

Written Answers.

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

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

Departmental Estimates

11. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if he anticipates bringing forward a supplementary estimate for his Department and the Health Service Executive in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39989/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): It is too early to say whether a supplementary budget will be required in 2013.

Significant savings have been required of the health services since the downturn in the economy. The budget provision for health has reduced by some €1.5bn on the 2008 provision and, taking into account the need to provide for increases in demand, the underlying reduction in health spend is over €3bn since 2008. At the half year position, the budget overrun in the HSE was just 1% of budget.

The health budget has been reduced by 20% in real terms. The number of staff within the health service has reduced by 10%. The population has increased by 8%. Despite this we are still managing to reform and improve the service.

There are a number of measures in place to mitigate deficits including the targeting of significant savings on the cost of drugs and medicines; regulations to reduce fees to doctors and pharmacists; savings under the Haddington Road Agreement, and a focus by HSE senior management on key hospitals where significant deficits are emerging. Detailed regular reporting, including comprehensive cash monitoring, is on-going. Work is also underway in the HSE to reform the financial management systems.

Mental Health Services Funding

12. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Health if he will reverse the decision to close the 22-bed mental health unit at St. Brigid's, Ballinasloe, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40034/13]

22. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if he will undertake an independent review of the acute mental health services in counties Roscommon and Galway; the implications of any reconfiguration on the operation of emergency departments/urgent care centres in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39923/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 12 and 22 together.

Galway and Roscommon Mental Health Services, which operates as one administrative unit, has been resourced to implement *A Vision for Change*, to modernise the service and give better outcomes for both patients and staff. Existing resources therefore need to be reshaped, and the priority now is to achieve this in this instance, in line with similar initiatives elsewhere.

At present, there are 35 acute psychiatric beds in Galway city, and 22 acute psychiatric beds in both Ballinasloe and Roscommon. This gives a total of 79 beds, serving a population of around 315,000. *A Vision for Change* recommends 50 beds for a catchment population of 300,000. It is clear therefore, in line with policy and operational norms nationally, that the provision of 22 beds in both Ballinasloe and Roscommon means that the current overall stock of 79 in HSE West is too high in relative terms, allied to a corresponding under-development of community based mental health services.

To address this situation, a purpose built 50 bed acute mental health unit will be completed in Galway University Hospital in 2015, to replace the existing smaller unit. This Unit will consist of 35 general adult mental health beds, with the remaining 15 beds relating to psychiatry of later life, eating disorders, and mental health and intellectual disability. The acute unit in Roscommon will continue to provide 22 general adult mental health beds.

The re-organisation of services by HSE West will provide a total of 57 general adult mental health beds. This will be a sufficient number of acute psychiatric beds, in line with *A Vision for Change*, while allowing the Executive to enhance much needed community based services through re-deployment of some staff from acute services. It is intended that staff from St. Brigid's, Ballinasloe will be redeployed on a phased basis, to both community mental health teams locally and to the acute units in Galway and Roscommon. I wish to stress that this initiative will not give rise to any job losses, and there will be no negative impact for the existing patients in Ballinasloe.

I am satisfied that the approach adopted by the HSE in this matter is in line with the requirements to deliver *A Vision for Change* in the Galway/Roscommon area, and is fully consistent with similar initiatives taken elsewhere in the country to modernise our mental health services. This includes taking account of all related services and skill mix availability in the region, as well as other relevant criteria such as geographic and transport considerations, to realise the best options available within available resources.

I and HSE management recently met with local and union representatives and listened to the concerns of all involved. As agreed at that meeting, the HSE will continue to engage with all parties around service re-organisation in the Galway/Roscommon area. I am satisfied that this is the most appropriate approach to ensure the continued implementation of *A Vision for Change* in that region.

HSE Staff Remuneration

13. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of executives in the Health Service Executive on salaries of over €100,000 as of September 2013 and the comparable figure for January 2012; the salaries and other payments received in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40032/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The health service is the most complex sector of the Irish public service and employs approximately one-third of all public service staff. Despite the substantial reductions in financial and staff resources which have been necessary

in recent years, the health budget accounts for approximately €13 billion annually. In addition, the health service is the subject of an ongoing major programme of reform in line with the Programme for Government. It is essential therefore that the health service is led by senior managers with the requisite skills and expertise to ensure safe and effective provision of services to the public during a period of major change. The number of executives in the HSE earning over €100,000 represents a very small proportion of overall staff numbers and the posts occupied by these staff are necessary for the safe and effective functioning of the the service.

