deprivation of liberty, and criminal and administrative punishment.

At this meeting, the EU also asked about measures taken so far by China to ratify the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, signed in 1998 in view of China's undertaking made during the 2009 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to ratify the Covenant at an early date. In February 2013, officials from my Department met with representatives of the Irish Falun Dafa Association. During this meeting the Irish Falun Dafa Association discussed the issue of organ harvesting and ways in which human rights issues are raised with Chinese authorities by both Ireland and the EU. Officials in my Department are due to meet again with the Falun Dafa Association regarding the issue of organ harvesting later this month.

Ireland, together with our EU partners, will continue to address human rights issues with China, including those related to the Falun Gong, in frequent and regular dialogue, through our contacts in both Dublin and Beijing and through the relevant multilateral channels, including at the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of human rights in China, scheduled for October 2013.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

66. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 132 of 28 May 2013 and the Immigration Reform Bill that was passed by the United States Senate on a 68-32 vote on 27 June 2013, to outline the measures contained within the Bill and the possible ramifications it will have on future J1 visas that many thousands of Irish college students avail of every summer; if new fees will be introduced on employers who hire J1 students for the usual 12 week period; his views on whether any such fees imposed on US employers will deter them from hiring Irish students, threatening the future of the J1 visa scheme; if it is apparent to him how this measure in the Bill would be paid or who would pay; his views on whether this measure contained in the Bill is unfair and unworkable; the measures he, officials in his Department and the Embassy of Ireland in Washington DC will be taking in the near future to ensure representations are made to every member of Congress, particularly those in support of the Irish cause, before this Bill is voted on in the United States House of Representatives to ensure amendments are made to the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32493/13]

68. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the US Immigration Reform Bill; the proposals, if any, he has to support the work of Irish advocacy groups in support of this legislation; his plans for further discussions with members of the US Congress to progress this legislation to a successful conclusion due to its importance for the undocumented Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32522/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 and 68 together.

I very much welcome the vote last week by the US Senate to approve a bill that provides for comprehensive reform of the American immigration system. This is a very positive development that takes us another step closer towards addressing the problems faced by undocumented Irish emigrants in the US and will allow them to emerge from the shadows. I strongly welcome the provisions in the Bill passed by the Senate to address the concerns of our undocumented and the specific E3 provisions for Ireland that provide extensive legal pathway for future migration flows between Ireland and the US.

I am particularly pleased that the Bill includes provisions that will allow for continuation of the summer J1 visa programme. Earlier drafts of the bill had threatened the future viability of the programme. I raised these concerns directly with Senator Patrick Leahy, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I am pleased that the Bill as passed by the Senate no longer classifies J1 summer participants as foreign workers, which would have imposed significant additional requirements on them and their potential employers. Earlier texts had also proposed a further fee of \$500 to be paid by the sponsoring organisations; the Bill as passed introduces a fee of \$100, and the conditions surrounding payment of this fee would allow for it to be paid by either the sponsoring organisation or the participant.

I pay tribute to hard work and persistence of Senators Leahy, Schumer, McCain and other members of the US Senate bi-partisan group who brought forward the original proposals. I also welcome the considerable bi-partisan support that has emerged in support of the Senate bill and hope that this bodes well for its further prospects.

The prospects for a successful outcome remain uncertain as the focus now moves to the House of Representatives. I look forward to visiting Washington D.C. next week to meet with key figures on Capitol Hill and the Government will continue to use every possible opportunity to secure a positive outcome. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my appreciation for the active support we continue to receive from a number of Irish community organisations,

including the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, the Chicago Celts and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. In pressing to secure a solution for the undocumented, we continue to work closely with them. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, through the Emigrant Support Programme, has provided funding to a number of organisations active in this area. They will be crucial partners as the immigration debate moves forward and I look forward to meeting representatives of these groups during my visit to Washington DC next week.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

67. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline the main points regarding the Minister of State with responsibility for trade and development's address to the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa EU Presidency Seminar in Dublin on 27 June 2013 entitled *Africa's Development Future: land, hope and hunger*; the number of persons on the African Continent who are employed by Irish companies; if he will detail where this data and statistical information is available; the Irish companies that interact with his Department that operate in Africa and the sectors they are involved with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32495/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): On 27 June 2013, I attended a two day seminar in Dublin entitled *Africa's Development Future: land, hope and hunger*. The event was organised by AWEPA, the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa. It sought to promote a dialogue on the roles, responsibilities and efforts of both European and African parliamentarians in developing policies relevant to Africa's development future concerning land ownership, water scarcity and chronic hunger. In the context of my participation in a panel discussion at the seminar, I emphasized the Government's commitment to reducing hunger and referenced the conclusions of the Dublin Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Climate Justice, which was held in April. I stressed the importance of the participation of smallholder farmers in policy discussions on agriculture, the need for a better appreciation of the links between HIV-AIDS and food security and the importance of ensuring the equitable use of domestic resources in responding to the problem of hunger and malnutrition.

I emphasized that in order that economic growth can support efforts to reduce poverty and hunger, it must be complemented with strong political leadership and sound policies. Such policies could include the introduction of appropriate social protection programmes, support to universal access to essential services, support to multi-sectoral initiatives to address malnutrition, such as the Scaling-Up Nutrition movement, support to smallholder agriculture, industrial policies which promote value addition and support decent jobs; and the development of fair and efficient tax systems.

Finally I referenced One World, One Future, Ireland's new Policy on International Development, which commits the Government to deepening efforts to help developing countries improve their business and investment environment, and to support their ability to trade. Ireland has a long history of trade with Africa and it is now an important market, particularly for the Irish food and drink industry. In 2011 exports of food and drink from Ireland to Africa grew by 26% to €500 million.

The most direct influence of trade on poverty reduction is through employment. It is not possible to provide the Deputy with precise statistical data on the number of persons on the entire African continent that are employed by Irish companies. Such data is not readily available from any reliable source or combination of sources, and Irish companies may choose not to report all details of their business transactions, where there may be commercial sensitivities

involved.

However, we do know from our ongoing contacts with the private sector, State Agencies and other relevant stakeholders, that Irish companies employ approximately 13,000 people in South Africa and over 15,000 people in West Africa, and that Irish business engagement in Africa is growing and generating employment. For the past two years, my Department has organised an annual Africa Ireland Economic Forum in Dublin and we will do so again in 2013. We expect some 200 Irish business representatives to attend the event from a broad range of sectors, including energy, construction, health care, education services, information technology, communications and financial services.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 66.

Fuel Laundering

69. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm the amounts spent by the State in each year for the past five years to operate and maintain the addition of dye to diesel used for certain industrial and commercial purposes; if he will further outline the estimated revenue lost to the State from the laundering of such fuels illegally in respect of the same years if such figures are available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32361/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners, who have responsibility for the collection of mineral oil tax, that the cost of adding the prescribed markers to rebated fuel is borne by the industry rather than the Exchequer. It has been suggested recently that huge savings could be made by moving from the current system of marking rebated fuel to one based on making repayments to those users that currently use marked fuel. This seems to be based on the erroneous view that adding the prescribed markers to rebated fuel is exceptionally costly and is borne by the Exchequer. This is not the case; the cost of the markers is negligible and is borne by the industry. The cost to the exchequer of marked fuel is the tax foregone and an alternative system based on direct repayments to users would not produce any savings for the exchequer and might be more costly if the incidence of fraud were greater. This system of marking diesel has been an effective and efficient means of delivering a tax rebate on a product used by a very large number of users across a wide range of uses. Fuel laundering to remove the marker added to lower-taxed mineral oil for off-road use has been a persistent problem over the years. However, it remained a marginal activity because the sulphur content of marked fuel was higher than that for road fuel and therefore the sulphur content continued to distinguish laundered fuel from genuine road fuel. Environmental requirements in relation to the sulphur content of fuel changed from the beginning of 2011, which resulted in marked fuel with the same sulphur content as road fuel coming onto the market. With this change, fuel laundering became more viable and criminal gangs intensified their laundering and distribution activities dramatically from the first half of 2011.

The Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to estimate accurately the loss to the Exchequer from particular activities in the shadow economy such as fuel laundering. It is clear, however, that illegal activity in the fuel market is significant, and that it poses a threat to the tax yield and to legitimate business. Revenue, therefore, has made action against fuel laundering one of its priorities and is implementing a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem through enhanced supply chain controls, the acquisition of a more effective fuel marker and continued robust enforcement action. This strategy included strengthening the licensing conditions for

auto-fuel traders in 2011 and the introduction of a new licensing system for marked fuel traders in October 2012. In addition, since January 2013, all licensed fuel traders are required to make electronic returns to Revenue of their fuel transactions each month. These supply chain control measures are designed to make it difficult for fuel criminals to source marked fuel for laundering and to get laundered product onto the market. Analysis of the monthly returns of fuel trading will enable Revenue to identify suspicious or anomalous fuel transactions and patterns of distribution. Analysis of the first few months of returns data is well advanced. Traders found to be involved in suspicious activity will be investigated and if they are unable to account properly for the source or disposal of product will face revocation of their licence, tax assessment and prosecution where appropriate. In addition, Revenue and HM Revenue & Customs in the UK signed a Memorandum of Understanding in May 2012 on a joint approach to finding a more effective marker for use in both jurisdictions. A number of proposals for a new marker submitted in response to an Invitation to Make Submissions are currently being evaluated. The outcome of this process is expected later this year. Revenue, in co-operation with other law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, continues to intensify enforcement action against fuel fraud and this work has yielded significant results to date. In the past two years 97 filling stations throughout the State were closed for breaches of licensing conditions. Since the beginning of 2010, over 2.8 million litres of fuel have been seized and 29 oil laundries detected and closed down, including 5 oil laundries in 2013 to date. Revenue regularly reminds motorists and the public generally that, in addition to its impact on the exchequer and legitimate trade, they should be aware of the risks posed to their vehicles by using laundered fuel and the fact that sourcing fuel in this way is funding criminal activity. The legitimate retail trade can also contribute to closing down this illegitimate trade by providing information on the outlets that are selling laundered diesel. Revenue chairs the Hidden Economy Monitoring Group (HEMG) and has established Regional sub-groups of the HEMG to facilitate the reporting of information by traders through their representative associations. Retailers who suspect or have evidence that laundered diesel is being sold in their area should report this through their representative associations to the Revenue. Such reports are treated as confidential and are fully investigated by Revenue.

Banking Sector Staff Issues

70. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if officials who were employed in banks that received bailout and contingency funding from the Central Bank and other State institutions, were bound by the code of the Civil Service that relates to the achievement of an excellent service for Government and the other institutions of the State as well as for the public as citizens and users of public services, based on principles of integrity, impartiality, effectiveness, equity and accountability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32331/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My ministerial colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has received an identical question (Dáil Question Number 145, PQ 32332/13 which is also for answer today) and he will provide the Deputy with the details he is requesting on behalf of both departments.

Budget 2014 Issues

71. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the way it is justifiable to take €280 a year from 300,000 pensioners in budget 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32370/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to certain media reports which indicate that Budget 2014 will contain measures to extend the Universal Social Charge to include the Contributory State Pension. As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Tax Code

72. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 26 June, if he will outline the effective tax rate effect for income earners whose tax credits were phased out with a reduction of half the credits between €100,000 and €150,000; three quarters of the credits between €150,000 and €200,000; and abolished over €200,000; based on the current tax rates; but also setting out a table of what the effective rate would be if a new third tax rate of 48% was introduced on income over €100,000. [32381/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the increases in the effective tax rates, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, that would be brought about by reducing the main personal and employee tax credits in the manner mentioned by the Deputy in parliamentary question 30922/13 are set out in respect of each specified income range as follows.

Range of Gross Income	Reduction in tax credits Increase in effective rates of income tax Percentage points %
€100,000 to €150,000	+ 2.16
€150,001 to €200,000	+ 2.07
Over €200,000	+ 1.06

If the impact of a new third tax rate of 48% on taxable income over €100,000 is included with the reductions in tax credits already mentioned the corresponding combined increases in the effective tax rates are estimated as follows.

Range of Gross Income	Reduction in tax credits and new top tax rate of 48% Increase in effective rates of income tax Percentage points %
€100,000 to €150,000	+ 2.5
€150,001 to €200,000	+ 3.5
Over €200,000	+ 4.87

The figures for increases in effective tax rates are obtained by calculating the tax increases arising from the changes as a percentage of the total gross income of income earners in each of the specified income ranges. It should be noted that the income ranges shown in the above table relate to Gross Income as defined in Revenue Statistical Report 2011. These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2010 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends in the interim. They are therefore provisional and likely to be revised. It should also be noted that a married couple who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

Tax Collection

73. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 26 June 2013, if he will set out the additional average tax paid by employees in the categories mentioned if the employees were also subject to a new third rate of tax of 48% on income earned in excess of €100,000. [32382/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that if the main personal and employee tax credits were to be restricted in the manner mentioned by the deputy in parliamentary question number 30922/13 of 26 June, and additionally, if a new third rate of tax of 48% on taxable income in excess of €100,000 was introduced, the additional average tax payable by employees, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, is set out in respect of each of the specified income categories as follows.

Range of Gross Income	Average additional tax payable per income earner within the income range
€100,000 to €150,000	€3,397
€150,001 to €200,000	€7,196
Over €200,000	€18,208

The employees who have been taken into account in these calculations do not include proprietary directors who, while formally taxed under the PAYE system, are more akin to the self-employed. An individual is not entitled to the employee (PAYE) tax credit against emoluments paid by a company to that individual as a proprietary director. It should be noted that the income ranges shown in the above table relate to Gross Income as defined in Revenue Statistical Report 2011. These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2010 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends in the interim. They are therefore provisional and likely to be revised. It should also be noted that a married couple who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

Tax Code

74. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue that would be raised if personal and not employee tax credits for high income earners were phased out with a reduction of half the credits between €100,000 and €150,000, three quarters of the credits between €150,000 and €200,000, and abolished over €200,000; the impact that would have on the average tax take from salary earners in that category; and the impact that would have on income earners in those categories if they were also subject to a new third rate of tax of 48% on income earned over €100,000. [32383/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of reducing the main personal income tax credits, but not the employee tax credit, for all income earners in the manner mentioned by the Deputy, would be of the order of €204 million. A breakdown of the estimated Exchequer yield by each specified income range, together with an indication of the average additional tax payable by income earners within each income range, is as follows.

Range of Gross Income	Estimated yield to the Exchequer €m	Average additional tax payable per income earner within the gross income range
€100,000 to €150,000	101	€1,540
€150,001 to €200,000	41	€2,305
Over €200,000	62	€3,079

If the impact of a new third tax rate of 48% on taxable income over €100,000 is included with the reductions in tax credits already mentioned above, the corresponding average additional tax payable by income earners within each income range, is as follows.

Range of Gross Income	Average additional tax take per income earner within the gross income range
€100,000 to €150,000	€1,954
€150,001 to €200,000	€4,757
Over €200,000	€17,668

It should be noted that the income ranges shown in the above table relate to Gross Income as defined in Revenue Statistical Report 2011. These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2010 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends in the interim. They are therefore provisional and likely to be revised. It should also be noted that a married couple who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

Tax Code

75. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to his Parliamentary Question No. 85 of 26 June 2013, if he will set out the average additional tax take paid by taxpayers earning over €100,000 if tax credits were abolished; the average additional tax take that would be paid if these taxpayers also incurred a new third rate of tax of 48% on the income earned in excess of €100,000; and what the effective tax rate with the credits abolished under either the current rate, or with the new tax rate, for average income earners at €125,000, €150,000, €175,000, €200,000, €300,000, and €500,000. [32384/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Unfortunately, it was not possible to collate the information required for this answer in the time allowed. I will provide the Deputy with the answer in writing shortly.

Tax Clearance Certificates

76. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the procedure by which companies with registered offices in the British Virgin Islands can obtain tax clearance certificates to be awarded contracts by public bodies and Government Departments here for work to be carried on here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32438/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that a Tax Clearance Certificate is a written confirmation that the tax affairs of a person or business are

in order at the date of issue of the Certificate. I am further advised that Revenue is obliged to issue tax clearance certification to any entity, regardless of where the entity is registered for company law purposes, providing there is no money outstanding to the Irish Exchequer and where relevant, providing all required tax returns are filed.

The application process for tax clearance certification can be completed either through the Revenue online system or in certain circumstances via manual application. For ease of administration Revenue has divided responsibility for processing tax clearance applications across a number of its operational areas. For example, Irish resident businesses are managed through the relevant local Tax District, while non-resident businesses are either dealt with by Dublin City Centre District or by the Non-Resident Unit in the Collector-General's Office, depending on whether the applicant is already permanently established in the State or not.

I am assured by Revenue that every application for tax clearance is fully vetted and certification will only issue where all tax obligations are up to date. In circumstances where the application is refused, Revenue will make direct contact in writing with the business and will outline why the application was refused.

Money Laundering

77. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if he will re-examine the requirement to have anti-money laundering identification requirements applied to the purchase of prize bonds over €25 as it is unnecessary restrictive and will have a detrimental impact on the sale of prize bonds to customers who wish to give them as a gift to family members; if he will review this with a view to setting the limit at €100 before any requirements were applied and accept that this would be a move appropriate level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32476/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): European legislation has been adopted to protect the financial system and certain professions and activities from being misused for money laundering and financing of terrorism purposes. The anti-money-laundering obligations applicable in Ireland derive from the Third EU Money-Laundering Directive. The Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 was enacted in July 2010 to transpose the Third Money Laundering Directive (2005/60/EC) and its Implementing Directive (2006/70/EC) into Irish Law.

Part 4 of the Criminal Justice Act 2010 sets out the obligations of "designated persons" in relation to customer identification. One such obligation set out in the Act is the obligation to conduct customer due diligence, prior to the establishment of a business relationship. Customer due diligence refers to the identification of customers and that of any beneficial owners of financial products associated with the customer.

An Post and the Prize Bond Company are deemed to be a "*designated person*" under the Criminal Justice Act 2010 as they fall within the definition of a "*financial institution*". In light of this, An Post and the Prize Bond Company are required to comply with the relevant provisions of the Act in relation to the sale of Prize Bonds to customers. This means, in practical terms, that customer due diligence must be conducted on all purchases of prize bonds, irrespective of value.

The extent to which any particular person or product may be exempted from the customer due diligence requirements of the Act is determined by reference to the Act having regard to the underlying Directives.

The Central Bank of Ireland has no discretion to exempt certain firms from the requirement to comply with the Act.

In light of the above, I am exploring with the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) and my colleague the Minister for Justice whether or not exemptions available under the Directives may be applied to small value purchases of prize bonds facilitated on behalf of the State by An Post and the Prize Bond Company.

Insurance Costs

78. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance the protections there are for holders of life insurance policies against insurance companies unreasonably and arbitrarily increasing the premiums to be paid by the policyholder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32477/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the outset the Deputy should note that neither I nor the Central Bank has the power to intervene in such matters as pricing of insurance policies is a commercial decision for firms to make themselves based on the risks involved. It should be noted that consumer issues are covered by the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code which amongst other things sets out a series of general principles about how financial service firms (including all insurance companies) should interact with their customers. The Code however does not prohibit or restrict an insurance company from increasing its annual premium rates, as this is a commercial decision for the company in question and is generally determined by such issues as higher claims volumes, and the nature of the product.

My Department has previously had a number of enquiries about this type of issue and it would appear that in most instances people have what are known as "Whole of Life" insurance policies. The Central Bank has advised that premiums for such policies are not fixed and can increase over the duration of the policy. "Whole of Life" policies which cover the policyholder for their entire lifetime while the policy is active must be distinguished from "Term Life" insurance policies which cover a fixed period of time such as 10 or 20 years and have a fixed premium unless index linked. Finally, it should be noted that if a policyholder has a complaint about an insurance company not honouring a claim on a policy, they can refer the matter to the Financial Services Ombudsman for adjudication <http://www.financialombudsman.ie/>.