In 2012, 121 HSE executives earned in excess of €100,000 and between them, total remuneration, including allowances and arrears, amounted to €14.6m. A high-level analysis of annualised payroll data from May 2013 indicates that at that time the number of executives on annual remuneration in excess of €100,000 was 129. In the short time available, it has not been possible to provide the detailed information requested by the Deputy; however the HSE has been asked to provide this information directly to him.

Cochlear Implants

14. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the Health Service Executive's plans to provide cochlear implants to children who need them. [39986/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Beaumont Hospital is the centre for delivering Ireland's national cochlear implant programme, with surgical provision for patients under six (6) years being carried out in the Children's University Hospital Temple Street.

Since the programme commenced seventeen years ago (in 1995), over 700 patients have received cochlear implants. Beaumont Hospital carried out ninety cochlear implants in 2012 (42 children and 48 adults).

The HSE has developed a proposal, in liaison with Beaumont Hospital, to introduce a bilateral cochlear implant programme in Ireland. It is planned that the programme will be located in Beaumont Hospital. This is a complex development and the HSE has engaged with many stakeholders in the proposal development.

The programme will involve additional staff, equipment and capital works and will be dependent on additional funding being made available to support its commencement. The proposal is being considered as part of the 2014 estimates process.

Hospital Waiting Lists

15. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reasons for the substantial increase in inpatient and day case waiting lists since the start of 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40016/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Improving access for patients to inpatient and daycase treatment is a priority for this Government and significant progress was made in 2012 towards maximum waiting time targets. However, 2013 has been very challenging. While waiting list numbers tend to increase in the first few months of any year, the increase in 2013 was much greater than expected, associated with the unusual wintry conditions and increase in emergency admissions.

Hence, the SDU/HSE have put in place a National Intervention Strategy aimed at meeting

this year's maximum waiting time targets (eight months for adults awaiting an inpatient or day-case procedure, 20 weeks for children, 13 weeks for anyone awaiting a routine GI endoscopy and 12 months for a first-time outpatient appointment). They have advised that all hospitals have now developed and commenced necessary action plans to achieve the national targets for maximum waiting times this year. It is welcome that the latest available figures show a 2% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or daycase procedure in August compared with July and a 6% reduction in the number of patients waiting longer than 12 months.

Mental Health Services Provision

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the progress made to date in developing a national mental health information system as provided for in the Health Service Executive's national service plans for 2012 and 2013 [39930/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The National Director of Mental Health Services in the HSE has prioritised the National Mental Health Information System Project to identify the national business requirements for a Mental Health ICT System. This is to deliver a clinical information and service delivery management system, encompassing an electronic service user mental health record. An allocation of €405,275 from the additional €35 million provided for mental health in 2013 was identified for this purpose.

Significant work has been undertaken recently to consult with a range of health professionals and clinicians, together with service user representatives, across mental health services to clarify the requirements for such a system. It is expected that this consultation will be concluded within the next 6-8 weeks.

A Project Structure for the National Mental Health ICT Project has been agreed and work is in train to establish each of the elements as soon as possible. A Steering Group has been identified to progress the Project and will be advised by a Stakeholder Group, to be chaired initially by the National Director of Mental Health Services. The components of the Project will be managed by a full-time Project Manager who will work with a Project Team, and arrangements for the identification and release of the Project Team are progressing.

The HSE expects to make a decision by the end of the year on the feasibility of extending and developing existing systems or whether there will be a need to tender for a new system. Thereafter, full national implementation of a mental health Information Systems is a three to five-year process.

National Substance Misuse Strategy

17. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the implementation of the recommendations of the steering group report on the national substance misuse strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40064/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Proposals are currently being finalised on foot of the recommendations in the Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy 2012. These proposals cover all of the areas mentioned in the report, including legislation on minimum unit pricing; controls on alcohol advertising and sponsorship; labelling of alcohol products; measures on access and availability of alcohol and a social responsibility levy on the drinks industry.

The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy has considered these proposals and it is intended to bring forward a finalised package of proposals for consideration by Government shortly.

In the meantime, work on developing a framework for the necessary Department of Health legislation is continuing. A health impact assessment has been commissioned in conjunction with Northern Ireland as part of the process of developing a legislative basis for minimum unit pricing. The health impact assessment will study the impact of different minimum prices on a range of areas such as health, crime and likely economic impact.