Banking Sector Investigations

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will state, in respect of each of the former covered institutions, if internal and-or external telephone calls were recorded by the bank; when the recording of telephone calls commenced; the current practice; if any such recordings from the period 2008 onwards have been passed on to the authorities as part of their investigation into certain matters associated with the banking collapse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32527/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware banks are required to record phone calls for a variety of reasons. I have not sought access to these recordings as under statute the Garda Síochána are the body responsible for criminal investigations in the State. I understand that the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation have requested access to various documents/materials in the banks, including audio recordings, and that the banks have fully complied with these investigations to date. It would be completely inappropriate for the Department of Finance to act outside of its legal powers and interfere with any investigation

that could compromise potential future criminal or civil investigations by the bodies responsible under statute. Any phone calls that are relevant around this period may feature as part of the forthcoming banking inquiry for which the legislation is currently before the House. Under the proposed legislation responsibility is assigned exclusively to the Houses of the Oireachtas to determine the requirement for a formal inquiry, the terms of reference of that inquiry and the procedural and organisational aspects of the inquiry.

Bank Liabilities

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the official breakdown by class of liability of the total amount of bank liabilities at 30 September 2008 covered by the bank guarantee announced on that day and subsequently enshrined in legislation. [32528/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that details of bank funding profiles, including a breakdown of the aggregate amounts of the liabilities of the covered banks for any given period, received by my Department in the course of official communications and which are not a matter of public record are commercially sensitive. However, in the case of the period specified by the Deputy, 30 September, 2008, the information requested is already available on public record as published in the Nyberg Report in March 2011 <http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/publications/reports/2011/nybergreport.pdf>. I repeat the figures published in that report (page 77 refers) for the Deputy's convenience.

Funding Profiles	€
Customer Deposits	€173.2bn
Interbank Deposits	€49.1bn
Senior Unsecured Debt	€124.2bn
Financial Instruments	€0.7bn
Asset Covered Securities	€15.8bn
Dated Subordinated Debt	€12.2bn
Total	€375.2bn

Central Bank of Ireland Investigations

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of each of the separate investigations currently under way by the Central Bank of Ireland into the banking collapse; the subject matter being investigated; if he will provide an update in respect of each investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32531/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank of Ireland that in January, 2009, it (the "Bank") commenced an investigation into certain matters in relation to Anglo Irish Bank. The investigation focused on the unwinding of CFD positions in Anglo Irish Bank, the back-to-back loans with Irish Life and Permanent and loans to directors and connected parties. In May, 2011, the Gardaí informed the Bank, following consultation with the Director of Public Prosecutions, that to proceed with the Bank's investigations at that time could prejudice any future criminal prosecutions. Accordingly, the Bank decided to defer its investigation but has kept this decision under review. Given the seriousness and sensitivity of criminal proceedings and the strength of the sanctions available to the Gardaí and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE), the Bank considers that this is the most appropriate approach to take where there is a reasonable possibility of multiple proceedings.

Regular liaison with these agencies is continuing.

In relation to Irish Nationwide Building Society (INBS), an investigation into historical lending practices at INBS is at an advanced stage and, once concluded, decisions regarding any possible future enforcement proceedings will be made.

In addition to the above two investigations, the Bank commenced a review in June, 2011, of the fitness and probity of all sitting directors of the six banks and building societies covered by the State guarantee. This review concluded in June, 2012. In respect of a small number of directors, the Bank investigated more thoroughly their individual roles and responsibilities during the period leading up to the present banking crisis. During the period of the review, many of the long-standing directors of the six institutions have resigned.

In respect of any directors who continued in their roles into 2012 and beyond and who were in place prior to 2008, the Bank concluded that, based on the evidence available, it had no reason to suspect the fitness and probity of those individuals. In some cases, this decision was taken within the Bank and, in others, the Bank sought an external opinion on the material available.

In respect of any directors of the institutions, including those whose tenure goes back to before 2008, the Bank will continue to carry out its role in respect of the supervision of the fitness and probity of those directors. Where any information comes to light to give the Bank reason to suspect that the Bank's standards may not be met by any individual director, then the Bank will commence to investigate that information in a thorough and comprehensive manner and take any action that may be warranted using the powers available.

New applications to sit on the boards of any of these institutions which remain under the Bank's active supervision will require the applicants to establish, to the satisfaction of the Bank, that proposed directors meet the Bank's minimum standards of fitness and probity.

In addition to the above, the Central Bank is carefully studying the various transcripts emerging in relation to Anglo Irish Bank. This is something that is viewed very seriously. The Central Bank will be liaising with the Gardaí in this regard and is also examining whether or not any breaches of regulatory requirements may have occurred arising from the information contained in the transcripts.

Bank Guarantee Scheme Administration

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money held by the then Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland at 30 September 2008 in respect of the deposit guarantee scheme for banks and building societies; and to specify the amount currently being held by the Central Bank of Ireland in respect of the same scheme. [32532/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) protects depositors in the event of a bank, building society or credit union authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland being unable to repay deposits. Deposits up to €100,000 per person per institution are protected. The DGS is administered by the Central Bank of Ireland and is funded by the credit institutions covered by the scheme. Each deposit-holding institution is required to maintain a balance on their Deposit Protection Account of 0.2% of their total deposits. This percentage is calculated annually in December.

The balance in the Deposit Protection Account at 30th September 2008 was €526,093,100.00.

The current balance is €377,335,017.55. The decline in the Deposit Protection Account balance primarily reflects the drop in deposits in Irish credit institutions between 2008 and 2013.

Economic Data

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent fall in GDP; the actions the Government will take to arrest the decline in output; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32534/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The figures published last week by the CSO show that GDP contracted by -0.6 per cent quarter-on-quarter in the first quarter of 2013 and by -0.9 per cent year-on-year.

Almost all components of domestic demand contracted in year-on-year terms in the first quarter. Private consumption was down -1.6 per cent, partly due to low car sales. Investment fell -19.8 per cent as there were fewer purchases of aircraft than in the same quarter of the previous year. Government consumption continued to fall as public service employment continues to shrink in line with policy objectives.

On the external side, exports fell by -4.1 per cent. This is primarily due to patent expiration in the pharma sector as goods exports are down -9.4 per cent. Weak trading partner demand is also impacting. Imports fell by -4.2 per cent.

Notwithstanding these data, the labour market continues to show signs of stabilisation. Figures published this morning show that unemployment has fallen from a high of 15.1 per cent in February 2012 to 13.6 per cent in June 2013. In addition, the latest Exchequer returns published yesterday by my Department highlight the consistent improvement in Ireland's public finances with the gap between income expenditure continuing to narrow.

The latest GDP figures are below expectations of both domestic and international forecasters. This makes the Government's primary macroeconomic policy objective of putting the economy back on a sustainable growth path so as to move to a point where sustained net employment creation is taking place, even more imperative.

In this regard, competitiveness has improved substantially in recent years, with inflation at or below the euro area since March 2008. Tangible progress is being made to ensure a banking system healthy enough to support productive investment by *inter alia* the SME sector. In relation to the public finances, the policy objective remains the correction of the excessive general government deficit by 2015, as recommended by the ECOFIN Council in late-2010. All of the interim annual deficit ceilings set by the Council have been met, and the Government remains committed to bringing the deficit below 3 per cent of GDP within the stated time horizon.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that the Government remains committed to tackling the unacceptably high level of unemployment. Reflecting this, the *Action Plan for Jobs 2013* set out over 333 actions to be undertaken in the coming year to support job creation and complement measures already undertaken in the *Jobs Initiative* and the *Pathways to Work*.

Bond Redemption

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if sales have taken place to date by the Central Bank of Ireland of the portfolio of Irish Government bonds it holds which replaced the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation promissory notes; the total value of such trans-

actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32608/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Central Bank that the portfolio of Government bonds now held by the Bank following the liquidation of IBRC will be sold as soon as possible, provided conditions of financial stability permit. The Bank has, however, undertaken that a minimum amount of bonds will be sold in accordance with the following schedule: to end 2014 (€0.5bn), 2015-2018 (€0.5bn p.a.), 2019-2023 (€1bn p.a.), 2024 and after (€2bn p.a.). The Bank normally reports in detail on its balance sheet only at annual intervals although it also publishes a more aggregate balance sheet on a monthly basis. While the latter does not contain details of its investment holdings, it is my understanding that no sales have so far taken place from this portfolio.

State Bodies Mergers

85. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on the merger of the National Centre for Technology in Education with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in order to integrate ICT education and further aid the number of students opting for ICT courses at third level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32500/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Programme for Government included a proposal to merge the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Following consideration of the issues involved, it was decided that the school-focused functions of the NCTE should be integrated more closely with other support services for teachers and schools and that certain functions relating to curriculum development be transferred to the NCCA. Therefore the NCTE was formally merged with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) as of 1st June 2012, while a senior post from the NCTE dealing with curricular matters was assigned to the NCCA. A new senior management team consisting of a Director and four Deputy Directors was appointed to the PDST organisation as a whole.

One of the Deputy Director posts has responsibility for the ICT support service functions carried out by the staff of the former NCTE. The new configuration ensures greater integration of ICT within teaching and learning both in terms of policy and practice. In relation to increasing the number of students opting for ICT courses at third level, the joint Government-Industry ICT Action Plan, which was published in January 2012, sets out a multi-level approach with an overarching aim of doubling the number of graduates from ICT disciplines to 2,000 by 2018. It contains a comprehensive range of measures to build the domestic supply of ICT graduates, in the short, medium and long term, including through the roll out of the ICT graduate skills conversion programmes. Almost 1,500 places have been provided for graduate jobseekers under the two rounds of the ICT graduate skills conversion programmes that have issued to date. More than 400 people have already graduated from these programmes and a further 300 are due to graduate before the end of this year. In addition, more than 3,700 people have enrolled on ICT programmes under the first two rounds of the Springboard reskilling initiative and a further 2,000 ICT Springboard places have been made available under the third phase of Springboard which was launched in June 2013.

The Plan has helped to raise awareness of employment opportunities in ICT. Technology courses accounted for 20.5% of all honours degree level first preference applications through the CAO this year. The increase in demand from students for technology courses, including a 50% increase in first preference applications for computing over the past 5 years is very positive in building the future supply of graduates.

School Accommodation

86. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) in County Louth has proposed to integrate an autism unit into its school and that a prefabricated building has been in place for some time; the reason the service has not yet been established in this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32309/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) engaged with County Louth VEC during the 2011/2012 school year with a view to establishing an autism unit at one of its post-primary schools in Louth. The VEC, in collaboration with the NCSE, identified the school concerned as being suitable for the establishment of such a unit.

The NCSE recommended that an autism unit would be established at the school in question to commence in January 2013. My Department sanctioned temporary accommodation for this unit on that basis. The NCSE has since advised that the ASD class did not go ahead because the anticipated demand did not materialise. I understand that it is the NCSE's intention to keep the matter under review in the context of any emerging need.

Student Support Schemes Issues

87. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider that there is little point in the Government fully accepting the recommendations of the Fottrell report, committing to increasing medical student numbers, investing the time and resources in establishing the GEM programmes and then making no provision to support students who will be returning to education driven by a passion to pursue a career in medicine (details supplied). [32329/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Students pursue GEM programmes as second undergraduate degree courses and consequently are not eligible for free fees or for student grants. However in order to widen access to GEM programmes, and give assistance towards the financial burden on each student pursuing these programmes, the fees of participating EU students are partly subsidised by the State via the Higher Education Authority. For the 2012/13 academic year, this subsidy amounted to €10,000 per annum in respect of each EU student participating in GEM programmes in the State. In addition the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides tax relief, at the standard rate, for tuition fees paid in respect of approved courses.

Schools Building Projects Administration

88. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date by which tenders have to be submitted to his Department for the construction of a new school (details supplied) in County Waterford; if a work schedule and completion date for the construction of the school will be published; if he will appoint a project co-ordinator to ensure adequate liaison and progress on the project between his Department and which the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government which are providing funding for a public library on the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32334/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): A project manager has been

appointed by my Department to oversee the delivery of the project referred to by the Deputy. Tenders for the project are due for return on July 15th 2013 and the relevant officials from Waterford City Council have been kept updated in relation to the project progress. Assuming no issues arise it is anticipated that construction will commence in Quarter four 2013. This project is being co-funded by Waterford City Council; therefore all funding queries on the public library should be raised with Waterford City Council in the first instance.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

89. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding emergency funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32336/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Following receipt of an application from the school authority I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department recently approved funding under the Emergency Works Scheme. The school authority has been informed of this decision.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

90. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for an ASD unit, English speaking, for primary school children in the west Cork area. [32363/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local special educational needs organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. SENOs are a valuable source of support to parents who are actively sourcing a placement for their children. Furthermore the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the statutory agency which assists parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The establishment of a network of autism-specific special classes in schools across the country to cater for children with autism has been a key educational priority in recent years. I have arranged for the matter raised by the Deputy to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

91. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an appeal made to Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32369/13]

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 new award letter on 28th June 2013, following a decision by the SUSI Appeals Officer. If the student is unhappy with the decision of the Appeals Officer, or is of the opinion that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she may appeal to the Student Grants Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form will be available on request from SUSI.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

92. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs assistants who will be allocated to primary and secondary schools in County Kerry from September 2013; the comparable figures for 2011 and 2012; if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the number of special needs assistants per school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32374/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports including resource teaching and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support as well as the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. Details of the resource teaching and SNA allocations which have been made to schools by the NCSE for the 2012/2013 and 2013/14 school years are available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie and can be viewed on a per county basis. The resource allocation statistics detail all of the SNA allocations by school in County Kerry for these years. The NCSE has advised my Department that they allocated 325 SNA posts to schools in County Kerry for the 2011/2012 school year. The number of posts available to the NCSE for allocation this year has been maintained at 10,575 posts and there has been no reduction to the overall number of posts available for allocation. The allocation that is made to schools annually is based on the number of valid applications received. Where a school enrolls new pupils who have care needs in advance or during the school year, schools may apply to the NCSE for additional SNA support or for a review of their SNA allocation. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

School Accommodation

93. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the application for capital funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Limerick requesting urgent repair of the school facilities; if he will fast-track the application in view of the fact that the architect's report has found the school building to be dangerous; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32376/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has been in contact with the school, referred to by the Deputy, and approved the preparation of the report concerned into the school's accommodation issues. This report has now been received and my Department will be in further contact with the school authorities when this report has been assessed.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

94. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of hours a permanent special needs assistant in a primary school is required to work on a weekly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32377/13]

95. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills whether the total number of hours a permanent special needs assistant in a primary school works is inclu-

sive or exclusive of tea breaks and lunch breaks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32379/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 95 together.

The working week for SNAs is defined in their contract (Department of Education and Skills Circular 15/05). SNAs are required to work normal classroom hours including class break periods and in addition to attend before and after school in order to help with the preparation and tidying up of classrooms, reception and dispersal of children etc. The exact hours of work will normally be specified by the Board of Management in the SNAs contract of employment. Full-time SNAs are required to work for the normal school hours in the school that they are working in, and in addition to be available for a period of time before and after school in order to help with reception and dispersal of children and preparation and tidying up of classrooms etc. These times are outlined locally by the school management and will vary from school to school depending on the requirements of the school. Furthermore, all SNAs were required to be available for a number of days at the start and finish of each school term not exceeding 12 in total. Under the Croke Park Agreement it was agreed to introduce greater flexibility to the use of these 12 days. These 12 days will now equate to 72 hours (pro-rata for part-time SNAs) to be used by schools as an additional bank of hours to be utilised and delivered outside of normal school opening hours and/or the normal school year. In terms of breaks staff are entitled to statutory minimum break periods as set out in the Organisation of Working Time Act.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

96. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the special needs assistant allocation for a child (details supplied) in County Cork currently receiving full-time assistance will be maintained for the upcoming year, as it is due to be halved, which will have adverse consequences for their learning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32386/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports including resource teaching and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support as well as the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

The level of resources being devoted to supporting children with Special Educational Needs has been maintained at €1.3 billion this year. This includes provision for 10,575 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and nearly 10,000 Learning Support and Resource Teachers. These resources have been protected despite the ongoing severe financial position and a requirement to make expenditure savings across a range of areas. There has been no reduction to the overall number of SNA posts being provided for schools for the coming school year. This provision remains at 10,575 posts, which will ensure that all children who qualify for access to SNA support for the coming school year will receive access to such support.

The total number of SNA posts allocated to schools for the 2012/13 school year was 10,487 posts. For the 2011/12 school year it was 10,320 posts. The demand for SNAs for the 2013/2014 school year currently stands at 10,490 leaving some 85 posts available for late demand. It is therefore estimated that there will be sufficient SNA posts to provide access to SNA support for

all children who require such support in the coming school year. SNA allocations are made to schools by the NCSE annually, taking into account the assessed care needs of qualifying children. All schools were advised to apply to the NCSE for resource teaching and SNA support for the 2013/14 school year by 15th March 2013.

Details of the SNA allocations which have been made to schools by the NCSE for the 2013/2014 school year are now available on the NCSE website *www.ncse.ie*, which provides details of the SNA allocations for each school on a school by school and per county basis. Where schools have enrolled children who were not considered at the time that these allocations were made, or where schools are seeking a revision to the quantum of SNA support which has been allocated to them for the coming school year, they should contact the NCSE regarding this matter. In general a revision to SNA allocations will only be made in circumstances where schools have enrolled new pupils or where schools can demonstrate that they do not have sufficient SNA posts to cater for the care needs of all of the qualifying children in their school. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on *www.ncse.ie*.

School Staffing

97. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide in tabular form the number of release days from full-time teaching duties afforded by his Department to teaching principals; his plans to increase these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32393/13]

108. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will list in tabular form the number of release days from full-time teaching duties afforded by his Department to teaching principals; his plans to increase these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32404/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 108 together.

The details regarding release time for principal teachers in primary schools is outlined in Circular Letter 25/02 which can be accessed on my Department's website. The number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year is as follows:

Size of School*	Number of Days Release Time
Principal + 5/6	22
Principal + 3/4	18
Principal + 0/1/2	14

*Size of school refers to Principal and mainstream class teachers only and excludes ex-quota posts e.g. learning support, resource, disadvantaged concessionary posts etc.

There are no plans to increase the number of release days that principal teachers may take as release days.

School Management

98. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the training that was provided for members of boards of management at primary and post-primary level; the

funding his Department provided for this training; the evaluation of this training that has been undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32394/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In recognition of the responsibility which the Education Act has imposed on Boards of Management and the increasingly complex environment in which they must operate, the Teacher Education Section (TES) of my Department developed a new scheme for the provision of support to school management bodies for the purpose of training and development of members of boards of management of primary and post-primary schools in the discharge of their duties. Five core modules of training are currently being delivered. The 5 topics available to Board of Management members are The Board as a Corporate Entity, Procedures Governing the Appointment of Staff in Schools, Board Finances & the Role of Treasurer, Legal Issues and Child Protection Guidelines. Other training is provided as is requested by members of Boards from time to time.

When the training was established in 2006, my Department allocated a sum of €1,000,000 and since then has provided an additional €764,146 towards the training. For 2013 my Department has allocated an amount of €250,000 to BoM training. A National Steering Committee, comprising representatives from all of the Management Bodies for schools, primary and post-primary, meets twice a year with the TES. The Steering Committee members oversee the design and planning of training materials and report on the roll-out of training for the respective school sectors. The response by BOM members to the training, as reported by the Management Bodies, has been very positive. The funding for Board of Management Training is administered on behalf of my Department by the Drumcondra Education Centre.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

99. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce the average class size in primary schools in Ireland, which according to OECD Education at a Glance 2013 is the second highest of EU countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32395/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The staffing schedule is the mechanism used for the allocation of classroom teachers to all primary schools. It operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. My Department publishes annual statistics on class size data for each school. The most recent statistics are for the 2011/12 school year. The national average class size is 24.4 pupils. However, with over 20,700 classes in over 3,100 primary schools throughout the country there will always be variations in class sizes at individual school level. My Department's guidance to local school management is that such variations should be kept to the minimum.

Classroom teachers are allocated under the staffing schedule based on the pupil enrolments for the previous 30th September. However, the staffing schedule also includes provision for schools that have significant increases in their enrolment in rapidly developing areas to be allocated classroom teachers based on their projected enrolments for September 2013. The criteria for this are set out in the staffing schedule which is available on the Department website. Given the constraints on teacher numbers my Department has no capacity to put any other ameliorating measures in place.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government has protected frontline services in schools to the greatest extent possible in the recent budget and there will no reduction in teacher numbers in primary schools and in free second level schools for the 2013/14 school year as a result of

the budget. The DEIS scheme for disadvantaged schools is also fully protected with no overall changes to staffing levels or funding as a result of the budget.

School Staffing

100. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will list in tabular form the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in primary schools in March 2009; the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in primary schools in September 2009; the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in primary schools in September 2010; the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in primary schools in September 2011; the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in primary schools in September 2012; the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in post-primary schools in March 2009; and the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in post-primary schools in September 2009. [32396/13]

101. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will list in tabular form the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in post-primary schools; the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in post-primary schools in September 2011; and the number of assistant principal posts and special duties posts in post-primary schools in September 2012. [32397/13]

102. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will list in tabular form the number of Assistant Principal posts returned to primary schools and post primary schools each year as a result of the limited alleviation introduced for schools acutely affected by the impact of the moratorium. [32398/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 to 102, inclusive, together.

When the moratorium on the filling of posts of responsibility was introduced the Government exempted Principal and Deputy Principal posts in all primary and post-primary schools and these posts continue to be replaced in the normal manner. The impact of the moratorium is therefore limited to the Director of Adult Education, Assistant Principal and Special Duties posts of responsibility. Vacancies at this level arise due to retirements in the specific grades and typically also from the knock on effect of filling Principal and Deputy Principal posts.

Limited alleviation was introduced for schools that are acutely affected by the impact of the moratorium at Assistant Principal level. This alleviation is mainly focused on post-primary schools. The detailed information requested by the Deputy would take some time to compile by staff in my Department. I do not therefore propose to divert them from their work on the staffing allocations for the 2013/14 school year. Instead I am providing the Deputy with the summary information on the overall impact of the moratorium since it was first introduced in March 2009. At that time about 53% of teachers had posts of responsibility. This has since reduced to about 39%. The following tables give some more detail on the overall position since the moratorium was introduced.

Level of Reduction in Posts of Responsibility

Post type	Post Primary	Primary
Assistant Principal	-2,222	-751
Special Duties	-1,836	-2,276
Total	-4,058	-3,027

Alleviation.

Post type	Post Primary	Primary
Director of Adult Education	30	N/A
Programme Co-ordinator (AP post)	90	N/A
Assistant Principal	307	38
Total	427	38

School Staffing

103. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will instruct his Department to carry out a review of the workload of principal teachers with particular emphasis on the role of teaching principals in view of reports that increasing workload pressure, responsibility and accountability is leading to a general negativity about the role of school leadership. [32399/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department is focused on improving its systems and requirements to ensure that the administrative burden for Principals, schools and for the Department itself is minimised as far as possible. To this end, a range of initiatives have been and continue to be undertaken by my Department. One such example is the introduction of electronic submission of primary schools' annual enrolment returns resulting in significant administrative efficiencies to this annual process for both schools and my Department. In recent years, my Department has also simplified the teacher allocation and redeployment processes with a view to giving earlier certainty to schools in relation to their teacher allocation and the arrangements for the filling of teaching posts. Other developments in recent years have included the introduction of an Online Claims System (OLCS) for teacher payroll and the payment of part-time teachers through the Department's payroll. The latter ended the previously burdensome system under which each school, funded by grant payments, was required to make its own arrangements to pay part-time teachers. Across all areas of my Department, we are continuously seeking to identify opportunities, ranging from small administrative changes to the more significant and major reforms, to streamline our processes, achieve better value for money and ultimately improve the education provided to our students. My officials will continue to work, in consultation with stakeholders as appropriate, on addressing this issue on an on-going basis.

School Staffing

104. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary principals between the age of 21 and 30; the number of primary principals between the age of 31 and 40; the number of primary principals between the age of 41 and 50; the number of primary principals between the age of 51 and 60; and the number of primary principals older than 60. [32400/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The information requested by the Deputy on the age profile of principals in primary schools is as follows:

Age	Number
21-30	102
31-40	711

Age	Number
41-50	1078
51-60	1412
>60	105

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

105. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of section 29 appeals against suspension in post-primary schools that were taken by parents of children with special needs; the number of section 29 appeals against expulsion in post-primary schools that were taken by parents of children with special needs; the number of section 29 appeals against suspension in primary schools that were taken by parents of children with special needs; and the number of section 29 appeals against expulsion in primary schools that were taken by parents of children with special needs. [32401/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The specific information requested by the Deputy, that is number and category of appeals relating to special needs children is not available. My officials have compiled the information that is available on the table following.

-	-	-	-	-	Details of results of section 29 appeals from 2008 to 2012	-
Category	Expulsions	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Level Post Primary	resolved before hearing	13	20	22	17	7
-	upheld at hearing	12	15	5	7	19
-	not upheld at hearing	61	38	35	32	46
-	*Referred back to Board of Management	-	-	1	-	-
-	Post-Primary - Total	86	73	63	56	72
Level Primary	resolved before hearing	2	2	3	3	1
-	upheld at hearing	4	1	0	2	5

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-	-	-	-	-	Details of results of section 29 appeals from 2008 to 2012	-
Category	Expulsions	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
-	not upheld at hearing	6	5	2	3	6
-	*Referred back to Board of Management	-	-	1	-	-
-	Primary - Total	12	8	6	8	12
Category	Suspensions	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Level Post Primary	resolved before hearing	2	3	0	2	4
-	upheld at hearing	7	6	1	2	6
-	not upheld at hearing	0	0	0	3	3
-	*Referred back to Board of Management	-	-	1	-	-
-	Post-Primary - Total	9	9	2	7	13
Level Primary	resolved before hearing	1	0	0	1	4
-	upheld at hearing	3	5	2	0	3
-	not upheld at hearing	0	2	1	0	2
-	Primary - Total	4	7	3	1	9

* Pre a Supreme Court Judgement this was an option open to committee members, post the judgement it was no longer an option

School Funding

106. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial

support being provided to each of the managerial bodies at primary and post-primary level in each of the past five years. [32402/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department provides annual grants to the recognised management bodies at primary and post primary level to assist them in providing management support to the schools in their sectors. Management bodies such as Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA), Educate Together, Church of Ireland Board of Education at primary level or at second level the JMB/AMCSS, IVEA and ACCS provide important support services for schools in respect of employment, legal, financial and other matters. The individual management bodies remit reflects the particular patronage of the schools which they serve for example the CPSMA provides support services to primary schools under catholic patronage and it is a similar position in relation to each of the other management bodies. The core funding to the management bodies at primary and post primary level amounts to a total of approximately €1.3 million per annum. Apart from the core funding provided, my Department also provides some funding in respect of

- the co-ordination role in relation to the Garda Vetting of school staff other than teachers
- Board of Management training
- Running costs of the Financial Service Support Unit (FSSU). The FSSU undertakes auditing and financial support function in respect of the accounts of voluntary secondary schools. The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following document.

Management Body	2010	2011	2012
CPSMA	-	-	-
Grant	€200,000	€190,000	€190,000
Vetting	€2,445	€51,048	€54,065
COI Board of Education	-	-	-
Grant	€140,000	€133,000	€133,000
Vetting	-	-	€22,848
Educate Together (New School Grant)	-	-	-
Grant	€140,000	€133,000	€133,000
New School Grant	-	-	€10,000
Vetting	€18,613.40	-	€22,158.50
Forás Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Gaeilge	-	-	-
Grant	€140,000	€133,000	€133,000
National Association of BOM in Special Education	-	-	-
Grant	€140,000	€133,000	€133,000
Muslim Primary Education Board	-	-	-
Grant	€41,000	€38,950	€38,950
JMB	-	-	-
Grant	€235,230	€223,469	€223,469
FSSU	€541,500	€506,000	€506,000

Management Body	2010	2011	2012
Vetting	€29,400	€29,400	€29,400
IVEA	-	-	-
Grant	€168,656	€168,656	€177,532
ACCS	-	-	-
Grant	€177,533	€168,656	€168,656
Vetting	€21,000	€25,200	€29,986

Departmental Funding

107. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial support being provided to the National Parents Council Primary and the National Parents Council Post Primary in each of the past five years. [32403/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The National Parents' Councils primary and post-primary are to a large extent financed by grants from my Department. The financial support provided by my Department is made up of two elements: A core grant to support the Councils in their day-to-day operations and a grant to meet the cost of the Councils training activities. The information requested by the Deputy on financial support being provided to the National Parents' Councils primary and post-primary in each of the past five years is contained in the following tables.

Table 1: National Parents' Council (primary), Department of Education and Skills funding 2009 to 2013.

Year	Core Grant Outturn	Training Grant Outturn	Total
2013*	€330,000	€76,682	€406,682
2012	€330,000	€76,682	€406,682
2011	€330,000	€96,792	€426,792
2010	€330,000	€106,488	€436,488
2009	€355,000	€25,000	€380,000

*Note: The 2013 figure is the indicative allocation for 2013.

Table 2: National Parents' Council (post-primary), Department of Education and Skills funding 2009 to 2013.

Year	Core Grant Outturn	Training Grant Outturn	Total
2013*	€202,000	€0	€202,000
2012	€202,000	€45,460	€247,460
2011	€202,000	€38,831	€240,831
2010	€177,000	€33,300	€210,300
2009	€177,000	€0	€177,000

*Note: The 2013 figure is the indicative allocation for 2013 and in this regard the National Parents' Council post-primary have not yet applied for a training grant.

The training grant for the National Parents' Council post-primary was first introduced in 2010.

Question No. 108 answered with Question No. 97.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

109. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) may expect a response to their current appeal to Student Universal Support Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32406/13]

113. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) may expect a response to their current appeal to Student Universal Support Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32424/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 and 113 together.

The appeal of the student referred to by the Deputy was reviewed by the independent Student Grants Appeals Board (Appeals Board) on Wednesday 26th June 2013 following the submission of additional relevant information to the Appeals Board. The Appeals Board's decision issued by post to the student on Thursday 27th June and was forwarded electronically to the awarding authority on Monday 1st July.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

110. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) may expect a response to their appeal to Student Universal Support Ireland; if he will resolve the issue whereby SUSI has issued this individual with two reference numbers; if he will clarify which one they should use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32412/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the correct reference number is W121310133413 in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy, and that his student grant application was further appealed to the appeals officer in SUSI on 1 July 2013. On that basis, the application is currently being reviewed and the student will be notified directly by SUSI of the outcome. Where an appeal is turned down in writing by SUSI and the applicant remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his or her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

School Enrolments

111. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken to secure a school place in respect of a child (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32413/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that 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.

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. 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's (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*. 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.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

112. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a third level higher education grant application for 2012-13 will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) as a dependent student, in view of the fact that they were deemed not an independent student at the time of application; when the parents' means will be taken into account and the grant approved in view of the urgency of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32415/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the applicant referred to by the Deputy was issued with a decision on 13 May 2013 advising her that she was deemed ineligible to receive a grant. If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. 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 will be available on request from SUSI.

Question No. 113 answered with Question No. 109.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

114. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will clarify a situation regarding special needs assistants (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32433/13]

118. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding special needs assistants (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32501/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 118 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the level of resources being devoted to supporting children with Special Educational Needs has been maintained at €1.3 billion this year. This includes provision for 10,575 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). These resources have been protected despite the ongoing severe financial position and a requirement to make expenditure savings across a range of areas. There has been no reduction to the overall number of SNA posts being provided for schools for the coming school year. This provision remains at 10,575 posts, which will ensure that all children who qualify for access to SNA support for the coming school year will receive access to such support. The demand for SNAs for the 2013/2104 school year currently stands at over 10,490 leaving over 80 posts available for late demand. Some additional posts are also likely to be freed up during the year due to children not enrolling to schools or diminishing care needs. The NCSE will allocate the remaining SNAs to schools during the year, as required, based on the care needs of qualifying children. In relation to the July Provision scheme I wish to clarify that the allocation of home based provision to siblings for July Provision is reflective of the school grouping principle. This is where one teacher is allocated to a class of six pupils at the appropriate educational level, primary or post primary. Accordingly it is considered appropriate, as in a school situation, that a tutor can provide tuition at the appropriate educational level to more than one sibling at that level simultaneously in the home. The school grouping principle does not purport to replicate or mirror all aspects of school based provision. The age or ability of siblings is reflected in their education level as determined by education and health professionals. In general where a child is receiving their education in a class setting with other children of mixed age and ability, this should carry through to their July Provision. However in recognition of the differing needs of some siblings, separate allocations can considered on a case by case basis. Applications in this regard will require supporting documentation including professional reports from a psychologist or a letter from the principal of the school detailing the existing arrangements currently in place for the respective children and providing reasons why they cannot be tutored together in the home.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

115. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine a student grant appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32435/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy, her student grant application was appealed to the appeals officer in SUSI on 12 June 2013. On that basis, the application is currently being reviewed and the student will be notified directly by SUSI of the outcome. Where an appeal is turned down in writing by SUSI and the applicant remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his or her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

School Accommodation

116. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow is being asked for a financial contribution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32451/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As the Deputy will be aware, a new 3 classroom school building was constructed in 2010 for the school to which he refers using public funds. At the time, payment of a local contribution of €63,000 was required for projects of this nature.

Fee Paying Schools

117. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that the only State support to fee-paying schools relates to teacher pay and that the schools themselves have to cover all of their other costs from fee income; and in view of the situation if it is reasonable to refer to fee income as discretionary as his Department did in a recent report. [32475/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The salaries of teachers employed within the approved annual staffing allocation for fee charging schools by my Department, are paid by the State. In addition, the salaries of approved Special Needs Assistants and clerical officers are also paid by my Department. The estimated cost of these posts in the 2011/2012 academic year was in the order of €103m.

Some limited funding is provided for capital projects undertaken in fee charging schools. The Department provided approximately €6.5m in capital funding in 2012. Fee charging schools do not receive any capitation or related grants from my Department.

As outlined in the report “Fee Charging Schools - Analysis of Fee income”, which I published last March, the tuition fee income of fee charging schools was adjusted or discounted by the amount of exchequer funding forgone to obtain the discretionary income of the schools. That exercise provided an opportunity to compare the position with that of similar sized schools in the Free Education Scheme and to identify the additional funding that the fee charging schools continue to have available when compared to other schools of comparable size.

A copy of the report is available on my Department’s website.

Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 114.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has been able to avert any loss of teachers at primary and second level schools throughout the country; the extent to which he is in a position to initiate any alleviating measures in any such cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32502/13]

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which pupil-teacher ratios at primary and second level throughout the country have been kept to the desired levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32518/13]

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which pupil-teacher ratios at primary and second level throughout County Kildare have been kept to the desired levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32519/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 119, 135 and 136 together.

The Statistics section of my Department's website contains information relating to pupil teacher ratio (PTR) at primary and second level. Pupil Teacher Ratio in respect of all schools is only available at national level and not disaggregated by county or any other variable.

Pupil teacher ratios for the 2012/2013 academic year are currently being compiled and will be available during the summer of 2013. Figures for the 2011/2012 academic year are available on the Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/>.

The Government has protected frontline services in schools to the greatest extent possible in the recent budget and there will be no reduction in teacher numbers in primary schools and in free second level schools for the 2013/14 school year as a result of the budget. The DEIS scheme for disadvantaged schools is also fully protected with no overall changes to staffing levels or funding as a result of the budget.

Teacher allocations are approved annually in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. My Department has published the staffing arrangements at primary and post primary level for the coming school year 2013/14 which are available on the Department's website. At primary level the staffing schedule includes provision for schools that have significant increases in their enrolment in rapidly developing areas to be allocated classroom teachers based on their projected enrolments for September 2013. The criteria for this are set out in the staffing schedule. Given the constraints on teacher numbers my Department has no capacity to put any other ameliorating measures in place.

At post primary level and in accordance with existing arrangements, where a school management authority is unable to meet its curricular commitments within its approved allocation, my Department considers applications for additional short term support i.e., curricular concessions. The allocation processes at both primary and post primary level also include an appeals mechanism under which schools can appeal against the allocation due to them under the staffing schedules. The appeal procedures are set out in the circulars referred to above. The Appeal Boards operate independently of the Department and their decisions are final.

The final staffing position for all schools at primary and post primary level will ultimately not be known until the Autumn. At that stage the allocation process will be fully completed and any appeals to the Staffing Appeal Boards will have been considered.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to meet the educational needs of children with special needs at primary and second level in all areas throughout the country in both small and large schools; the steps he has taken to address any such emerging issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32503/13]

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of places currently available in mainstream primary and second level schools for children with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32508/13]

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has been in a position to maintain expenditure on the educational needs of children with special needs in each of the past four years to date; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [32509/13]

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which children with autism and Asperger's or children with similar needs are likely to be facilitated in terms of their educational requirements at primary and second level throughout the country in the coming year notwithstanding the budgetary exigencies within which he must operate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32510/13]

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of special needs school places available throughout the country; if this is in line with requirements as set out by the school authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32516/13]

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of special needs school places available throughout County Kildare; if this is in line with requirements as set out by the school authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32517/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 120, 125 to 127, inclusive, 133 and 134 together.

The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to the protection of frontline services for pupils with special educational needs. The level of resources devoted to supporting children with Special Educational Needs has been maintained at €1.3 billion this year. This includes provision for 10,575 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), nearly 10,000 Learning Support and Resource Teachers, provision for over 600 Special Classes attached to mainstream schools at reduced pupil teacher ratios, enhanced capitation for special schools and special classes and provision for assistive technology support.

Approximately 15% of the entire budget of my Department – some €1.3 billion – was spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs in 2011/12. The provision for the 2012/13 school year is in line with expenditure last year and shows that the overall level of funding for special education has been protected despite the ongoing severe financial position. There has been no reduction in the level of funding to support children with Special Educational needs since this Government came to office.

The level of investment being provided will ensure that provision can continue to be made to provide for the educational requirements of children with special educational needs, enrolled in all schools, including schools in Co. Kildare, to ensure that children with special educational needs, including those with Autism and Aspergers Syndrome can continue to have access to educational facilities in line with their requirements. In relation to the number of school places available for children with special educational needs throughout the country and in County Kildare, the policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs should be included in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. All schools and all school places are therefore available for children with special educational needs to be enrolled. In circumstances where children with special educational needs require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

The Deputy will be aware that the NCSE recently published comprehensive policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools.

I have, as suggested by the Report, requested the NCSE to establish a Working Group to develop a proposal, for consideration, for a new allocation model for teaching supports for children with Special Educational Needs based on the profiled educational needs of children in

schools. In the interim, I wish to ensure that children will not be disadvantaged while we move towards a new model which will ensure greater fairness and quality of education for children with special educational needs. That is why I have made the decision to maintain the existing allocation levels this year.

Fee-Paying Schools

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to facilitate dialogue with the authorities in catholic and protestant fee-paying schools with a view to addressing concerns they may have arising from fears of capitation reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32504/13]

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received communication from the authorities in catholic or protestant or fee-paying schools who are concerned with suggestions regarding possible reduction in capitation grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32505/13]

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if arising from any discussions he has had with representatives of fee-paying schools, it has been found possible to address issues of mutual concern; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32506/13]

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will facilitate meetings with representatives of catholic and protestant fee-paying schools with a view to reaching agreement on issues of mutual concern; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32507/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 121 to 124, inclusive, together.

I met in recent days with the Joint Managerial Body and representatives of fee charging schools. The meeting afforded them an opportunity to articulate their views on a range of issues concerning their schools.

A number of fee charging schools have made contacted with the Department and the level of engagement to date varies from school to school. Where the authorities of a school approach the Department about entering the Free Education scheme it is because they are concerned about the future viability of the school and wish to explore all options in considering the future of the school.

I have made it clear that the Department will engage constructively with any fee charging school that is considering how best to secure its future. Any approach to the Department will be considered on an individual school by school basis, taking account of the significance of the provision concerned in terms of diversity and overall demand for school places in the locality served by a school.

I wish to inform the Deputy that fee charging schools do not receive any capitation or related grants from the Department. The Deputy will be aware that in the context of the Budget 2013, I made a further one point change to the staffing allocation of fee charging schools from September 2013. On the basis of the analysis I published earlier this year on the income from fees available to fee charging schools, I expect that a minority of the fee charging schools will wish to engage with the Department in planning for their future.

Questions Nos. 125 to 127, inclusive, answered with Question No. 120.

School Accommodation

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools at primary and second level throughout the country at which he has managed to replace temporary school buildings with permanent structures in each of the past two years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32511/13]

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools at primary and second level throughout County Kildare at which he has managed to replace temporary school buildings with permanent structures in each of the past three years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32513/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 130 together.