Chronic Disease Management Programme

18. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to help persons with asthma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40009/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The National Clinical Programme for Asthma, which commenced in 2011, is one of a number of chronic disease programmes established in the HSE's Clinical Care Directorate aimed at bringing a systematic approach to changes in how services for patients are delivered. Current estimates suggest that there are approximately 450,000 people with doctor-diagnosed asthma in Ireland.

The initial focus of the work of the Programme has been primarily on three main areas:

1. The development and implementation of national asthma guidelines based on international best practice for acute and ongoing asthma management and in relation to this, national asthma education initiatives for patients and health care professionals;
2. The organisation and better integration of national asthma services at primary and secondary care levels through development of a national model of care; and
3. A national project of auditing acute asthma deaths.

Work in relation to Asthma Guidelines has included:

Acute adult asthma guidelines and associated care pathways, treatment protocols and care bundles have been developed for use in all care settings (primary and secondary care levels), in conjunction with other relevant programmes and the Irish College of General Practice (ICGP). These include:

An in-hospital practical asthma education programme for nurses to underpin and support the implementation of the acute adult guidelines; and

General management asthma guidelines for use in all health care settings especially in primary care.

The Acute Adult Emergency Guidelines are available through the HSE website. This user friendly resource will facilitate all health care staff in optimising the management of adult patients attending services with an acute asthmatic episode.

Guidelines for acute paediatric asthma have also been completed and should be available soon on the HSE website. An associated educational programme is being developed at present.

The National Asthma Programme is developing a National Model of Care (MOC) for Asthma with an implementation plan which will detail how physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals will work with engaged patients to make the clinical decisions most appropriate

to their circumstances; and to collaborate with specialist colleagues in providing a safe, seamless patient experience within the health system in Ireland. This is a key deliverable of the National Asthma Programme for 2013. As 85 per cent of asthma is managed in primary care without the need for hospital specialist services, the Programme is aiming to provide at primary care level a yearly programme of assessment for asthma called Chronic Disease Watch (CDW) – Asthma, also known as Asthma Check. Asthma Check, which has been submitted to the ICGP for review, outlines the step-by-step process for the implementation of guideline based asthma management in primary care to deliver optimal outcomes for patients.

The Model of Care will also focus on:

Improving access to hospital based specialist asthma services from primary and secondary care services, through Scheduled/Rapid access asthma services (adult/paediatric), and access to specialist asthma therapies.

Improving links through Clinical/Asthma Nurse Specialists within the community services.

Developing and implementing a standard referral pathway to asthma services.

Developing structured assessment and review protocols throughout the system.

Establishing uniform discharge protocols.

Facilitating access to accurate asthma diagnostics.

Examining solutions to develop and subsequently implement an Asthma database/register linked into all care levels (GP, Community Pharmacist and Hospital).

The draft model of care has been circulated for stakeholder consultation. The National Asthma Programme is aiming to have the Model of Care published by the end of this year.

Implementation of the National Clinical Programme for Asthma, which was included in the HSE's 2013 Operational Plan is ongoing and will continue in 2014.

Primary Care Strategy

19. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if persons with a long-term mental health condition will be considered for inclusion in the first phase of the roll-out of free primary care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39931/13]

27. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Health the engagement the Department has had with general practitioners regarding the proposed introduction of free GP care for under fives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40002/13]

275. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of free general practitioner health care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40310/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19, 27 and 275 together.

The Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, a universal GP service without fees within its term of office, as set out in the Programme for Government and the Future Health strategy framework. It is a matter for Government to determine policy in this area. There has been no Government decision, at this stage on the details of the roll-out of a universal GP service, such as a proposal for a specific age cohort. When the Government has

taken a policy decision in this area, I will engage with all relevant stake-holders, as appropriate, in relation to implementation and administrative arrangements.

The introduction of a universal GP service constitutes a fundamental element in the Government's health reform programme. The current Government is the first in the history of the State to have committed itself to implementing a universal GP service for the entire population. A well functioning health system should provide equal access to health care for its patients on the basis of health needs, rather than ability to pay. The principles of universality and equity of access mean that all residents in Ireland should be entitled to access a GP services that is free at the point of use.