The Deputy will be aware that under the Prefab Replacement Initiative 2012, approval was given to 170 schools nationally to replace 458 prefab units with permanent accommodation. In excess of €42 million was allocated for this initiative. Some thirty projects have been completed with approximately 100 others on site.

In June of this year, I announced a further initiative to replace prefab units with permanent accommodation. A total of €15 million has been allocated in 2013/2014 for this purpose. Forty-six schools, with 115 prefab units, will be offered grants to provide the new facilities.

Replacing prefabs is part of this Government's €475 million education infrastructure plan for 2014. The Plan will provide modern, high quality accommodation for pupils and teachers and construction related jobs for workers around the country.

The Deputy will also 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 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 replacement of temporary accommodation with permanent structures may form part of the accommodation brief for some projects being delivered under this Plan.

In addition, due to additional funding made available for the schools' building programme as part of the Government's "Investing in Infrastructure & Jobs" package announced recently, school projects that were not contained in the 5 year programme but have completed extensive architectural planning are now being progressed to tender and construction. Where appropriate, this too will address the replacement of temporary accommodation with permanent structures.

Details of all works funded, including those for schools in Kildare, under the above initiatives including Prefab Replacement and Additional Accommodation Schemes, are available on my Department's website and this is updated on a regular basis.

Schools Building Projects Status

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) in County Kildare will become fully operational; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [32512/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the school closed for the summer holidays last week. The project is close to completion and it is envisaged that the building will be handed over to the school authorities shortly.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 128.

School Curriculum

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the workplace educational and skills requirements continues to be monitored with a view to ensuring that students leaving second and third level are suitably skilled and equipped to meet the ever-increasing challenges of the workplace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32514/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The development of appropriate skills for the workplace has implications for curricula, programme design and teaching methodologies at all levels of the education system. As enterprise sectors develop and expand, demand for employees with core technical and specialist expertise across a range of disciplines continues to grow. Employers also equally value more generic skills such as creativity, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, and problem solving abilities. The fostering of these attributes and the development of core foundational skills in numeracy and literacy is built through the experience of students at both primary and second level. The wide ranging programme of reform which is being rolled out across all levels of the education system seeks to further improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience for all students and to ensure the ongoing supply of high quality graduates for the workforce.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, which is funded by my Department, also plays a key role in advising on future skills needs and any emerging gaps. Its research provides a valuable input to the development of course curricula and has also informed the development of new competitive funding models of provision to address emerging skills needs, including Springboard, Momentum and the ICT skills conversion programmes and Skillnets. The development of training on these programmes is led by representatives of industry ensuring that training provision meets the needs of the sector.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects Student Universal Support Ireland to be in a position to deal with processing of higher education grants for students within a reasonable time; if in the event of the obvious shortcomings so far identified, consideration might be given to reverting to the old system whereby extra local authority staff were traditionally deployed for this purpose and were re-deployed to other work for the remainder of the year, thus achieving a much higher degree of efficiency and value for money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32515/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Accenture Report, which reviewed the operations of SUSI, contained a series of recommendations, many of which are already being implemented by SUSI. In line with these recommendations and in preparation for the 2013/14 academic year, both the online application system and the application assessment process have been further developed to enhance their effectiveness and to deal with the difficul-

ties experienced in year one.

A number of new initiatives will make the application process more efficient this year including: direct information sharing between SUSI and Government agencies such as the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Social Protection, the General Register Office and the Central Applications Office. These links should significantly reduce the number of documents required from applicants themselves.

In addition the staff resources recommended by the review have already been sanctioned. The resources include five additional management posts and some 23 (whole time equivalent) additional processing staff. This will help to ensure that qualifying students have their applications assessed as quickly as possible. SUSI has also significantly developed its training programme to meet the training needs of new and existing staff.

In addition, the closing date will be a month earlier to facilitate earlier application and decision on a grant application. Also SUSI is working closely with all third level institutions to improve the payment process for the 2013/14 academic year.

I have no plans to revert to the previous system where 66 different awarding authorities were involved in the assessment of grants.

Questions Nos. 133 and 134 answered with Question No. 120.

Questions Nos. 135 and 136 answered with Question No. 119.

Bullying in Schools

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of incidents of school bullying including cyber bullying reported to his Department through the primary and or post-primary sectors in each of the past three years to date; the extent to which it has been found possible to address the issue to date; his plans for the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32520/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The information requested by the Deputy is not available in my Department as individual school management authorities are not required to report incidents of bullying to my Department. As the Deputy is probably aware, 29th of January last, Minister Fitzgerald and I published the Action Plan on Bullying which sets out twelve actions to help prevent and tackle bullying in primary and second level schools. As part of the Action Plan, new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and second level schools are currently in development in consultation with the education partners. These new procedures will include a specific reference to cyber bullying and to requirements for noting and reporting bullying incidents. These will be issued to all schools at the beginning of the next school year.

Third Level Participation

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students known to have dropped out of third level education in each of the past three years to date for whatever reason; his plans to tackle this issue in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32521/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The most recent report by the HEA entitled ‘A study of Progression in Higher Education’ is available on the HEA website. The following table from the report illustrates the non-presence rates of new entrants in their second year of study by sector, NFQ level and course duration. New entrants are classified as ‘not present’ if they do not appear in the statistical returns of that institution in the following academic year. The proportion of new entrants in 2007/08 who were not present one year later was 15% on average across all sectors and NFQ Levels. Prior educational attainment is a very significant factor. The HEA is currently in the process of working on an analysis of retention rates in the universities and institutes of technology. This has only recently become possible due to a full population of SRS (Student Record System) data becoming available for a period spanning five years. The HEA which is responsible for the collection of data on student progression does not have information for the current academic year, however it is currently collating data for the 2010/11 academic year and it is hoped that this data will be available in the autumn. Higher education institutions have a wide range of supports in place to improve retention of students in their institutions. The HEA study and other research has also highlighted that undergraduate first years are most at risk of non-progression. The new National Forum for the enhancement of Teaching and Learning that I established late last year is looking at the undergraduate student experience in first year and how that may be improved on a system wide basis. Their work should improve quality outcomes for students at that difficult transition period. The work of the Transition reform group chaired by the Secretary General of my Department should also contribute to improvements in students’ quality outcomes. A key commitment has been made by the higher education institutions to reduce the number of level 8 programmes offered through the CAO and broadening them. This should help school leavers better navigate the entry routes into higher education system when making the important choice about what programme to undertake. They will also be exposed to a broader first year experience. This change when implemented should help to reduce the number of school leavers making the wrong choice about what course of study to undertake and help to reduce non-progression and completion.

Non-Presence Rates for New Entrants by Sector and NFQ Level (2008/09).

Sector	Level	Most Common Points Attained	% Not Present
-	Level 6	250–300	25%
-	Level 7	250–300	26%
-	Level 8	300–350	16%
-	L8 3 yr duration	300–350	16%
-	L8 4 yr duration	300–350	16%
-	L8 4+ yr duration	450–500	10%
Institutes of Technology	All New Entrants	300–350	22%
-	Level 8	400–450	9%
-	L8 3 yr duration	350–400	10%
-	L8 4 yr duration	450–500	9%
Universities	L8 4+ yr duration	550–600	3%
-	Level 8	450–500	4%
-	L8 3 yr duration	450–500	2%
Other Colleges	L8 4 yr duration	400–450	7%
All Institutions	Level 8	350–400	11%
All Institutions	All New Entrants	350–400	15%

Special Educational Needs Staffing

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a special needs assistant will be assigned to a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32523/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including the allocation of resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools. The NCSE operates within my Department's established criteria for the allocation of Special Education supports and the staffing resources available to my Department. SNA allocations are made to schools by the NCSE annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support each year. All schools were advised to apply to the NCSE for resource teaching and SNA support for the 2013/14 school year by 15th March 2013. Details of the SNA allocations which have been made to schools by the NCSE for the 2013/2014 school year are now available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, which provides details of the SNA allocations for each school on a school by school and per county basis. Where schools have enrolled children who were not considered at the time that these allocations were made, or where schools are seeking a revision to the quantum of SNA support which has been allocated to them for the coming school year, they should contact the NCSE regarding this matter. In general a revision to SNA allocations will only be made in circumstances where schools have enrolled new pupils, or where schools can demonstrate that they do not have sufficient SNA posts to cater for the care needs of all of the qualifying children in their school. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

School Transport Provision

140. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to representations made by this Deputy on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32525/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Due to the increased volume of administration work in relation to school transport provision generally, regrettably, it was not possible to deal with all representations. Under the terms of my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kms from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service in the context of the Scheme nationally. Where practicable, and subject to considerations of cost and logistics, routes are planned to avoid an eligible child having to travel more than 2.4 kms to or from a pick up/set down point. Bus Éireann has advised that the child in question can avail of a level of service within these guidelines. Parents are responsible for ensuring that children are brought safely to and collected safely from Bus Éireann designated pick up and set down points.

Third Level Participation

141. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is possible for a person to participate in the DARE programme in a given academic year if their application is held up beyond the closing date for reasons beyond their control; his views that adding an extra year's wait to students in this situation represents a significant additional stress; his plans to change the applications process to allow for such complexities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32535/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is a third-level admissions scheme for students with a disability. The scheme is operated by a number of higher education institutions and not by my Department. Admissions to the institutions are regulated by the institutions themselves. The Deputy may wish to contact the Irish Universities Association in this instance. Further details in relation to the DARE scheme are also available at www.accesscollege.ie.

Ministerial Meetings

142. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on his meeting with Down Syndrome Ireland on 25 June 2013; if he will provide the resource hours to children with Down syndrome as requested by Down Syndrome Ireland. [32536/13]

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's 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's 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's 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. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a formal role under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 in advising me in relation to any matter relating to the education of children and others with disabilities. My Department requested that the NCSE consider the issue of whether Down's syndrome should be reclassified as a low incidence disability in all instances, regardless of assessed cognitive ability, in the context of its preparation of comprehensive advice on how the educational system supports children with special educational needs in schools. The NCSE report on Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Schools has now been published and is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie. The report recommends that under the new resource allocation model proposed by the NCSE in its report, children should be allocated additional resources in line with their level of need, rather than by disability category. The NCSE has recommended that in the short-term, pupils with Down's syndrome pupils who are in the Mild General Learning Difficulty (Mild GLD) category should continue to be supported by schools' Learning Support allocation in the same way as other pupils with a Mild GLD. The NCSE policy advice did not recommend that an exception should be made for children with Down's syndrome who are in the mild general learn-

ing difficulty range, over other children who are in the mild range and who also may have other co-morbid conditions. However, the NCSE report states that it is confident that the introduction of a new allocation model will overcome the difficulty posed by all children with mild general learning disabilities, including children with Down's syndrome, who have additional difficulties and who can be supported according to their level of need and in line with their learning plan process. In the meantime, schools are reminded that they can differentiate the level of learning support granted to ensure that available resources are used to support children in line with their needs. I have requested the NCSE to immediately proceed to establish a Working Group in order to develop a proposal for consideration for a new Tailored Allocation Model, which is set out as one of the principal recommendations of the report. In the course of my recent meeting with Down Syndrome Ireland a number of issues were raised which I consider merit further examination. Accordingly I have asked my officials to consider these issues further and to provide a full response to Down Syndrome Ireland on the issues raised as soon as possible.

School Services Staff

143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a protocol or guideline in place governing the appointment of voluntary classroom assistants at primary and second level; if not, his plans in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32607/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Responsibility for the recruitment and selection of school personnel (including volunteers) rests with the Board of Management. If the Board of Management of a school decides to engage a person (whether on a voluntary or paid basis) to assist or supplement the classroom teacher, the Board must ensure that appropriate selection procedures have been followed and that the person is suitably qualified to undertake the duties concerned. In this regard, good practice involves the checking of recent employment records, qualifications, experience and names of referees. In relation to Garda vetting, all schools are also required to comply with the vetting arrangements, including those relating to volunteers, as set out in my Department's Circular 0063/2010. It should be noted that the teaching staff and principal remain responsible for the provision of the curriculum and must exercise effective control over the planning and content and delivery of lessons and the assessment of pupil progress. The class teacher continues to be responsible for the supervision of pupils in situations where an external tutor or other individual is working with the class and the class teacher therefore must remain with the pupils during such periods.

Banking Sector Investigations

144. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he expects a banking enquiry to be started in order that all the information from the decision to guarantee the banks will be publicly known; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32319/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy will be aware, I strongly support the objective of undertaking an effective and legally robust parliamentary banking inquiry. I wish to advise the Deputy that the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Bill 2013 is expected to be enacted before the summer recess. The Bill establishes a comprehensive statutory underpinning for the Oireachtas to conduct inquiries within the current constitutional framework.

The Bill envisages a central role for the Oireachtas in both initiating and conducting a parliamentary inquiry. Under the Bill, responsibility is assigned exclusively to the Houses of the Oireachtas to determine the requirement for a formal inquiry, the terms of reference of that inquiry, the appropriate committee to conduct an inquiry and the procedural and organisational aspects of the inquiry.

Banking Sector Staff Issues

145. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if officials who were employed in banks that received bailout and contingency funding from the Central Bank and other State institutions, were bound by the code of the Civil Service that relates to the achievement of an excellent service for Government and the other institutions of the State as well as for the public as citizens and users of public services, based on principles of integrity, impartiality, effectiveness, equity and accountability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32332/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The provisions of the Code of Standards and Behaviour for Civil Servants apply to all established and unestablished civil servants. As the officials referred to in the Deputy's question were not appointed Civil Servants the provisions of the Code of Standards and Behaviour do not apply to them.

National Monuments

146. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the current state of national monuments DG025-029001, DG025-029003, DG025-029006, DG025-029004, DG025-029005, DG025-029002, and their grounds and access roads at present; if he will ensure that access to these national monuments is upgraded and the vicinity in which they stand is enhanced; if he will provide an undertaking to have signage and information on the history of this national monument erected in the vicinity of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32419/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Ray Church and Cross, at Falcarragh, Co. Donegal, is a National Monument in State ownership (DG025-029001 and 029003) and comes within the statutory remit of the Office Public Works (OPW) as defined in the various National Monument Acts. These structures are therefore afforded the full protection of the State as defined in the legislation.

The other structures identified by the Deputy in his Question (ie: reference nos. 029002, 004 – 006) are not listed on the National Monuments records of Monuments in State care.

Ray Church and Cross monument attracts a certain number of visitors and, for protection and conservation reasons, the Cross has been mounted on the inside of the Church walls. The Cross is cut from a thin sheet of stone, is undecorated and stands over 9m tall. Access to the Monument is by lane/roadway which is privately owned and arrangements are in place to allow OPW staff to access the Monument for care and maintenance. The OPW is not aware of any formalised right of access for members of the public currently; however, there is evidence that visitors may be able to gain access relatively freely.

There are no plans currently to erect signage and information panels in the vicinity of the site.

National Lottery Licence Sale

147. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a requirement in the tendering process documentation for the National Lottery Licence for the successful applicant to be a registered company here; if companies whose registered offices are not here will be excluded from this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32439/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy is aware, section 29(1) of the National Lottery Act 2013 provides as follows: the licence holder shall (a) be formed as a company, or (b) if the holder is (at the time of the application for the licence) a company or a company formed in another jurisdiction, form a company, for the sole purpose of operating the National Lottery in accordance with the terms and conditions of the licence and is referred to in this Act as the operator.

There is no question of excluding parties who may be interested in applying for the next licence from the process on the basis that they have not formed a company in this jurisdiction. However, in the event of such a party's application being successful, the party concerned would be required to form a company in accordance with paragraph 29(1)(b) of the Act prior to the signature date of the next licence.

Public Procurement Regulations

148. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on public bodies granting contracts for works to be carried out here where the companies registered office are in the British Virgin Islands or in other jurisdictions thousands of miles away; his views on whether these companies will be fully compliant with public procurement guidelines such as tax clearance certificates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32441/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public procurement is the acquisition, whether under formal contract or not, of works, supplies and services by public bodies. National rules governing public procurement must comply with the relevant EU, WTO and national legal requirements and obligations. Under EU law, public contracts above a certain value must be advertised EU-wide and awarded to the most competitive tender in an open and objective process. The aim of European and national rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular candidates on grounds of location or nationality and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

Public procurement procedures require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. In this regard applicants are required to make declarations in relation to their financial standing, their legal standing and in relation to payment of taxes and social contributions.

Prior to the award of the works contract, the successful applicant is also required to produce a current Tax Clearance Certificate from the Revenue Commissioners. Under our national rules, any non-resident contractor being awarded a public contract must provide a Tax Clearance Certificate issued by Revenue confirming that the firm's tax affairs are in order and that it has complied with its tax obligations in this jurisdiction. Additional information in relation to tax requirements for non-resident contractors can be obtained at revenue.ie.

The management of the tendering process for a public contract is a matter for each contracting authority. It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process.

Registered Employment Agreements

149. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the legislative measures he intends to take on registered employment agreements following on from the recent striking down elements of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 by the Supreme Court in *McGowan and others v. The Labour Court, Ireland and the Attorney General*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32494/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the judgment delivered on 9 May last in *McGowan and others v. The Labour Court, Ireland and the Attorney General*, the Supreme Court held that Part III of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 was invalid having regard to Article 15.2.1 of the Constitution.

That Article provides, in effect, that the exclusive power to make laws is vested in the Oireachtas. The Supreme Court took the view that REAs are instruments having the status of laws made by private individuals. While the Constitution allows for the limited delegation of law making functions, the provisions of the 1946 Act went beyond what is permissible under the Constitution.

The effect of this decision is to invalidate the registration of employment agreements previously registered under Part III of the 1946 Act. This is an important issue for many employers and their employees, particularly in relation to rates of pay and tendering for contracts.

I intend as soon as possible to put in place legislation that will be fully informed by the Supreme Court judgment, but will introduce a revised framework to deal with these matters.

Birth Certificates

150. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the procedures to be followed in order for a person aged 89 years, with no living family members, to register their birth as it has not been registered to date. [32325/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The provisions governing the registration of births in Ireland are set out in Part 3 of the Civil Registration Act, 2004. The standard procedures for registration of a birth require a qualified informant to give the required particulars to a registrar of births and to sign the register in the presence of the registrar.

In cases where no qualified informant exists or can be found, the Registrar General, acting under section 19(5) of the Act, may authorise the registration of a birth, subject to provision of satisfactory evidence as to the facts of the birth.

In this case, the person concerned (or their nominated representative) should apply to the office of the Registrar General directly in writing and formally request that their birth is registered. Independent evidence of birth (such as a baptismal certificate or school records) should be enclosed with the application, if possible.

The application should be made to: Late Registrations, General Register Office, Government Offices, Convent Road, Roscommon.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Eligibility

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has an entitlement to a non-contributory State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32310/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for the State pension (non-contributory) on the 21st January 2013 and by decision dated 21st February, 2013 her application was refused as her means exceeded the statutory limit for receipt of that pension. The customer was advised of her right to appeal this decision.

Departmental Staff Numbers

152. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of staff of her Department who were assaulted by members of the public or other members of staff in the past year; the number of prosecutions taken against the perpetrators of these assaults; if she will provide details of supports available for staff who are victims of assault. [32315/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Since 1st July 2012, there have been four reports of alleged physical assaults on members of staff of my Department, three by members of the public and one by another staff member. My Department's Health and Safety Unit has recorded 103 other instances of alleged threats, assaults or abuse of staff members in the last year. The criminal prosecution of assaults is a matter for independent investigation by An Garda Síochána.

My Department takes seriously all events or incidents involving a threat to or an assault on a member of staff. The manager of any staff member involved in such incidents is asked to establish the immediate needs of that staff member having regard to the particular circumstances and situation including determining whether there is physical injury and seeking medical assistance and, in the case of threat or assault, reporting the issue to the Gardaí.

In these events, staff members are supported by local management and regional health and safety management, where appropriate. In addition, the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is a support service available to all staff of my Department on a confidential basis. In the event of an assault or threat, the EAS would ordinarily be contacted by local management, regional management or Human Resources Division and asked to make contact with the individual(s) directly affected. Typically the Employee Assistance Officer would offer to visit the location and speak with and assure all of the staff concerned. Also, if required, outside counsellors may be engaged to assist the staff member.

Housing Issues

153. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for a relocation grant lodged by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32316/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Government has provided various types of support to people affected by the November 2009 flooding. Humanitarian Aid payments were made, both in the immediate aftermath of the flooding and subsequently to enable eligible households to resume living at their home.

Subject to certain conditions the Government also decided to provide support to a small number of families who are continuing to experience significant housing problems as a result of the November 2009 flooding and are considering the possibility of relocating rather than resuming living at their original home.

The legal agreement necessary for the purpose of this scheme was the subject of much detailed discussion and negotiations between this Department, the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO). The agreement was finalised and issued to the householders in December 2012.

In view of the legal obligations attaching to the payment of moneys in respect of relocation assistance, householders were advised to seek legal advice prior to signing the agreements.

The required information to complete the processing of a relocation grant for the person named was received in the Department on 19 June 2013. Payment has issued to the person's nominated financial institution on 28 June 2013.

Social Welfare Benefits Numbers

154. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of casual or part-time employees in receipt of social welfare payments such as jobseeker's allowance, jobseeker's benefit and family income supplement, grouped by the 20 largest private sector employers and occupation type; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32340/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure on the jobseeker's schemes of €3.66bn in 2013.

As of end May 2013 there were 87,943 casual or part-time workers on the schemes, of whom 33,354 were in receipt of jobseeker benefit and 54,589 were in receipt of jobseeker allowance. The family income supplement or FIS payment is designed to provide income for employees on low earnings with families. The FIS payment preserves the incentive to remain in employment in circumstances where the employee might only be marginally better off than if he/she was unemployed and claiming other social welfare payments. The Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure on FIS of nearly €230 million in 2013. There are currently just under 40,600 families benefiting from the FIS scheme.

To qualify for payment of FIS a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week.

Administrative data in relation to the number of hours worked by FIS recipients are not available. However, the table below lists the twenty private sector employers with the largest number of employees who are in receipt of FIS as at end June 2013.

It is recognised that a changing labour market has resulted in a move away from the more traditional work patterns, with a consequent increase in the number of persons employed for less than a full week. This is an important policy issue for my Department but any changes to the current criteria could have significant cost implications. For that reason my Department will consider this issue very carefully. In tandem the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare, which has already reported to me on a number of important policy areas, is now looking at the whole area of atypical work and I look forward to their recommendations on this issue.

Questions - Written Answers

The following tables set out the most recent analysis by my Department of private sector employers who employ persons also in receipt of jobseeker's benefit and allowance, or family income supplement. The main employment types are in the retail and service sectors.

Casual Jobseeker's Recipients by Private Sector Employers

-	Employees	Employer Name
1	679	Dunnes Stores
2	306	An Post
3	284	Tesco Irl Ltd
4	279	Next Retail Ltd
5	275	Flexsource Ltd
6	223	Noonan Services Grp Ltd
7	188	Primark T/A Pennys
8	153	Noel Recruitment Ltd
9	150	CP Healthcare Ltd
10	130	Lidl Irl
11	129	Argos Dist Ltd
12	123	Grafton Recruitment Ltd.
13	120	Lifestyle Sports Ltd
14	116	Xtra Vision Ltd
15	115	ISS Irl. Ltd
16	111	Poundland Ltd
17	109	Heatons
18	107	TJX Irl.
19	105	G4S Secure Solutions Ltd
20	104	Noel Recruitment Ltd (Employer number other than at 8 above)

FIS Recipients by Private Sector Employers

-	Employees	Employer Name
1	849	Tesco Irl Ltd
2	542	Dunnes Stores
3	228	Noonan Services Group Ltd
4	186	ISS Irl Ltd
5	148	Campbell Catering Services
6	145	Primark T/A Pennys
7	135	Marks & Spencer Irl Ltd
8	93	Lidl Irl
9	93	Boots Retail Irl Ltd
10	91	Sodexo Irl Ltd
11	89	Superquinn Ltd
12	80	Dawn Meats Irl
13	80	Compass Catering Services Irl
14	79	Bank of Ireland

-	Employees	Employer Name
15	78	Kerry Grp Services Ltd
16	73	Ard Services Ltd (Statoil)
17	68	Nolan Transport
18	67	Rosderra Irish Meats Grp
19	66	B&Q Irl Ltd
20	65	Mowlam Healthcare Services

Question No. 155 withdrawn.

National Internship Scheme Placements

156. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding persons approaching the end of their nine-month JobBridge placement; if she will outline the timeframe involved for such persons being eligible to secure a further placement and-or FÁS scheme placement; the options that are available to such persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32437/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The JobBridge Scheme has made very significant progress since it came into operation on 1st July 2011. Over 18,500 internships have commenced to date with circa; 6,000 participants currently undertaking an internship and over 2,000 internship opportunities presently advertised on *www.jobbridge.ie*. A recent independent evaluation conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants found that 61% of interns progress to paid employment after completing their internship. These progression outcomes into employment are among the best in Europe for similar schemes. The eligibility to access the Scheme is based on the overall objective of labour market policy to provide a pathway to paid employment for people who are unemployed.

At present, an individual may avail of up to two placements on the Scheme, the total cumulative time not exceeding 9 months (39 weeks). The duration of any individual internship is determined, within these guidelines by the host organisations. The maximum cumulative period that an intern may undertake on one or more internships is currently being reviewed in line with other findings and recommendations contained in the Indecon evaluation report. Any amendments to the Scheme will be communicated clearly on the JobBridge website *www.jobbridge.ie*. Alternatively, a person who has completed nine months on JobBridge may apply to take-up a Work Placement Programme with another organisation.

Question No. 157 withdrawn.

Social Insurance Issues

158. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 363 of 25 June 2013, if her Department has a mechanism of tracking employees who have switched from direct employees to C2 operators without any intervening period of unemployment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32448/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no specific mechanism to identify or track employees who were previously employed under a contract of service and

who subsequently become C2 operators or self-employed and who have no intervening periods of unemployment. The allocation and issue of C2s is in the first instance a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. However, when determining whether an individual is employed or self-employed, consideration is given to the Code of Practice for Determining the Employment or Self-employment Status of Individuals. As indicated in my reply to the Deputy's previous question on this matter (No. 30220-13) which was answered on the 25th June 2013 the class of PRSI payable by an individual is effectively determined by the terms and conditions of the employment in which they are engaged. Generally an individual is classified for PRSI purposes as either an employee or self-employed.

Departmental Funding

159. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that Vantastic have had to introduce a flat rate charge for passengers on their hospital routes in Dublin Fingal; if her Department has reduced its funding to Vantastic; if this is a result of a reduction of funding from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32458/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Vantastic, like all community and not-for-profit contract holders with the community services programme (CSP), acts independently of the Department of Social Protection in the determination of and the fees that it charges for the services it offers to its membership and the general public. Vantastic is funded from income from its membership, charges for journeys and funding under the CSP. The grant for Vantastic in 2012 was €835,000 and was set at €822,000 in 2013. The CSP grant reflects the nature of the contract with the programme rather than any reduction in the level of funds available to the Programme. The charge introduced by Vantastic for this particular service is a matter for the Board of the company and does not relate to the services that are part funded by the Department of Social Protection. A key feature of the CSP is the requirement of the contract holder to generate a substantial level of its resources from the fees charged or other traded income from service provision. The overall level of funding provided to the CSP was increased in 2013.

Social Welfare Replacement Rates

160. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the current respective replacement rates for the most common scenarios in the social protection system. [32485/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Almost three-quarters of the people on the Live Register (317,004 people) are only claiming a personal rate for themselves. They are either single or may have a spouse or partner who is working. In addition, just over half (53%) of the people on the Live Register receive less than the maximum personal weekly rate. This means that the great majority of people on the Live Register have a strong financial incentive to work and significant numbers leave the Register each year. The replacement rate for given income levels is a tool used to measure the degree to which of out-of-work benefits when unemployed replace take home income from work. The replacement rates my Department calculate highlight the strong financial incentive that the majority of jobseekers have to enter employment. While there is no predetermined level of replacement rate which would influence every individual's decision to work, higher replacement rates may indicate lower incentives to take up employment. In this regard a replacement rate in excess of 70% may be considered to be excessive.

Generally, my Department calculates replacement rates for the following family types:

- Single claimants
- Married or co-habiting couples:
 - Couple with no Children (1 earner);
 - Couple with 1 Child (1 earner +1 Child Dependent);
 - Couple with 2 Children (1 earner +2 Child Dependent);
 - Couple with 4 Children (1 earner +4 Child Dependent).

The following table sets out replacement rates values, which compare social welfare income, assuming that fuel allowance is payable, with net income at National Minimum Wage (NMW), two thirds of the Average Weekly Earnings (67% AWE) and Average Weekly Earnings (AWE).

Replacement Rates 2013

-	NMW	67% AWE	AWE
Single	61%	50%	37%
Couple 1 earner	68%	64%	55%
Couple 1 earner +1 Child Dependent	72%	68%	61%
Couple 1 earner +2 Child Dependent	75%	71%	66%
Couple 1 earner +4 Child Dependent	75%	72%	66%

In general, replacement rate analysis demonstrates that for the overwhelming majority of social welfare recipients, replacement rates are relatively low and they have a strong financial incentive to take up employment. Replacement rates for certain jobseekers can be higher than those listed in the above table if the jobseeker is in receipt of rent supplement or mortgage interest supplement. However, the vast majority of jobseekers do not receive these additional supports.

Free Travel Scheme Applications

161. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a companion travel pass will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32540/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): This application for the person named has been medically assessed by a Medical Assessor on 1 July 2013. The medical opinion has been conveyed to Household Benefits Section, Sligo, and the customer in question will be contacted shortly regarding the decision on the application.

Mobile Telephony

162. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the arrangements put in place by the regulatory authorities to prevent exorbitant roaming charges being imposed on customers by mobile phone operators in the Border areas between here and Northern Ireland. [32322/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): On 26th June I announced that I have signed new regulations to combat excessive roaming fees imposed on mobile service users. The regulations will enable the Communications Regulator, ComReg, to use its investigative and enforcement powers to oblige mobile telephone service providers to implement retail price reductions required by the EU Roaming Regulation. The regulation of roaming charges is an EU competency following the introduction of an EU Regulation in 2007, which introduced harmonised maximum charges for roaming voice services across the European Union.

From 1 July 2013, the new EU Roaming Regulation lowered the price caps for data downloads by 36%, making it much cheaper to use maps, watch videos, check emails and update social networks while travelling across borders. Data roaming is now up to 91% cheaper in 2013 compared to 2007. The Regulation also introduced per megabyte price limits of €0.70 per megabyte from July 2012, which reduced to €0.45 on July 1st. It will reduce further to €0.20 in July 2014.

The reduction in maximum retail prices (excluding VAT) required by the current EU Regulation over three years is outlined as follows.

Service	1 July 2012 €	1 July 2013 €	1 July 2014 €
Outgoing call - per minute	0.29	0.24	0.19
Incoming call - per minute	0.08	0.07	0.05
Call to voicemail	free	free	free
Outgoing SMS/text	0.09	0.08	0.06
Incoming text	free	free	free
Data-per megabyte	0.70	0.45	0.20

It is a matter for the regulatory authority in each Member State to ensure that service providers do not exceed the maximum permitted retail roaming charges. The regulatory function is performed by ComReg, in Ireland.

Information and Communications Technology Issues

163. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will reassure Dáil Éireann as to the security of the e-mail systems in his Department subsequent to recent reports of US intelligence agencies accessing e-mail and other digital content; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32537/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): My Department employs a multi layered approach to email security. The Department's email servers are held in secure premises. External emails are processed and scanned initially by Government Networks firewalls and subsequently by the Department's own firewalls. Both Government Networks and my Department have realtime email anti-virus and anti-spam sys-

tems in place. Emails between my Department and other Government Departments' email servers remain within the Government's private network. In addition, the following security measures are applied:

-DCENR uses encryption for email communications with some organisations, as appropriate.

-All DCENR mobile email devices use encryption to secure the emails in transit.

-Emails on all mobile devices that are lost or stolen can be wiped remotely.

Library Projects

164. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm that provision of capital funds has been made for the construction of a public library (details supplied) in County Waterford; if he will confirm that there is adequate co-ordination and liaison between both Departments; if he will outline what this co-ordination entails so that the project is delivered and constructed as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32335/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Funding of €556,000.00 in respect of Carrickphierish Community Library was provided to Waterford City Council, in 2010, from my Department's Social and Community Facilities Scheme in recognition of the innovative nature of the development. Under Section 78 of the Local Government Act 2001, the provision of premises and facilities in the public library service is a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority. This project is not included in the current Library Capital Programme and all funding available to me under this Programme is fully committed to existing approved library projects at varying stages of completion.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Provision

165. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the proposed new sewerage schemes for areas (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32373/13]

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 Kerry. The Ardfert, Ballylongford, Fenit and Tarbert Sewerage Schemes are included in the Programme with the treatment plants amongst the list of contracts in the county to start in the period 2010 – 2013 and further elements of the schemes to advance through planning during the same period.

Kerry County Council has sought tenders for the Ballylongford and Tarbert wastewater treatment plants as one contract and is currently assessing the tenders received. When this assessment is completed the Council will advise my Department and seek confirmation that funding is available to allow work commence. I approved funding for a section of advance pipelines in Tarbert in July 2012 and this contract has recently been completed. I understand that Kerry County Council will shortly seek tenders for the Ardfert Sewerage Scheme Wastewater Treatment Plant Contract.

The Preliminary Report for the Fenit Sewerage Scheme is being assessed by my Depart-

ment. The Council was requested to provide additional information to enable my Department to complete its assessment. The Council has submitted the required information and my Department is now finalising its assessment. A decision will be conveyed to the Council as soon as possible.

Leader Programmes Funding

166. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason approved Leader funding is being withheld for the development of a sports ground (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32392/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The project referred to in the Question was submitted to and was approved by my Department in 2012. Approval was conditional on the appropriate leasing arrangements being put in place and a requirement that the facility be available to the wider community. A claim for payment was submitted on 15 April 2013 and was subsequently selected for inspection as part of the normal risk assessment process that is required under the EU regulatory framework governing the Rural Development Programme. An inspection was carried out on 24 April 2013 and a report was issued to the Local Development Company (LDC), in this case Clare Local Development Company on 16 May 2013. The report indicated that a number of issues had been discovered which rendered the project ineligible under the Programme.

The LDC was advised that an appeal could be submitted; information to address the identified issues was subsequently submitted and the project was re-examined in light of this. A revised report, which concluded that the initial finding of ineligibility remained unchanged, was issued to the LDC on 4 June 2013.

In line with the appeals procedure in place the LDC lodged a request for a further review to the Regional Inspector on 19 June 2013. Department procedures allow for a 2 month period to conduct this review which is currently on-going. The LDC will be notified of the outcome of the review as soon as possible.

Irish Water Establishment

167. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if, in the context of the establishment of Irish Water, liabilities incurred by local authorities in the provision of public water supplied to communities will be transferred to Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32428/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The *Water Sector Reform Implementation Strategy*, which is published on my Department's website, is focused on ensuring that appropriate policy and legal frameworks are put in place for Irish Water and the water sector. A key objective is to rationalise the cost of the current service delivery and ensure more efficient operation of water services by moving from 34 water services authorities to a single body; following enactment of comprehensive legislation later this year, Irish Water will, therefore, become the water services authority from 1 January 2014, responsible for the supply of public water and waste water services. Functions, such as the bulk provision of water to private group water schemes from public water supplies, will become the responsibility of Irish Water from that date. Irish Water will be working through service level agreements with local authorities to deliver on a range of their functions. Work

being progressed at present is examining the necessary processes for the transfer of assets and financial liabilities associated with these assets taking into account, *inter alia*, the impacts on local government finances.

Leader Programmes Funding

168. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to a previous Parliamentary Question, if he will confirm the information that has been requested from Kildare Leader partnership in respect of the Geraldine Hall project. [32430/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): As outlined previously in Question No. 419 of the 25 June 2013, the project referred to in the question is a high value project and is currently under assessment by my Department. Further information has been requested and received from Kildare Leader Partnership regarding a particular issue of concern. The project will now proceed to the final stage of the approvals process. I expect a decision will issue to the LDC shortly.

Homeless Persons Supports

169. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the funding provided by his Department to agencies dealing with the issue of homelessness in County Louth in 2010, 2011 and 2012; the amount that has been allocated for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32443/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with the housing authorities and the purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Details of the funding provided by my Department, under Section 10, for the years 2008 – 2012 in County Louth, are set out in the table. Funding is provided from my Department at 90% of costs incurred, with the housing authorities providing 10% of costs from their own resources.

-	2010	2011	2012
-	€	€	€
Louth County Council	10,000	903,499	900,308
Drogheda Borough Council	254,932	2,402	0
Dundalk Town Council	670,941	2,457	0
TOTAL	935,873	908,358	900,308

A Protocol for the Delegation of Section 10 Homeless funding has been agreed between my Department and Louth County Council, as lead authority for the North East region. This arrangement provides for the delegation of €879,963 for homeless accommodation and related services to the North East region involving Louth, Cavan and Monaghan County Councils for

2013.

In addition, details of the funding provided by my Department to organisations tackling the issue of homelessness, under the Scheme to Support National Organisations, for the years 2010 - 2013 are set out in the table.

-	2010	2011	2012	2013
-	€	€	€	€
Simon Communities of Ireland	171,936	112,914	90,000	84,780

My Department also provides funding to organisations under the Local and Community Development Programme with the objective of tackling poverty and social exclusion through partnership and constructive engagement between Government, its agencies, and people in disadvantaged communities. It is a key tool of Government in providing supports for the 'harder to reach' in the most disadvantaged areas and communities. Details of the funding provided by the Louth Leader Partnership in respect of the issue of homelessness in the County Louth area for the years 2010 - 2013 are set out in the table.

-	2010	2011	2012
-	€	€	€
Drogheda Homeless Aid - funding provided towards PR material	-	€3,500	-

Domestic Violence Policy

170. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the funding provided by his Department to agencies dealing with the issue of domestic violence in County Louth in 2010, 2011 and 2012; the amount that has been allocated for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32444/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Responsibility for the development and provision of services to support victims of domestic abuse rests with the Minister for Health and is delivered through the Health Service Executive. In addition Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, which was established in June 2007 as an executive office of the Department of Justice and Equality, works to ensure the delivery of a coordinated response across Government to issues of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. My Department's responsibility is in respect of homelessness which in some cases involves the provision of current funding, under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988, towards the operational costs of refuges for the victims of domestic abuse. Details of the funding provided by my Department, under Section 10, for the years 2008 – 2012 in County Louth are set out in the following table. Section 10 funding is provided from my Department at the rate of 90% of costs incurred, with the housing authorities providing 10% of costs from their own resources.

-	2010 €	2011 €	2012 €
Drogheda Borough Women's Aid Refuge	31,267	29,700	72,900
Dundalk Town Women's Aid Refuge	82,782	96,300	96,300
TOTAL	114,049	126,000	169,200

A Protocol for the Delegation of Section 10 Homeless funding has been agreed between my Department and Louth County Council, as lead authority for the North East region. This arrangement provides for the delegation of €879,963 for homeless accommodation and related services to the North East region involving Louth, Cavan and Monaghan County Councils for 2013.

In addition, details of the funding provided by my Department to organisations tackling the issue of domestic violence, under the Scheme to Support National Organisations, for the years 2010 - 2013 are set out in the following table. Details are not available on the expenditure by these organisations in County Louth.

-	2010 €	2011 €	2012 €	2013 €
MOVE Ireland	45,792	32,828	50,000	47,100
Rape Crisis Net- work Ireland	91,584	81,175	90,000	84,780
Safe Ireland	91,584	81,175	90,000	84,780

My Department also provides funding to organisations under the Local and Community Development Programme with the objective of tackling poverty and social exclusion through partnership and constructive engagement between Government, its agencies, and people in disadvantaged communities. It is a key tool of Government in providing supports for the 'harder to reach' in the most disadvantaged areas and communities. A number of groups funded under this programme specifically target actions in respect of domestic violence initiatives. Many other projects funded under this programme, while not having a specific domestic violence focus, provide information on this issue. Details of the funding provided by the Louth Leader Partnership in respect of the issue of domestic violence in the County Louth area for the years 2010 - 2013 are set out in the following table.