It has become clear that the legal and administrative framework required to provide a robust basis for eligibility for a GP service based on having a particular medical condition, as outlined initially in the Programme for Government, is likely to be overly complex and bureaucratic. Relatively complex primary legislation would be required in order to provide a GP service to a person on the basis of their having a particular illness. While it would not be impossible to achieve this, it would take several months more to finalise the primary legislation, followed then by the preparation of statutory instruments. In my view, this would entail putting in place a cumbersome legal and administrative infrastructure to deal with what is only a temporary first phase on the way to universal GP service to the entire population.

However, the Government is firmly committed to introducing a universal GP service within this term of office. The Cabinet Committee on Health has discussed the issues relating to the roll-out of the universal GP service. In doing so, it has considered the delay in the initial step and the importance of weighing the balance between, on the one hand, resolving the legal issues but with a further delay and, on the other hand, with the need to bring forward an important Programme for Government commitment with the minimum of further delay.

It has been agreed that a number of alternative options should be set out with regard to the phased implementation of a universal GP service without fees. As part of this work, consideration is being given to the approaches, timing and financial implications of the phased implementation of this universal health service. A range of options are under consideration with a view to bringing developed proposals to Government shortly.

Medicinal Products Prices

20. Deputy Billy Timmins asked the Minister for Health the reason for the price differential between medication sold in Northern Ireland and here; the way he plans to close this gap; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39929/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The prices of drugs vary between countries for a number of reasons, including different prices set by manufacturers, different wholesale and pharmacy mark-ups, different dispensing fees and different rates of VAT.

The State has introduced a series of reforms in recent years to reduce pharmaceutical prices and expenditure. These have resulted in reductions in the prices of thousands of medicines. Price reductions of the order of 30% per item reimbursed have been achieved between 2009 and 2013; the average cost per items reimbursed is now running at 2001/2002 levels.

A major new deal on the cost of drugs in the State was concluded with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) in October last. It will deliver a number of important benefits, including

significant reductions for patients in the cost of drugs,

a lowering of the drugs bill to the State,
timely access for patients to new cutting-edge drugs for certain conditions, and
reducing the cost base of the health system into the future.

The IPHA agreement provides that prices are referenced to the currency adjusted average price to wholesaler in the nine EU member states. The prices of a range of medicines were reduced on 1 January 2013 in accordance with the agreement.

The gross savings arising from this deal will be in excess of €400m over 3 years. €210 million from the gross savings will be available to fund new drugs.

A new agreement has also been reached with the Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers in Ireland (APMI), which represents the generic drugs industry. From 1 November 2012, the HSE will only reimburse generic products which are priced at 50% or less of the initial price of an originator medicine. This represents a significant structural change in generic drug pricing and should lead to an increase in the generic prescribing rate. It is estimated that the combined gross savings from the IPHA and APMI deals will be in excess of €120 million in 2013.

The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, which came into operation on the 24th of June, introduces a system of generic substitution and reference pricing. This legislation will promote price competition among suppliers and ensure that lower prices are paid for these medicines resulting in further savings for both taxpayers and patients.

Under the Act, the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) is responsible for the assessment for interchangeability of medicines. Generic substitution will be introduced incrementally with the IMB prioritising those medicines which will achieve the greatest savings for patients and the State. The Board is in the process of reviewing an initial 20 active substances, which equates to approximately 1,500 individual medicines. They include statins, proton pump inhibitors, angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors and angiotensin II receptor blockers.

The first List of Interchangeable Medicines, containing groups of atorvastatin products, was published by the IMB on the 7th August. The second and third lists containing groups of esomeprazole and rosuvastatin products were published on 20th and 24th September respectively. Once the IMB has assessed the initial 20 priority products, then a further list of priority products will be identified and assessed by the IMB and the process will continue until all medicinal products on the reimbursable list have been assessed.

Once a List of Interchangeable Medicines is published by the IMB a two stage price reduction process gets under way. First, under the terms of the 2012 APMI Agreement, the price of all relevant products fall by 20%, e.g. Atorvastatin prices were reduced from 1st September. Secondly, the legislation also provides that the HSE may set a reference price for each group of interchangeable products published on the List of Interchangeable Products with a view to introducing further significant price cuts.

Reference pricing involves the setting of a common reimbursement price, or reference price, for a group of interchangeable medicines. It means that one reference price is set for each group or list of interchangeable medicines, and this is the price that the HSE will reimburse to pharmacies for all medicines in the group, regardless of the individual medicine's prices. It is expected that the first reference price for atorvastatin products will be implemented by November and, subsequently, reference prices for esomeprazole and rosuvastatin products will be implemented by the HSE in accordance with the timelines set out in the legislation. Reference prices will ensure that generic prices in Ireland will fall towards European norms.