-	2010 €	2011 €	2012 €	2013 € (committed)
Glow Project – IT Programme for victims of domes- tic violence	8,000			
Interagency net- work on domestic violence		4,000		
Pre-development training for vic- tims of domestic violence				500

Road Improvement Schemes

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will clarify the basis on which Kildare County Council carried out improvements, upgrading and maintenance on a regular basis on the road serving the properties of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare while now maintaining that the road in question is not taken in charge and citing a requirement under the 2009 Act to the effect that the residents involved are required to obtain a court order to continue to enjoy the rights and entitlements they have enjoyed since the 1970s; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32463/13]

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will clarify the position regarding the road (details supplied) in County Kildare with particular reference to when responsibility for maintenance was undertaken by Kildare County Council in view of the fact that the local authority has provided such services there since the 1970s and the requirements now being pursued under the 2009 Act affecting rights of way, easements and/or profit à prendre; if it is recognised and accepted that rights and entitlements have been established more than 20 years ago by an original land holder part of whose property has since been disposed of to the aforementioned including rights and entitlements envisaged under the 2009 Act but prior to the passage of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32465/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

The Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 is primarily the responsibility of the Minister for Justice and Equality and I have no direct function in this regard. Furthermore, I have no function in relation to a planning authority as a roads authority as this is primarily a matter for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Rural Development Policy

173. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will apply to the appropriate national and European bodies to amend the rural development programme so that the Cnoc na Gaoithe project in Tulla, County Clare and other projects which similarly aim to promote culture and heritage conservation are no longer subjected to the de minimis rule when this is not required by Article 107 3 (d) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32478/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): There are 35 Local Action Groups contracted, on my Department’s behalf, to deliver the Leader elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP) throughout the country and these groups are the principal decision-makers in relation to the allocation of project funding. The project referred to received RDP funding, through Clare Local Development Company, of almost €150,000 under the Conservation and Upgrading of the Rural Heritage measure of the RDP during 2012 and the promoter now wishes to avail of further funding under the Programme but is prohibited due to State Aid/ “de minimis” rules.

I recently met briefly with the project promoters and outlined to them that in accordance with the State Aid rules/‘de minimis’ (Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1998/2006) the overall limit of ‘de minimis’ aid cannot exceed €200,000 over any three year period under the Conservation and Upgrading of the Rural Heritage measure of the RDP. The three year period is from

the date of award of funding, and the 'de minimis' limit in this case will apply until the end of 2014. The rule applies to both the project and the promoter.

It is possible to seek a derogation in relation to the Conservation and Upgrading of the Rural Heritage measure. However, the Programme amendment process, as stipulated in the regulatory framework, is quite complex and can take some time to complete with no guarantee that the amendment submitted would be approved by the European Commission. As funding commitments under the current Programme are closing at the end of the 2013 there would not be enough time remaining to facilitate the programme change process for the current programming period. My Department will consider this issue when developing the framework for the Rural Development Programme for the 2014-2020 programming period.

Diplomatic Representation Issues

174. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the parameters of the Minister of State's recent address to the International Conference on Nuclear Security in Vienna, Austria on 30 June and 1 July; if he will detail the bilateral engagements and other meetings he had at the conference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32482/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My colleague, the Minister of State Fergus O'Dowd, attended the opening day of the International Conference on Nuclear Security organised by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna on 1 July 2013. The Conference, which will continue until 5 July, is the first time that all Member States of the IAEA have had the opportunity to attend, at ministerial level, a Conference on Nuclear Security and it is therefore a welcome step forward in multilateral engagement.

The Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd made a statement to the Conference during the afternoon session of the opening day. In his statement, he confirmed Ireland's policy position not to use nuclear energy for the generation of electricity but highlighted the high value Ireland puts on the peaceful use of nuclear technology. He noted that Ireland was conscious of the risks which may be associated with nuclear power and technologies, in particular the risk of malicious acts and of nuclear terrorism.

Minister of State O'Dowd stressed Ireland's commitment to effective multilateralism as the best way of achieving and upholding the rule of law, ensuring international peace and security, and advancing international cooperation. The Minister of State noted that Ireland has been associated, from the outset, with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as the multilateral basis for achieving complete nuclear disarmament, preventing nuclear proliferation, and facilitating the peaceful uses of nuclear energy subject to strict international controls and standards.

He also referred to Ireland's positive contribution to the dialogue aimed at improving Government to Government communications on nuclear shipments, which has been underway at the IAEA since late 2012.

Finally, he concluded that it is appropriate for the international community to use the opportunity of the Conference to take stock in assessing lessons learned in the area of nuclear security; to identify those areas for further action; and to act collectively for the common good. The on-going contribution which the IAEA is making in this area is to be welcomed and Ireland offers its full support in drafting and implementing the Nuclear Security Plan for 2014 – 2017.

In terms of his international engagements during his time in Vienna, Minister of State

O'Dowd and my Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs had a pre-arranged meeting with the IAEA Director General Mr Yukiya Amano on 1 July. The Minister of State also met informally with representatives from Italy and Portugal. A meeting also took place with the delegation from Lithuania, which assumed the Presidency of the Council of the EU from 1 July.

Waste Water Treatment Inspections

175. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 191 of 27 June 2013, and the recently signed Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013, when he expects grants to be made available for the upgrading of households whose septic tanks and other domestic wastewater treatment systems are deemed to require remediation following an inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32492/13]

176. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the new septic tank grant €4,000 if a person sells a house; will the new purchaser be entitled to claim the grant for upgrading the septic tank; if there is a time limit on the application and or work . [32538/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 176 together.

The Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013, which I recently signed, provide for a scheme of grant assistance for the remediation of domestic wastewater treatment systems. Grant assistance will only be available to an owner whose treatment system was registered before the prescribed date of 1 February 2013 and is deemed, following an inspection under the EPA's National Inspection Plan, to require remediation or upgrading. The owner must also meet the eligibility criteria specified in the Regulations.

Purchasers of houses may subsequently apply for grant aid once they meet all eligibility criteria, including the requirement that the treatment system serving the property was originally registered before the prescribed date of 1 February 2013. The only exceptions to this are houses that have a treatment system constructed or installed after 1 February 2013; in such cases the owners should register their systems within 90 days of the connection of the premises to the treatment system. The timeframe for completing remediation work will be specified in the advisory notice issued by the water services authority and will depend on the nature of the problem revealed by the inspection and the extent of the risk to human health or the environment. There is no time limit set for submission of grant applications.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

177. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) in County Louth will receive Garda vetting which has been applied for and which is essential for them to gain work experience which they are required to do as part of FETAC level 5 course they have undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32308/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that a vetting application on behalf of the individual referred to by the Deputy was received by the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) on 9 May 2013. The application is being processed and will be returned to the registered organisation once completed.

All organisations registered for Garda Vetting are aware of the processing time-frames for the receipt of Garda vetting and have been advised to factor this into their recruitment and selection process. In order to observe equity and fairness in respect of all applicants for Garda Vetting, standard processing procedures are such that applications are processed in chronological order, from the date of receipt at the Central Vetting Unit.

Garda Stations Refurbishment

178. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations around the country that are not wheelchair accessible; and the measures being taken to address this issue. [32311/13]

179. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will take the necessary measures to make Crumlin Garda station, Dublin, accessible to members of the public who must use a wheelchair. [32312/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 and 179 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the State property portfolio. In addition, I understand that the OPW has a programme in place to provide disabled access to public buildings, including Garda stations. This set of projects is being progressed by the OPW and I am advised that details in relation to the number of Garda buildings to be catered for under the programme are not readily available to the Garda authorities.

With regard to Crumlin Garda station, I am also advised that a Universal Access Audit has been carried out in respect of the station and that the matter will be further pursued in the context of An Garda Síochána's identified accommodation priorities and the availability of funding within the Vote of the Office of Public Works.

Immigration Status

180. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures used by An Garda Síochána when establishing the marital status of a Brazilian citizen living here who proposes to get married in this State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32318/13]

184. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures used by An Garda Síochána when establishing the marital status of a Filipino citizen living here who proposes to get married here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32456/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 184 together.

The entering into a marriage in this State irrespective of the immigration status of the persons involved is a matter for the individuals concerned. Neither my Department nor An Garda Síochána has any role or involvement in establishing the marital status of a non-national person living here who proposes to get married in the State unless there are allegations of criminal conduct in this regard.

With regard to marriage in the State, the Deputy may wish to access the website of the Gen-

eral Registrar Office at www.groireland.ie which provides comprehensive information on the laws and procedures relating to marriage in the State.

Criminal Investigations

181. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the presence of the Anglo Irish Bank tapes; the date on which he was made aware of their presence; the action he has taken since being made aware of their presence; the actions that have been taken by the Garda on foot of these recordings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32328/13]

191. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide details of each of the separate investigations currently underway by An Garda Síochána into the banking collapse; the subject matter being investigated; if he will provide an update in respect of each investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32529/13]

192. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if An Garda Síochána has launched an investigation into the leaking of certain tapes of Anglo Irish Bank telephone calls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32530/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181, 191 and 192 together.

While I am in ongoing contact with the Garda Commissioner concerning the progress of the investigations into the former Anglo-Irish Bank, the Deputies will appreciate that I have no role in relation to the detailed management of these investigations, nor would it be appropriate for me to disclose what evidence the Garda have in their possession, or the use to which it may be put, in relation to any criminal investigations which they are conducting. I was aware in general terms of course that An Garda Síochána had obtained an enormous range of documents and recordings in the course of these investigations but the detail of this material would have been a matter for the investigating and prosecuting authorities alone. In the circumstances, as I have indicated previously, I had, quite properly, no knowledge of the tapes in question until they were disclosed publicly.

Equally, I do not have a function in relation to establishing the origin of the disclosure of the tapes referred to and, accordingly, I cannot comment on this, other than to say that I have been advised by the Garda authorities that the issue of a criminal investigation into the disclosure of the tapes has not arisen.

As I have stated previously in this House I share the widespread concern that the criminal investigations into the former Anglo-Irish Bank be resolved as soon as possible. However, what is most important now is that nothing be said which would in any way risk the possibility of prejudicing any criminal proceedings.

The Deputies will be aware that a number of Garda investigation files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions as have several files from the parallel investigation taking place under the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement. The investigations comprise several strands which, as has previously been indicated, include the provision of funds by Anglo to various parties for the purpose of its shares, the so-called 'back to back' short term deposits, issues concerning loans to directors and matters relating to financial statements and disclosures. Three persons are currently charged with offences under the Companies Acts and a number of files remain with the DPP awaiting her independent directions. There continues to be close contact between An Garda Síochána and the DPP in relation to all matters arising from

these cases. In the circumstances it will be appreciated that it would not be appropriate to make any further comment on the detail of these matters.

Legal Aid Applications

182. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason that there are delays in giving new appointments to persons seeking the assistance of the Legal Aid Board; his plans to provide extra resources to eliminate these waiting lists; the average waiting time for an appointment from the board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32330/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that under the terms of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995, as passed by the Oireachtas, the Legal Aid Board is independent in the operation of its functions and decisions on individual cases are a matter for the Board. However, in order to be helpful to the Deputy I have had enquiries made with the Board on his behalf.

I am advised that demand for legal services from the Legal Aid Board (“the Board”) has increased significantly since the down-turn in the economy. While there was a 10% drop in demand at the general law centres in 2012 compared to 2011, nevertheless the demand in 2011 was 93% greater than it was in 2006. Demand in 2013 is running at the same level as it was in 2012. The Board has not been subject to the sort of cuts to its grant-in-aid that other public service bodies have had to experience and I have been able to maintain the Board’s grant-in-aid at the same level for 2013 as it was in 2012 (and 2011).

Nevertheless it is a challenging environment that has resulted in lengthened waiting times for those seeking legal services for matters that are not prioritised. Notwithstanding the pressures on resources, the Government has further supported the Board by approving exemptions from the moratorium to enable the organisation to recruit front-line staff for direct service delivery. The Public Appointments Service has recently concluded a solicitor recruitment competition for the Board from which appointments, both temporary and permanent, are being made at the moment.

In response to the changed environment the Board has taken steps to try and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of its legal services. Those steps include the following:

- The Board has been piloting a ‘triage’ approach in most of its law centres to service delivery and this approach is operative in most of its centres at this stage. The pilot is in response to lengthening waiting times. The aim of the ‘triage’ approach is that every applicant gets to see a solicitor within a period of one month for the purpose of getting legal advice (consultations are broadly limited to 45 minutes). If the applicant requires further services they remain on the ‘waiting list’. There is or has been a ‘backlog’ of applicants to be seen for triage purposes hence it is taking time to reduce the waiting time for such an appointment to one month. A first review of the operation of the pilot indicated that clients were overwhelmingly satisfied with this particular service initiative. This was because they got early access to a solicitor for advice on their legal disputes that provided clarity about the options open to them and the process through which their disputes might be resolved.

- In August 2012 the Board introduced a new case management system in its law centres. This is a ‘start to end’ system which will in the medium term deliver efficiencies in terms of the administration aspect as well as in relation to the delivery of the legal services;

- In November 2011 the Board took responsibility for the management and administration of the State funded family mediation service. A key reason for transferring this responsibility to the Board was to improve the synergies between the State funded family mediation services and the State funded civil legal aid services (most of the demand for legal services is in the area of family law). Improving the synergies will be for the benefit of the customer and will help move away from a 'litigation first' approach that may on occasion be too common. Already there are very positive signs from a pilot initiative operating in Dolphin House (where the District Family Court sits) involving the co-location of the courts and a mediation service with a legal service located there also. Steps are now being taken to replicate this initiative in a number of other locations including Cork and Naas;

- With the drop in demand for asylum services the Board has taken steps to integrate its Refugee Legal Service into the general law centre service delivery model thus effectively transferring resources from the asylum area to the general legal service area where the demands have increased;

- The Board has maintained a high level of usage of private solicitors for family law cases in the District Court;

- The Board has continued to engage with other key players in the justice / legal area with a view to trying to ensure that State funded resources that impact on its area of business are used to best effect.

I am currently considering a package of proposals from the Board for the revision of the financial eligibility and contributions provisions governing the granting of civil legal aid. These provisions may have some impact, albeit relatively marginal, on the demand for legal services and the resources available to the Board.

I am very conscious of the difficulties that delays in accessing legal aid can give rise to and I am aware that the Board is also keenly aware of those difficulties and is working to ensure the delays are minimised to the greatest extent possible. I have noted some of the steps that it has taken and I know that it is constantly keeping the delivery of its services under review with a view to getting services to those most in need of them as quickly as possible.

It is difficult to give an 'average' waiting time as waiting times fluctuate at the individual law centres depending on the levels of demand, the levels of resources available and 'environmental' factors such as the frequency of court sittings.

The waiting times at law centres for non prioritised matters are as per the following schedule. This schedule sets out the waiting times for centres not operating the triage approach (second column) and the waiting times for centres operating the triage approach (third and fourth column). The fourth column indicates the additional time that a person who has had a triage appointment is likely to have to wait for a second consultation.

Details re waiting times and numbers waiting on the 1st June 2013 (in months)

Law Centre	General Law Centre not operating triage	Waiting time for a triage appointment	Further waiting time where triage appointment previously given
Blanchardstown	3		
Brunswick St		9	4
Clondalkin	12		

Law Centre	General Law Centre not operating triage	Waiting time for a triage appointment	Further waiting time where triage appointment previously given
Finglas	14		
Gardiner St		3	15
Tallaght	11		
Popes Quay	9		
South Mall	12		
Athlone		4	8
Castlebar		2	6
Cavan		4	3
Dundalk	4		
Ennis	13		
Galway- Francis St		6	6
Galway – Seville H		7	5
Kilkenny		2	11
Letterkenny		5	7
Limerick	10		
Longford		3	5
Monaghan	2		
Navan		4	1
Nenagh		1	3
Newbridge		6	9
Portlaoise		6	10
Sligo		4	5
Tralee	4		
Tullamore	6		
Waterford	7		
Wexford	9		
Wicklow		1	12

Criminal Law Matters

183. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will investigate the legality of a mosquito device and clarify if there is any breach of Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act (details supplied) [32452/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters referred to by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as the report is to hand.

Question No. 184 answered with Question No. 180.

Rights of Way

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will clarify the basis on which the legal representatives of Kildare County Council have informed persons (details supplied) in County Kildare to the effect that rights in respect of access by way of public road to their property is being restricted notwithstanding the fact they have enjoyed such rights and entitlements since the 1970s; if it is recognised the situation emerging seriously undermines their ability to enjoy the full amenities of their property and any future sale of the said properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32462/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will appreciate, I am not in a position to interpret the law or to provide advice on a particular case in response to a Parliamentary Question. Moreover, on the basis of the information provided, the matter does not appear to come within my field of responsibility as Minister for Justice and Equality.

Juvenile Offenders

186. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when all teenage offenders will be taken out of St Patrick's Institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32479/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to advise the Deputy that on today's date I have announced Government approval for my plans regarding the future accommodation of prisoners currently detained at St Patrick's Institution.

In line with the recommendation of the Inspector of Prisons and in order to effect the changes necessary in regime and culture and to ensure the safe and secure custody, I am satisfied that the complete closure of St. Patrick's and the dispersal of all prisoners is now required. Pending the development of new facilities in Oberstown in mid 2014, for which the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs has responsibility, this will in the interim involve the transfer of all 17 year olds currently serving a sentence in St. Patrick's Institution to a dedicated Unit in Wheatfield Prison and the transfer of the 18 to 20 year old population to Wheatfield also.

Arrangements will also be put in place for the transfer of prison staff to other institutions. With the full co-operation and support of everyone involved, it is anticipated that this can be achieved within 6 months. A dedicated Project Board has been established by the Irish Prison Service to oversee this transition.

Juvenile Offenders

187. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when extra specialised training should be offered to staff in facilities housing juvenile offenders, when extra personnel trained to deal with young offenders will be employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32480/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) that the University of Ulster has been successful in a recent tender to develop a programme to illustrate the benefits of positive communication, cover the main theories of communication, personality, child development and stress reduction in order to equip Irish Prison Service staff with the skills they need to de-escalate stressful and aggressive interactions, particularly those involving the young people in their care.

I have announced today my plans regarding the future accommodation of prisoners cur-

rently detained at St Patrick's Institution.

In line with the recommendation of the Inspector of Prisons and in order to effect the changes necessary in regime and culture and to ensure the safe and secure custody, I am satisfied that the complete closure of St. Patrick's and the dispersal of all prisoners is now required. Pending the development of new facilities in Oberstown in mid 2014, for which the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs has responsibility, this will in the interim involve the transfer of all 17 year olds currently serving a sentence in St. Patrick's Institution to a dedicated Unit in Wheatfield Prison and the transfer of the 18 to 20 year old population to Wheatfield also.

Arrangements will also be put in place for the transfer of prison staff to other institutions. With the full co-operation and support of everyone involved, it is anticipated that this can be achieved within 6 months. A dedicated Project Board has been established by the Irish Prison Service to oversee this transition. A Project Board and team have been put in place to manage the transition of young offenders from St. Patrick's Institution to Wheatfield Prison and the selection and training of staff will be given priority.

Garda Vetting Process

188. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person should receive confirmation when he or she has passed the vetting process by the Garda central vetting unit; if a person may request the confirmation from the employer or organisation that requires the Garda vetting; if a person may request a certificate or other comparable form of confirmation of vetting from the central vetting unit to prove he or she has passed Garda vetting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32489/13]

189. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps that have been taken to date on the setting of up an the e-vetting system; the way the process would work for both approved employers/organisations and persons to be vetted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32490/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 and 189 together.

The function of the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) is to conduct Garda vetting checks in respect of persons on whose behalf vetting applications have been submitted by organisations registered with the Unit for that purpose.

The role of the GCVU is not to deem any individual to have "passed the vetting process". Its role is to provide a vetting service to registered organisations who employ or engage persons to work with children or vulnerable adults. The disclosure is made to the organisation to enable it to decide on the suitability of the person and the function of deciding whether an individual is suitable to work in a registered organisation rests within each registered organisation and not the GCVU.

Each time a new vetting application is received, a full vetting check is conducted to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. Non-transferability and the contemporaneous nature of the vetting protects against the risk of fraud or forgery and is a guarantee of the integrity of the vetting service. It also affords the registered organisation the facility to assess suitability based on the most up to date information available on the applicant.

It is open to any individual to request from any organisation, including an employer, a copy of any personal data held about them, including data contained in a Garda vetting disclosure.