Hospitals Discharges

21. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address delayed discharges from acute hospitals in the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39924/13]

53. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the estimated number of older persons and others requiring long-term residential care who are hospital in patients ready for discharge but awaiting residential places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40035/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 21 and 53 together.

The operational definition of a delayed discharge is “A patient who remains in hospital after a senior doctor (consultant or registrar grade) has documented in the medical chart that the patient can be discharged.” The number of delayed discharges nationally, as at 17th September 2013, is 653. Of these, 529 are reported as awaiting discharge to long term nursing care; the discharge of the others may be delayed for a number of reasons, including identification of suitable placements to address complex individual care needs or convalescent care requirements, community assessment of needs, or provision of specific aids by the community to facilitate discharge to home.

Whilst it is acknowledged that not all patients affected by delayed discharge are older persons, it is accepted that the majority of such patients are from this cohort. Although nationally ED attendances are down by over 5%, presentations by older persons (65+ yrs) are increasing. Up to mid-September 2013, the number of older persons admitted to hospital has increased by 17% over the equivalent period in 2012 and a significant number of these patients have comorbid conditions and complex needs.

The HSE has put in place a number of initiatives to address this including increased allocations of Fair Deal approvals, the temporary prioritisation of Fair Deal referrals for patients in acute hospitals, the temporary prioritisation of referrals to long stay facilities from acute hospitals for older persons with complex needs and the improved targeting of appropriate homecare packages for older persons.

Question No. 22 answered with Question No. 12.

Hospitals Inspections

23. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent Health Information and Quality Authority hospital hygiene reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39998/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The prevention and control of Health care Associated Infections (HCAIs) is one of my priorities in protecting patient safety. HCAIs represent a major cause of preventable patient harm and increased health care costs.

Established as an independent statutory body under the Health Act 2007, the Health Information and Quality Authority’s (HIQA) mandate extends across the quality and safety of the public, private and voluntary sectors. Since late 2012 the Health and Information Quality Authority (HIQA) has been carrying out a monitoring programme against the National Standards for the Prevention and Control of Health care Associated Infections (HCAIs), 41 of which have

been completed. Both I and my Department welcome the publication of HIQA's reports and note the concerns raised in these, and indeed, previous reports about hand hygiene practices particularly among medical staff. With regard to hand hygiene the findings of the Authority suggest that hand hygiene best practice needs to become more operationally embedded at all levels.

Achieving a culture of patient safety in which best practice in hand hygiene is embedded requires actions at all levels. It is the responsibility of management and clinical leadership to make this a priority and ensure that the correct conditions to allow for the improvements in hand hygiene compliance are in place.

It must be emphasised that it is of vital importance that health care workers recognise their personal responsibility to protect patients by maintaining their own good hand hygiene. It is extremely disappointing to note that despite the Health Service Executive's (HSE) initiatives to develop an organisational culture of hand hygiene, a significant number of health care staff, including doctors, are still not adhering to the basic principles of hand washing.

I very much support the HSE's ongoing work through its national programme of activity to raise awareness amongst staff, monitor compliance with national standards and to take action to reduce HCAs in hospitals. A key element of this programme is the HSE's continuing bi-annual hand hygiene audits which occur in both the acute sector and in the long stay area as well. Additionally, from July of this year it has become mandatory for all staff to receive hand hygiene training as part of staff induction and an education programme every two years is being put in place. The HSE audits have shown an encouraging improvement in hand hygiene compliance with a most recent figure of 84.3% compliance overall (October 2012).

The Director General of the HSE has instructed that all hospitals act immediately on the following:

Ensure that a member of the senior management team is responsible for hygiene. This person must give a report to the facility management team on the facilities performance against the 2006 cleaning manual with a remediation plan and on the facilities performance multimodal hand hygiene plan by the end of 2013.

Ensure that there is a hygiene programme in place by the end of 2013 which clearly demonstrates the hospital's commitment to hygiene, specifically focusing on patient care equipment, the patient environment and hand hygiene. The programme should be based on the WHO multimodal framework.

Ensure that 100% staff have received hand hygiene education and training by June 2014.

Hospitals are to provide monthly reports on progress to the National Director for Acute Services. The HSE is also working with the main medical professional bodies to address the issue of doctor attitudes and behaviour around hand hygiene.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of the Department of Health has written to the Chair of the Health and Social Regulatory Forum asking that the Forum consider the matter and submit proposals as to how it might adopt a common approach to raise awareness of hand hygiene in particular and support and reinforce compliance with this very important patient safety issue. It has also been agreed that the CMO will meet with the Director General of the HSE to discuss the issue of governance in the control and prevention of HCAs.

Services for People with Disabilities

24. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied recent events at

Stewarts, Dublin 20 and St. Michael's House, Ballymun do not undermine the commitment in the programme for Government to ensure the quality of life of persons with disabilities is enhanced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40011/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): This Government currently provides funding of over €1.5 billion to the Disability Services Programme through the HSE's National Service Plan for 2013, and is committed to protecting frontline services for people with disabilities to the greatest possible extent.

In 2013 the HSE is seeking to maximise the provision of services within available resources and is committed to maintaining a consistent level to that provided in 2012, by providing the following specialist disability services:

residential services to over 9,000 people with a disability;

day services to over 22,000 people with intellectual and physical disabilities;

respite residential support for over 7,500 people with intellectual and physical disabilities;

1.68m hours of Personal Assistant / Home Support Hours.

With regards to Stewart's Hospital the HSE has confirmed that Stewarts Care have agreed placements with all families that fully meet the needs of the young people who are completing their education this year at Stewarts Care. This has come about as a result of reconfiguration of services and on-going dialogue between the HSE and Stewarts Care. I understand that families have confirmed their satisfaction with the services offered.

In relation to St Michael's House, under the Health Act 2004, the HSE is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services, including disability services. The HSE either directly provides or contracts disability agencies such as St Michael's House to provide a range of disability services through service level arrangements.

St Michael's House received over €70 million in 2012 in funding from the HSE to provide a range of services to approximately 1,660 children and adults with an intellectual disability in over 170 centres in the Greater Dublin Area and Navan Co. Meath.

The HSE and St Michael's House work in close collaboration with regard to the funding and delivery of services to people with an intellectual disability. As a voluntary agency, St Michael's house are obliged to work within the resources available to them and in that regard have introduced significant efficiencies over recent years to remain within budget. The HSE has advised that these changes to date have not resulted in service contraction.

The Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) sets out measures relating to productivity, cost extraction and reform which together intends to achieve a required pay bill reduction of €150m identified in the HSE Service Plan 2013. The agreement provides a framework and opportunities for managers within the health services, including agencies such as St Michael's House, to reduce their costs associated with agency and overtime and a wide range of other pay costs, particularly through measures such as additional working hours and revised rates in respect of overtime.

The HSE has advised the Department of Health that the recent application of additional budget cuts under the HRA has presented a significant challenge to St Michael's House. A process is now under way between the HSE and St Michael's House to identify the impact of these budget reductions on services. The Department of Health has received assurances from the HSE that both organisations are committed to working within the terms of the HRA to ensure

that services are impacted upon only as a measure of last resort.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Application Numbers

25. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the numbers awaiting placement through the nursing homes support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40006/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The total budget for long-term residential care in 2013 is €974m. The HSE operates a national placement list to enable it to operate within the budget for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. All applicants who are approved for funding are put on the placement list in chronological order by the date of determination of their application. Funding issues to applicants in this chronological order to ensure equity nationally. The HSE makes every effort to match available funding to demand by releasing funding on a weekly basis.

On 20th September there were 330 people on the national placement list. All applicants with a date of determination up to and including the 5th September had been approved for funding.

Rare Diseases Strategy Publication

26. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health when the national action plan on rare diseases will be published; if a Health Service Executive clinical director will be appointed to co-ordinate implementation of the plan; if a State registry and rare disease information office will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40031/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Work on the drafting of a National Plan is well under way with publication of it earmarked for the end of the year.

As the particular queries raised by the Deputy are service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 27 answered with Question No. 19.

Cochlear Implants

28. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure, without further delay, the provision of bilateral cochlear implants for all deaf children who require them. [40030/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Beaumont Hospital is the centre for delivering Ireland's national cochlear implant programme, with surgical provision for patients under six years being carried out in the Children's University Hospital Temple Street. Since the programme commenced in 1995, over 700 patients have received cochlear implants. Beaumont Hospital carried out ninety cochlear implants in 2012 (42 children and 48 adults).