The possibility of introducing an e-vetting system has been assessed and the Garda authorities are now in the process of developing a system which will enable vetting applications to be submitted electronically through a secure web service. In addition, the system will facilitate the checking and monitoring of applications. The relevant work is being pursued on a priority basis and it will be completed as quickly as possible.

Prison Committals

190. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in the situation where a person receives a custodial sentence and in the absence of a specific direction for the judge, the person who decides in which prison the convicted person will serve his or her sentence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32524/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am to inform the Deputy that in the absence of a specific prison on the committal warrant, designated prisons are associated with specific areas of the country. For example, all male persons committed to prison on remand, pending trial or under sentence of imprisonment or otherwise from any court in the county of Cork, the county borough of Cork, the county of Kerry, the county of Waterford or the county borough of Waterford are committed to Cork Prison unless otherwise stated. Other areas are associated to other prisons on a similar basis.

A guiding principle in the placement of prisoners is that they are detained in an institution as near to their homes as possible to facilitate visits from relatives and friends. Accommodation near their home, however, may not always be possible. For example, female prisoners can only be accommodated in the Dóchas Centre on the Mountjoy Campus in Dublin or in Limerick Prison. Pressures of space and security considerations are also taken into account, as is the need to keep certain prisoners apart from the general population for their own safety.

When a prisoner is committed to prison the management of the prisoner's sentence and any transfers take place on foot of administrative decisions made on my behalf. Every effort is made to balance the needs of the prisoner and the aim of providing an effective rehabilitative environment for as many prisoners as possible. In order to maximise the effectiveness of prison programmes, prisoners may move between different prisons at various points in their sentence.

Other common reasons for prisoner movements include court appearances, disruptive behaviour, conflict with other prisoners, to participate in a particular training or educational course, to assist in reintegration or to alleviate overcrowding. Factors taken into account include length of sentence, nature of offence, medical needs, drug dependency, behaviour while in custody, the age of the prisoner, previous criminal record, engagement with the various services and the availability of accommodation.

Questions Nos. 191 and 192 answered with Question No. 181.

Human Trafficking

193. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will update Dáil Éireann on European Council dialogue in respect of trafficking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32541/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The issue of human traffick-

ing and the rights of victims of this abhorrent crime was a focus of discussions at the European Council during the Irish Presidency. The discussions centred on the Commission publication in April 2013 of a document entitled ‘The EU rights of victims of trafficking in human beings’ as provided for by Priority A, Action 4 of the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings (2012 - 2016). This document does not provide for the establishment of any new rights under EU law. Its purpose is to ensure that the rights of victims that already exist are set out clearly and, insofar as possible, in simple language that could be understood by a victim. It also provides for the first time in a single document all of the relevant EU legislation with an overview in simple language.

The European Council adopted Council Conclusions at its Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council meeting in June 2013 welcoming the Commission publication and inviting Member States to: Take into consideration and utilise the Commission document ‘*The EU rights of victims of trafficking in human beings*’ for the purpose of drawing up or, if necessary, amending Member State specific document(s). Such document(s) should provide clear, user-friendly information on labour, social, victim and migrant rights that victims of trafficking in human beings have under EU law in their jurisdiction with special attention being given to child victims; supplement the information on the labour, social, victim and migrant rights that victims of trafficking in human beings have under EU law with any other rights of victims of human trafficking that exist under the domestic law in their jurisdiction, in/when drawing up such document(s); ensure, as far as possible, where the information is to be provided in more than one document, that such documents are collated into a single dossier to facilitate victims’ easy access to comprehensive information on their rights; ensure that such document(s) outline(s) in a clear and user-friendly manner how such rights can be exercised by victims in their jurisdiction; disseminate such document(s) to all relevant actors that work with victims of human trafficking in their jurisdiction (e.g. police, border guards, immigration and asylum officials, health and social work professionals, Non-Governmental Organisations, etc.); utilise such Member State specific document(s) in training to all relevant actors working in combating trafficking in human beings to ensure a human rights’ perspective; satisfy themselves that the objective of these Council Conclusions have been met by June 2014.

Naturalisation Applications

194. **Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway who has lived here for 13 years and is married to an Irish citizen has to pay €980 for an Irish passport; his views on whether this is a very exclusionary fee and would limit those with limited resources to gain an Irish passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30654/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The prescribed fees to be paid by applicants on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation were last increased by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship (Fees) Regulations 2008, which came into effect on 1st August 2008. The standard certification fee is €950 while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain circumstances when the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of refugees and stateless persons no certification fee is charged.

In November 2011, I signed into law Statutory Instrument 569/11, which introduced an application fee of €175 for new applications for a certificate of naturalisation. The application fee was introduced to contribute towards the costs of processing those applications that do not attract any certification fee and to help reduce the proportion of invalid and ineligible applica-

tions being lodged. The fees are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. As the Deputy will be aware I have introduced formal citizenship ceremonies at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship.

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.

Sugar Industry

195. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he proposes to take to ensure the re-establishment of the sugar industry here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32371/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I would like to give the Deputy the background to this issue. The EU Sugar Regime underwent a radical reform in 2005 following major EU decisions to restructure the industry. A temporary restructuring scheme was introduced with the aim of reducing EU sugar production. Greencore, the holder of the entire Irish sugar quota, availed of this voluntary scheme, dismantled its facilities and ceased production in 2006. Ireland secured €353 million as part of the reform package of which €220 million went to beet growers, €127million to Greencore and €6 million to machinery contractors. There is no mechanism under the present EU Regulations to allow for the reinstatement of the sugar quota for Ireland.

I know you will be aware that in 2011 I met with two separate groups which had conducted feasibility studies, into the possibility of establishing a new sugar/bioethanol facility in the country. I understand from figures published by the interested groups who are investigating the possibility of building a new facility, that the overall capital cost costs involved could range from €250 million to €400 million, depending on what type of facility will be constructed.

I have previously indicated that any venture to develop a combined sugar/bioethanol production facility would have to be a viable commercial proposition, and supported by a business case which is sufficiently robust to attract the funding from investors for the very substantial capital investment required. I am pleased to confirm to the Deputy that at the recent Council of Agriculture Ministers, which I chaired under Ireland's EU Presidency, I secured agreement as part of the overall CAP reform package to abolish sugar quotas by 30 September 2017. This agreement removes, with effect from 1st October 2017, the quota barrier for operators in Ireland or other Member States wishing to re-establish a sugar industry. This agreement has been welcomed by those who are interested in seeking to re-establish a sugar industry here.

EU Directives

196. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if new legislation will be required to implement required standards for the testing and use of agricultural sprayers in accordance with European Directive 2009/128/EC; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32366/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Statutory Instrument No. 155 of 2012 which transposes Directive 2009/128/EC into Irish law, makes it a legal requirement for all “agricultural sprayers” over 3m wide, as well as orchard sprayers and other pesticide application equipment to be tested by November 2016. Officials in my Department are currently working on the mechanisms to facilitate this process and it is planned to have a coherent system in place by early 2014. It is not foreseen that any additional legislation will be required to progress these systems.

EU Directives

197. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when standards for the testing and use of agricultural sprayers here in accordance with European Directive 2009/128/EC will be published; the way these standards will be enforced and if sanctions will apply where required standards are not reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32367/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Statutory Instrument No. 155 of 2012 which transposes Directive 2009/128/EC into Irish law, makes it a legal requirement for all “agricultural sprayers” over 3m wide, as well as orchard sprayers to be tested by November 2016. Schedule 1 of the legislation prescribes the standard to which the above equipment will be tested i.e. boom sprayers in excess of 3m wide must conform with EN Standard 13790-1:2003, while orchard and blast sprayers must conform with EN Standard 13790-2:2003. These standards are published on the website of the European Committee for Standardisation and are available for purchase.

All legal requirements placed on various people through regulations mentioned above will be monitored and measured by officials from my Department. This includes inspection at farm level under Statutory Management Requirement No. 9 (pesticides). There will not be any additional inspections at this level but rather the scope of the inspections will be enhanced to include issues such as end-user training, certification of sprayer and operation of the principles of integrated pest management. Statutory Instrument No. 155 of 2012 allows for the application of penalties. Where a breach is detected to a Single Payment Scheme recipient, a disallowance through this scheme may also apply.

EU Directives

198. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the testing facilities and certification systems that are currently in place here to ensure that the testing and use of agricultural sprayers are in compliance with European Directive 2009/128/EC; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32368/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Directive in question was transposed into Irish legislation in 2012 under Statutory Instrument 155 of 2012. The principle aim of these regulations is to achieve a more sustainable use of pesticides in both the farming and the amenity/landscaping sectors.

With regard to the “testing and use of agricultural sprayers”, these regulations enable me to establish a register of “inspectors of pesticide application equipment” and make it a legal requirement for all pesticide application equipment in use, to be tested by a registered inspector by November 2016. The registered inspectors, when inspecting such equipment, shall apply the standards as set out in EN Standard 13790-1:2003 for Boom sprayers and EN Standard 13790-

2:2003 for Orchard and Blast sprayers.

Officials in my Department are currently working on the mechanisms to facilitate this process and it is planned to have a coherent system in place by early 2014, allowing sufficient time for all sprayers to be tested by the timeline prescribed in the regulations.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Conditions

199. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the flexibility that is applied in relation to agri-environment options scheme 3 applications by farmers in disadvantaged areas, particularly where the farm is 22.06 ha in size. [32417/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The process of ranking and selecting all AEOS applicants was clearly set out in the scheme documentation. Acceptance into the scheme was established using the pre-determined selection criteria as follows:

1. farmers in the Boora region of Co. Offaly who chose Wild Bird Cover Option B (Grey Partridge) as one of their selected options,
2. farmers with a minimum of 0.5 hectares of designated land,
3. farm partnerships,
4. farmers who previously participated in REPS commencing with smallest farms. and
5. others based on farm size (again favouring smaller holdings).

Because of the funding constraints and as a result of the selection process, farmers that previously participated in REPS and had a farm size bigger than 22.06 hectares were unsuccessful in their applications as were those who had not previously participated in REPS.

Forestry Management

200. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will account for the discrepancy in respect of the calculation on the size of a forestry plantation as determined by the Forest Service in both March 2008 and again in respect of the same plantation in early 2013 in view of the fact that the Forest Service used maps digitised by his Department in its initial calculation; the extent to which this issue is replicated in other cases and the negotiations if any which his Department is having with the company which carried out the digitising process in respect of redress for the errors involved; the number of forestry plantations with problems arising from these digitising errors; if his Department has taken advice as to the liability of individual land owners in respect of his Department's request for recoupment of over payment of premiums and overpayment of plantation grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32425/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): With regard to a discrepancy of any kind on an individual afforestation contract, the Forest Service is not in a position to give a definitive explanation without knowing the details of the contract in question. However, in general terms, the situation as described most commonly occurs where an applicant has made an over-claim on his or her contract and my Department discovers that over-claim.

The forestry schemes administered by my Department and other schemes, such as the Single Farm Payment scheme, use computerised geo-spatial and payments systems. These systems use ortho-photography, which is geometrically corrected aerial photography overlaid onto maps. The systems capture an image of an applicant's claim map and calculate an accurate measurement of the area being claimed. The process of electronically capturing the claim map is called digitisation. This technology has been used internationally for many years. Tolerances are applied when capturing and measuring claims in order to avoid penalising applicants due to minor inaccuracies in their claims. To ensure accuracy and consistency, digitising is performed by the contracted company using well established standards and procedures. My Department has no concerns over the accuracy of ortho-photography and geo-spatial systems for measuring areas. Digitising accuracy depends on the applicant's claim map – if the applicant submits a claim map which does not accurately define the area planted then the digitised image will obviously reflect that.

My Department, including Forestry Division, uses constantly updated ortho-photography to detect potential over-claims and overpayments. A simple example would be where a forestry plantation is initially established, the trees planted are not visible when viewed in contemporaneous photographs. However, when viewed on later photography, maturing trees in the plantation will be visible but the more recent photographs may show gaps where trees have failed, were removed, or were never planted. The updated photography therefore provides an effective audit tool to ensure that claims made under my Department's schemes are accurate.

Over-claims and overpayments on forestry contracts (and other schemes) are detected in this manner or through random or risk analysis driven inspections; through Single Farm Payment queries by applicants or their neighbours; through forestry queries by the applicant himself; by formal audit of files, etc. Any over-claim and overpayment, regardless of how it was detected, will be similar to the case described, in that the contract will be paid on an area determined from the applicant's claim from the 1st grant onwards and then, if an over-claim is discovered, the payable area will be adjusted downwards and any overpayment will be recouped.

It is impossible for the Forest Service to predict how many over-claims are made on contracts, as it must first detect each individual over-claim in order to be aware it. In all cases of overpayments, my Department is obliged to recoup any public money that has been overpaid.

Missing Children

201. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will update Dáil Éireann as to recent EU dialogue about Finland's position on the EU missing children help line; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32541/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The 116000 Missing Children Hotline is an EU-wide initiative designed to provide a single point of contact across the European Union for missing children and their families. The number is currently operational in 23 EU countries and the number has been allocated and is soon to be operational in a further three countries.

As part of the recent EU Presidency, Ireland co-hosted an EU conference on Missing Children, in Brussels on the 4th of June 2013, at which all EU countries were encouraged to fully roll out a 24/7 Missing Children Hotline service.

School Completion Programme

202. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is committed to retaining funding for the school completion programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25499/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The School Completion Programme (SCP) aims to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle and to generally improve the school attendance, participation and retention of its target cohort. The SCP is one of three service strands being integrated into a continuum of education welfare services under the remit of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). The SCP is a key programme under the Department of Education and Skills DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Action Plan.

In 2013 an allocation of €26.246m has been provided for the programme. This supports 124 projects and related initiatives which operate in 470 primary schools and 224 post-primary schools across the country to provide targeted supports to approximately 36,000 children and young people. The Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, published in December 2011, requires the SCP to achieve cumulative savings of €5.5 m over the period 2012 to 2014, of which €1.8m in savings is to be found in 2013.

My Department has recently written to the Chairperson of each SCP in relation to the next cycle of the programme. Each Local Management Committee, which is responsible for the delivery of services to local students, is currently developing its 2013/2014 proposals for targeted interventions and supports. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), which operates under the remit of my Department, is providing assistance to each Local Management Committee in this process. The administrative and financial arrangements for the coming year are being finalised and will be confirmed to individual projects during the coming months.

The savings necessary in 2014 will be further considered in the context of the operational review which is to be conducted during the coming academic year. A core objective of the review will be to ensure that available funds are appropriately targeted to support those pupils most at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving. Work is already underway to gather comprehensive information relating to existing organisational arrangements across all local project structures. It is also proposed to procure external expertise to further support the review process. This review will assist to identify the reforms necessary to consolidate the programme on a sustainable footing in the coming years.

I remain committed to supporting the educational attainment of children and young people at risk of early school leaving through a variety of formal and informal support services.

Preschool Services

203. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress she can report on her plans for a second free preschool year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32278/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was introduced in January 2010 and provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children in the year before commencing primary school. In line with the Programme for Government, my Department has made a significant commitment to maintaining this universal programme and some 68,000 children are availing of it at this time. The programme is expected to cost in the region of €175 million this year.

I am aware of the need to further develop the early childhood care and education sector. However, any development that involves further pre-school provision would require considerable additional funding. I am also very conscious that work is continuing on improvement of quality within the pre-school year. All of the available evidence indicates that the quality of the provision is key to good outcomes for children. In particular, I would like to see further progress in workforce development within the sector given the demands which expansion would place on the current pool of trained staff.

Future developments relating to early years care and education are being considered in the context of the National Early Years Strategy.

After-School Support Services

204. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she intends to take to address the lack of availability of after-school services for children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22386/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As part of Budget 2013 I, together with my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, was pleased to announce a new After-school Childcare initiative which will be targeted at low-income parents availing of employment opportunities. Lack of access to affordable, quality childcare is a significant barrier to many low income and disadvantaged families seeking to avail of work opportunities. This initiative will provide an important support measure to enable parents to avail of job opportunities. This is in line with the Government's overall strategy to support parents of low income families to take up employment and demonstrates how Departments are working together to deliver the Government's agenda on promoting employment and supporting children's development.

The initiative is expected to receive full year funding of €14 million to provide over 6,000 after-school places for children attending primary school in order to support parents to take up employment. This funding has been made possible through savings from the Vote of the Department of Social Protection.

Eligibility for the new After-school Childcare programme is determined by the Department of Social Protection. Officials from the Department of Social Protection and my Department are continuing in close collaboration on the operation of the programme. The first pilot phase has commenced. Up to 500 childcare places are available with Department of Social Protection local offices in Tralee, Mullingar, Dundalk, Cork City, Finglas, Kings Inn and Limerick City participating. The second phase of the pilot will be rolled out in July, with the full roll-out of the programme in September 2013, to coincide with the new school year. The pilot programme will assist both Departments in determining the procedural, quality and practical issues that require attention prior to the finalisation of the programme.

The programme will provide €35 per week per child enrolled in a participating service for after school services and this payment will rise to €100 per week during holiday periods when parents will be availing of full day care. A further €20 per week will be paid by the parent to the provider in both instances.

The new After-school Childcare programme will further augment my Department's programme of childcare supports for low income families. These include the Community Childcare Subvention and the Childcare Education and Training Support programmes, both of which provide subsidised childcare for low income parents, including qualifying parents who are on

approved VEC and FÁS education and training courses. In 2013, my Department expects to spend in the region of €70 million on these programmes, supporting over 30,000 childcare places.

Sunbed Usage

205. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he has any proposals to bring in regulations with regard to persons who operate sun beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32708/13]

206. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce legislation to protect young persons from sunbed use as a result of the huge incidents of skin cancer resulting from same [32306/13]

221. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when he expects legislation on the regulation of sunbeds to be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32416/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205, 206 and 221 together.

I can confirm that legislation will be implemented to regulate the use of sunbeds. This Bill has priority drafting and officials of my Department are working closely with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to complete the drafting of this legislation.

This legislation will prohibit the use of sunbeds on a sunbed premises by persons under 18 years of age and will also set out a comprehensive range of measures to promote a greater public awareness across all age groups of the dangers of developing skin cancer, premature ageing and eye damage from exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR). Key provisions in the Bill will include:-

- (i) a prohibition on anyone under 18 years of age using a sunbed on a sunbed premises;
- (ii) a prohibition on the sale to or hire of sunbeds to anyone under 18 years of age;
- (iii) a prohibition on the unsupervised use of sunbeds in a sunbed premises;
- (iv) an exemption for medical purposes;
- (v) control on the remote sale or hire of sunbeds (internet transactions);
- (vi) sunbed operators, sellers and hirers will be required to notify the HSE;
- (vii) a requirement that sunbed operators provide training for staff;
- (viii) an enforcement regime and the imposition of penalties for non-compliance;
- (ix) an obligation on all sunbed operators to provide protective eyewear to users;
- (x) a requirement that warning signs be displayed in all sunbed premises;
- (xi) a prohibition on certain promotional marketing practices;
- (xii) a requirement on operators to ensure that sunbed users are made fully aware of the potential dangers of sunbed use; and a related provision whereby sunbed users are required to sign to confirm that they have been made so aware.

The drafting of the Bill will be finalised within the next 6-8 weeks. Thereafter, it must be notified to the EU Commission under the EU Transparency Directive prior to its publication and initiation of the Bill in the Oireachtas. This EU notification requirement will necessitate a minimum of three months to complete.

Price of Medicines

207. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 901, 902 and 941 for 11 June 2013, if the Health Service Executive concluded its consideration of the Intermune offer in relation to the pricing of Pirfenidone; and if not, by what date will a decision be reached. [32314/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE has completed the consideration of the pricing and reimbursement application for Pirfenidone (Esbriet). The pricing and reimbursement application and associated commercially confidential offer made by Intermune has been accepted.

The HSE has been in contact with Intermune (the market authorisation holder) and has confirmed that it will be in a position to commence reimbursement from 1st of August 2013, subject to Intermune being in a position to launch the product. The HSE expects that Intermune will be in a position to launch on the 1st of August. The administrative processes to allow reimbursement to happen are ongoing and will be completed over the next few weeks.

Hospital Car Parks

208. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a list of all private companies who operate car parking facilities at publically funded hospitals here; the location and terms of the contract in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32320/13]

209. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm the ownership of the multi-storey car park at the Adelaide and Meath Hospital, Tallaght, Dublin; if he will outline the terms and duration of the contract between the Health Service Executive and the private operators of this car park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32321/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 and 209 together.

In relation to the particular queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in these matters.

Medical Card Applications

210. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons who are in their seventieth year cannot apply for a medical card for over seventies, in the months leading up to their seventieth birthday, which would ensure that they had the card received by their seventieth birthday, as opposed to the present practice whereby persons cannot apply for a medical card for over seventies, until they are actually seventy years of age, ensuring that persons do not get the over seventies medical card, until they are some months over this age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32324/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I am advised by the HSE that people can apply for a medical card in the months leading up to their seventieth birthday. The application will be assessed under the National Income Guidelines for Over 70's and will be put on hold until the day of their seventieth birthday. On this day the client will be notified of the outcome of this assessment.

The length of time that it takes for a client to receive a decision on their medical card application depends on (1) whether the client submitted a complete application or not, and (2) if not how quickly the applicant responds to the subsequent request for additional information. The Primary Care Reimbursement Services aims to process all medical cards within 15 days of receipt of the application.

Organ Donation

211. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the programme for Government commitment to allow for an opt out system for organ donation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32326/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Programme for Government envisages the introduction of an opt-out system of organ donation, with a view to improving the availability of organs for patients in need of transplantation. This will require detailed consideration and further consultation and I am developing proposals for Government on this matter. The public consultation process in relation to how such an opt-out system should operate, will generate greater public awareness of the need for organ donation.

In addition to consent systems, there is evidence from other countries that good co-ordination at hospital level and counselling arrangements for relatives are significant factors in achieving high organ donation rates. In conjunction with the HSE's National Organ Donation and Transplantation Office my Department is also examining what practices and organisational changes could further improve donation rates.

Organ Donation

212. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Health in view of the MSM blood ban, if sexually active gay men are also prevented from being organ donors; and if so, if he or his Department have considered removing such a ban [32327/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): EU Directive 2012/53/EU requires Member States of take all necessary measures to safeguard the recipients of organs. This was transposed by the European Union (Quality and Safety of Human Organs Intended for Transplantation) Regulations, S.I. No. 325 of 2012.

The Regulations apply to donation, procurement, testing, characterisation, transport and transplantation of organs. They set out a clear legal framework for the application of quality and safety standards for human organs intended for transplantation. The Regulations, however, do not specify who should or should not be donors, but state that selection assessments carried out pursuant to the regulations may provide for the exclusion of persons whose donation could present unacceptable health risks.

In order for transplantation to proceed safely all potential donors are risk assessed in order to prevent inadvertent transmission of infection. All potential donors, or in the case of deceased

donors their next of kin, must answer a range of questions prior to the organ donation process proceeding. They include questions in relation to certain risk behaviours. The decision on whether someone who is gay may become a donor is not based on sexual orientation, but because it is known that there is an increased level of HIV infection rates in MSM in Ireland. Testing for HIV remains very sensitive and effective, but there remains a period between infection and detection which could permit the transmission of the virus to a recipient. For this reason sexually active gay men are currently excluded from becoming organ donors.

Medical Card Eligibility

213. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the withdrawal of a medical card from a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [32341/13]

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.

Ambulance Service Response Times

214. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Navan ambulance control room; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32359/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Ambulance Service Provision

215. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when the proposed new ambulance control centre will be opened in Tallaght, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32360/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A significant reform programme is underway to reconfigure the way the HSE manages and delivers pre-hospital care services, to ensure a clinically driven, nationally co-ordinated system, supported by improved technology. The National Control Centre Reconfiguration Project, which is endorsed by HIQA and which represents international best practice, will reduce the number of ambulance control centres to a single national control system, with significant investment in new voice, data and mapping technologies. This project is a key element of Future Health: A Strategic Framework for Health Reform in Ireland 2012-2015.

In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy regarding when the new ambulance control centre will be opened at Tallaght, as this involves a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Accident and Emergency Departments Waiting Times

216. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry was waiting for 12 hours in accident and emergency in Kerry General Hospital before being admitted to a bed where they subsequently passed away; the intervention that was provided for the person; if their death could have been prevented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32362/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): At the outset, I would like to express my sympathy to the family of the person the Deputy mentions in this question. However, as the Deputy will appreciate, due to patient confidentiality, I am unable to discuss individual cases, including that of the patient involved. The Deputy may nonetheless wish to know that I have been advised by the HSE that if the family of the patient contact the hospital general manager's office, the management of the hospital are more than willing to engage with them to address any concerns they may have.

If the family do not wish to do so, a formal complaint can be made under the HSE complaints policy, entitled *Your Service Your Say* details of which are on the HSE website, at www.hse.ie/eng/services/ysys/Complaint. In addition, advice and instructions for making complaints about a service or an individual may be found at www.healthcomplaints.ie.

In accordance with this procedure, a complaint must be made in the first instance, to the hospital in which the incident causing the complaint occurred. In the case of Kerry General Hospital, the complaint can be addressed to:

General Manager's Office,
Kerry General Hospital,
Raghass,
Tralee, Co.Kerry.

If an individual is not satisfied with the response from the hospital, a review can be sought from the HSE Director of Advocacy and the Ombudsman, whose details are set out below.

HSE Director of Advocacy
Oak House
Millennium Park
Naas
Co Kildare
Tel 1890 424 555
Office of the Ombudsman
18, Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2
Tel 1890 223 030
Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie

I have asked the HSE to also contact you directly on this matter.

Symphysiotomy Report

217. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the Walsh report has been given to groups, group representatives or persons and if so, to whom it has been given, and the date of same. [32378/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy is aware, my Department has commissioned an independent research report in relation to the practice of symphysiotomy in Ireland. The research process comprised of two stages. The first stage was an independent draft academic research report, which was based on an analysis of published medical reports and research. The draft report contained information about how frequently symphysiotomy was carried out in Ireland and compared rates with other countries. The second stage in the research process was consultation on the draft report involving patient groups, health professionals and in particular the women who had undergone symphysiotomy. This second stage has just completed by the researcher, and following peer review, has been submitted to me for consideration. I intend to brief the Government on the report prior to its publication and I also intend to meet with representatives from the symphysiotomy support groups prior to the release of the report.

Patient Statistics

218. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients residing in psychiatric hospitals and units during the period 2006 to 2011; the number discharged; the number who went into community mental health care services and the number who went home; the number of patients still residing in psychiatric hospitals and units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32388/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Information on the number of patients resident in Irish psychiatric units and hospitals is collected by the Health Research Board under the National Inpatient Reporting System (NPIRS). The number of patients resident in such hospitals and units on Census nights - 31st March 2006 and 31st March 2010 is set out below. Data on the intervening years is not available.

Year	Number of Patients Resident in Psychiatric Hospitals and Units
2006	3,389
2010	2,812

Source: NPIRS, Health Research Board

In terms of the number of patients still residing in hospitals and units, the Health Research Board conducted a Census of Psychiatric hospitals and units on 31st March 2013 and this data is currently being processed. It is expected that preliminary data will be available before the end of the year.

The number of psychiatric patients discharged from Irish psychiatric hospitals between the years 2006 and 2012 is set out below. Data on the numbers who have been discharged into community mental healthcare services and the numbers discharged home is not collected.

Year	Number of Discharges
2006	20,098
2007	20,498
2008	20,603
2009	20,213
2010	19,614
2011	18,968
2012*	17,986

**Data for 2012 are provisional and subject to change*

Source: NPIRS, Health Research Board

Medical Card Eligibility

219. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card has been withdrawn in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32391/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Mr 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.

Dental Services Provision

220. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the forthcoming review of the Dental Act 1985, which will identify the regulatory and other reforms required in the dental health professions; the progress that has been made to date on this issue; if consultations have been held to date with relevant stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32411/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A public consultation on new legislation to replace the Dentist Act, 1985 which legislates for the regulation of dentists in Ireland, is currently underway by my Department. This 7 week consultation began on 10th June 2013 and will conclude on 26th July 2013. Members of the public and interested stakeholders are invited to submit views, interests and concerns on key issues relating to the development of the new legislation. The outcome of the consultation will inform the drafting of Heads of Bill, as well as informing the completion of a Regulatory Impact Analysis which will be carried out by my Department.

The proposed new legislation will form part of a suite of legislative instruments to ensure greater accountability of all professions within the health care service. The need for clear and comprehensive regulatory governance in all healthcare professions, which has already been achieved in the Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005; the Medical Practitioners Act, 2007; the Pharmacy Act, 2007; and the Nurses and Midwives Act, 2011 will also be provided for in new legislation regulating the dental profession. The protection of the public is the main objective of the proposed new legislation.

Question No. 221 answered with Question No. 205.

Drug Treatment Programmes Funding

222. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he has plans to review the funding his Department provides to tackle the issue of cocaine use; if this review will have an impact on the services currently provided by the Louth Community Drug and Alcohol Team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32432/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In the region of €274,000 has been allocated through the Drugs Initiative this year for cocaine specific initiatives provided at local level through the Drugs Task Forces. Of this sum, over €44,600 has been allocated to the North East Regional Drugs Task Force for cocaine measures, including €13,500 to the Louth Community Drug and Alcohol Team. At the request of my Department, the HSE recently carried out a review of the expenditure of cocaine initiative funding in the North East Regional Drugs Task Force area. This review confirmed that the funding allocated to the Task Force is being used to address the cocaine problem.

Home Help Service Provision

223. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan who has been awarded extra home help hours is still awaiting the implementation of the additional home help [32434/13]

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.

Nursing Home Services

224. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the cost of care for public nursing homes for 2011 for each of the nursing homes in the country; the average weekly cost per patient in each of these nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32440/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As these are service matters, the question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services Issues

225. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 225 of 8 May 2013, when the information requested will be supplied by the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32442/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have again asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Medical Card Applications

226. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1. [32449/13]

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 Strategies

227. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support national vision strategy for eye health in 2013. [32453/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The issues involved in eye health span a number of areas in the health sector with regard to access to treatment, patient safety and quality of care. There are a number of eye conditions which require specialist health services including cataract, refractive error, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and age related macular degeneration. There are detection and treatment services available at present in community and acute hospital settings for these conditions. In addition, there are a number of high level strategies which are relevant to the area of eye health, including Clinical Programmes; Public Health; Health Protection; Positive Ageing and Carers Strategies and Screening initiatives. A number of these strategies link with the HSE's Clinical Ophthalmology Programme. The health sector will continue to provide and deliver vision services and supports through these programmes and specifically through health prevention, screening and intervention policies and programmes. In this context, it is not proposed to develop a separate national vision strategy.

Hospital Services

228. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason there has been no orthoptist services available in Our Lady's Hospital Cashel, County Tipperary since December 2012; when will the previous orthoptist be replaced in Cashel; where are patients who have been on the priority list being treated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32454/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Maternity Benefit Issues

229. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the total amount paid out in maternity cash grants to medical card holders in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32455/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I have asked the Health Service Executive to supply this information to me and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Card Appeals

230. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if medical cards will be reinstated to persons (details supplied) in County Kerry in view of the the fact that they were awarded after notification of a successful appeal and withdrawn two months later without any review or formal notice of this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32457/13]

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.

Primary Care Centres Expenditure

231. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an assurance that the funds for a primary care centre at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 11 will be ring-fenced in the event that the planned development does not go ahead or is delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32459/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Deuty Alex White): Finglas has been identified as a high priority location for the development of a primary care centre (PCC). Approval for a HSE direct-build PCC was approved in 2012 in the context of the HSE's multi-annual Capital Plan. Following the review of a number of sites in the area, the HSE identified a Dublin City Council owned property on Mellowes Road, Finglas as the preferred site for the construction of the proposed new Finglas PCC. Subject to planning permission, the commercial terms for the sale were agreed with the officials of Dublin City Council and approved by the HSE. This site was selected because

- it is centrally located in the catchment area which it is intended to serve;
- it has very good accessibility and is well served by bus routes;
- it is a generous green-field site, has future expansion capacity and there would be no impact on current services during the construction period;
- it would complement the HSE Day Care Centre on Kildonan Road;
- it facilitates the establishment of GP services in this area; local GPs have expressed significant interest in discussion with the HSE, in being a part of this development in this specific location.

The HSE now advises that the North West Committee which is a local area committee of Dublin City Council has rejected the proposed sale of the Mellowes Road site to the HSE for use as a health care facility. A final decision is awaited from Dublin City Council. The HSE remains committed to the development of this primary care centre and has appointed a design team who have commenced a preliminary design. The design is now on-hold pending completion of the purchase. It was intended to submit the planning application once the site acquisition had been finalised.

An important feature of the HSE's construction programme is that it recognises the con-

struction dynamic - that construction projects can develop at different paces - and as a consequence it is multi-annual. Ring-fencing this project's estimated construction costs would cut across the multi-annual concept and be counter-productive, as funds ring-fenced but not spent in a given year must be surrendered to the Exchequer at year end. This project's progress and its estimated costs (as is the case for all other projects) are reviewed and revised as appropriate at each stage of development.

Hospital Waiting Lists

232. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a patient who is under the care of a consultant (details supplied) in County Donegal since November 2012 was informed that their surgery will not be carried out; the reason this is the case, and if he will reassure this patient that they will receive the necessary care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32460/13]

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 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 Waiting Lists

233. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a patient (details supplied) in County Donegal whose case has been regarded as a priority may expect to be called for elective hip surgery in view of the fact that the patient is in severe pain; the number of elective hip replacements carried out at this hospital last year and the expected number for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32461/13]

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 been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular queries raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to the Deputy in these matters.

Hospital Consultants Contract Issues

234. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will identify, by name, hospitals where management have implemented elements of the deal agreed between health service management and hospital consultants at the Labour Relations Commission in Autumn 2012; the nature of the elements of the agreement that have been put in place in each acute hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32466/13]

235. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will identify, by name, the hospitals where management has introduced the rostering of hospital consultants on any five out of seven days under the terms of the agreement reached at the Labour Relations Commission in September 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32467/13]

236. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will identify, by name, the hospitals where management has put in place roster arrangements to have consultants on duty on a 24 hour basis in specialties such as emergency medicine, neonatology, intensive care and obstetrics as provided in the agreement on work practice reforms brokered at the Labour Relations Commission in September 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32468/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 to 236, inclusive, together.

In September 2012, following intensive engagement between health service management and the consultant representative bodies at the Labour Relations Commission, a comprehensive set of measures was agreed. The agreement encompasses a range of flexibilities to enhance productivity and efficiency and to maximise the availability of consultants, as key clinical decision-makers. These arrangements are to be given effect as determined by service needs in any particular hospital and resource considerations. Management across the hospital service have been instructed by the HSE to implement the agreement with effect from November 2012.

I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy with detailed information in relation to progress at hospital level in implementing the various aspects of the agreement. The extent to which any hospital would utilise the range of flexibilities agreed would vary depending on the nature of services provided.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

237. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff in the Health Service Executive currently being paid a salary on the basis of the grade of national director; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32469/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is an operational matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services Staff Issues

238. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff in the Health Service Executive actually serving as a national director and the number of staff who continue to be paid as a national director on a personal-to-holder ring-fenced basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32470/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is an operational matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

239. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1341 of 16 April 2013, if a date for a heart operation will be set in respect of a

person (details supplied) in County Waterford. [32483/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I understand that the HSE responded to the Deputy on 15th April last, in relation to this matter indicating that the patient had been issued with an Outpatient appointment to be seen by the CardioThoracic service but was not on the waiting list for surgery. In general should the patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. However in relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy regarding a heart operation, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Marine Safety

240. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his Department's strategy on saving lives in man overboard situations; if his Department will consider making it compulsory to wear personal alert systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32421/13]

241. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if in view of the recent tragedies in the fishing industries, he is considering making it compulsory for an alert system to be worn if a fisherman goes overboard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32422/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 240 and 241 together.

Ireland's maritime safety agenda is constantly being developed in line with developments across the maritime sector, including internationally recognised safety conventions, safety standards, codes of practice, and the promotion of a culture of safety among those who go to sea for leisure or to earn their living.

I am at present considering the need for a new national maritime safety strategy and how such a strategy could be progressed in an integrated way for the sector. I expect to complete this consideration shortly. The focus of this strategy will be on the development of a culture of safety amongst seafarers and the crucial role of regulation and enforcement.

All fishing vessels, regardless of size, are required to carry a satellite emergency position-indicating radio beacon, EPIRB, appropriate to their size and the sea area in which they operate. The Marine Casualty Investigation Board has recommended that all fishing vessels carry automatically activated float free EPIRBs and the issue of personal locator beacons, PLBs, has been recommended for examination.

My Department has been working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Bord Iascaigh Mhara on the legislative and financial supports for a series of maritime safety measures focused on the fishing community, including the mandatory use of automatically activated float free EPIRBs and PLBs. Later this month I, along with my colleague Minister Coveney, will launch a joint initiative targeting increased safety in the fishing industry, concentrating on an integrated package of measures including mandatory training and grant aid for mandatory safety equipment. PLBs, used in conjunction with a Lifejacket, should enhance search and rescue efforts, including Man Over Board incidents. These measures are designed to enhance safety for fishermen and in parallel to promote a culture of safety within the industry.

Public Transport Initiatives

242. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will outline the service provided by the new Real Time Ireland application by the National Transport Authority, integrating all real time arrival information services from Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, DART, Irish Rail and Luas; if the application development was publicly procured; the total cost of the application to date and if he will clarify any outstanding payments; if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the number of downloads that have occurred to date of the application available for download on both the Apple App Store and the Google Play Android marketplace for smartphones and tablet devices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32407/13]

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 provision of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), such as Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) comes under the remit of the NTA. In addition one of the Authority's principal functions is to promote the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

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

Driving Licence Issues

243. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the measure contained with the Road Traffic (No. 2) Bill 2013 regarding the graduated driver licence system and the two-year period after a person passes their driving test in the novice category to have N plates is excessive; his views on whether a shorter timeframe such as six months or 12 months would be more appropriate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32431/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The novice driver category is one of nine measures developed by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) as part of a Graduated Driver Licensing System (GDLS) for Ireland. The RSA developed these measures following extensive study and public consultation. There is a great deal of international research and evidence to show that novice drivers are, as a group, at risk due to lack of experience, sometimes compounded by a mistaken sense that once qualified they may have little more to learn. The idea of placing restrictions on novice drivers is therefore well grounded in evidence.

The choice of a two-year period for the novice category is also based on international experience. It coincides with the preferred novice period in a number of other jurisdictions. In some other cases the novice period is as much as five years. One point of the novice period is to underline and impress on recently qualified drivers that the learning process does not end with the passing of the test, and that there are important improvements which develop only with experience. This takes time, and I am satisfied that a two-year period is an appropriate span for the category.

I plan to introduce the Road Traffic (No. 2) Bill, which provides for the two-year period for novice drivers, in the Oireachtas as soon as possible and there will be an opportunity to discuss the matter then.

Roads Maintenance Issues

244. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will clarify the basis on which Kildare County Council carried out improvements, upgrading and maintenance on a regular basis on the road serving the properties of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare while now maintaining that the road in question is not taken in charge and citing a requirement under the 2009 Act to the effect that the residents involved are required to obtain a court order to continue to enjoy the rights and entitlements they have enjoyed since the 1970s; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32464/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): It is my understanding that the road referred to is a private road and is therefore not a matter for my Department. Furthermore I understand the Act referred to by the Deputy maybe the Land and Conveyance Act 2009, this being the case my Department has no function in the matter

National Transport Authority

245. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding that the National Transport Authority, NTA, has made available for the provision of a footpath and improved alignment at a location (details supplied) in County Wicklow; the amount of the allocated funding that has been drawn down by the local authority to date or has been spent by the NTA to date; when he expects the project works to commence and when they are to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32533/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the provision of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and the regional cities. Wicklow comes under the remit of the NTA as the county is part of the Greater Dublin Area.

The NTA provides funding to local authorities for a range of schemes to benefit pedestrians, including footpath and junctions improvements, under the Sustainable Transport Management Grants programme.

I have forwarded your request to the NTA and I have asked it to forward the information to you directly.

Bus Éireann Services

246. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will reverse the changes being made to the 6.15 a.m. express Bus Éireann service from Mullingar (details supplied); if he will consult with Bus Éireann and ask for this decision to be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32577/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling and timetabling of buses is an operational matter for Bus Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and not one in which my Department has any role. I have forwarded your question to the company for direct reply and to the NTA for information. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.