The HSE has developed a proposal, in liaison with Beaumont Hospital, to introduce a bilateral cochlear implant programme in Ireland. It is planned that the programme will be located in Beaumont Hospital. This is a complex development and the HSE has engaged with many stakeholders in the proposal development. Introduction of bilateral cochlear implantation will involve additional staff, equipment and capital works and will be dependent on additional funding being made available to support its commencement. The proposal is being considered as part of the 2014 Estimates process.

Home Help Service Provision

29. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when the home help hours cut in 2012 will be restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40046/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I have already indicated on a number of occasions that Home Help provision in 2013 has been restored to levels planned for in 2012.

Medicinal Products Prices

30. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the full roll-out of reference pricing and generic substitution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40048/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, which came into operation on the 24th of June, introduces a system of generic substitution and reference pricing. This legislation will promote price competition among suppliers and ensure that lower prices are paid for these medicines resulting in further savings for both taxpayers and patients.

Under the Act, the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) is responsible for the assessment for interchangeability of medicines. Generic substitution will be introduced incrementally with the IMB prioritising those medicines which will achieve the greatest savings for patients and the State. The Board is in the process of reviewing an initial 20 active substances, which equates to approximately 1,500 individual medicines. They include statins, proton pump inhibitors, angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors and angiotensin II receptor blockers.

The first List of Interchangeable Medicines, containing groups of atorvastatin products, was published by the IMB on the 7th August. The second and third lists containing groups of esomeprazole and rosuvastatin products were published on 20th and 24th September respectively. It is expected that the initial list of 20 priority products will have been assessed by the IMB by June 2014. At this point a further list of priority products will be identified and assessed by the IMB and the process will continue until all medicinal products on the reimbursable list have been assessed.

Once a List of Interchangeable Medicines is published by the IMB a two stage price reduction process gets underway. First, under the terms of the 2012 APMI Agreement, the price of all relevant products fall by 20%, e.g. Atorvastatin prices were reduced from 1st September. Secondly, the legislation also provides that the HSE may set a reference price for each group of interchangeable products published on the List of Interchangeable Products with a view to introducing further significant price cuts.

Reference pricing involves the setting of a common reimbursement price, or reference price, for a group of interchangeable medicines. It means that one reference price is set for each group or list of interchangeable medicines, and this is the price that the HSE will reimburse to pharmacies for all medicines in the group, regardless of the individual medicine's prices. It is expected that the first reference price for atorvastatin products will be implemented by November and, subsequently, reference prices for esomeprazole and rosuvastatin products will be implemented by the HSE in accordance with the timelines set out in the legislation. Reference prices will ensure that generic prices in Ireland will fall towards European norms.

Home Help Service Eligibility

31. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if it is the case that he

intends to introduce means testing for home care and other services for older persons and persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40042/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): No decisions of this nature have been taken.

In line with what we committed to in the Programme for Government, we have commenced a review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. This review will consider the scheme's administration and structures, and also its sustainability in the longer term.

The review will consider the balance of funding between long-term residential care and community based services and the options that may exist for the future financing of community based services and of disability and mental health services. Work will continue on the review in the coming months with a view to completion by end 2013-early 2014. Primary legislation is likely to be needed to implement any changes resulting from this review.

The Value for Money and Policy review of disability services echoes *Future Health - a Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012-2015* in recommending the need to restructure service delivery, and improve organisational, financial, governance and accountability systems with the aim of providing a more effective and more accountable service. One of the recommendations of the VFM Review is to move towards a model of individualised budgeting, whereby individuals and their families will be given more choice and control over the service and supports they require. Any such model will have to be carefully considered and under-pinned by a resource allocation provision which will take account of peoples' needs and circumstances against a defined resource cap.

Hospital Services

32. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to address the waiting lists for rehabilitation services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40053/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I understand that the Deputy is referring to services at the National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH) in Dun Laoghaire.

The NRH is working in partnership with the Health Service Executive (HSE) to deliver complex rehabilitation services in line with the National Policy and Strategy for the Provision of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland 2011-2015. Services are developed on a regional basis in addition to the complex rehabilitation services currently being provided by the NRH. In this regard, the NRH and the HSE are working together to develop inpatient rehabilitation services and capacity in each region.

In addition, as part of the National Clinical Programme, the NRH is currently developing care bundles and clearly defined pathways for patients requiring inpatient services.

In May 2012, my colleagues the Tánaiste and the Minister for Health confirmed a significant capital development on the campus of the existing hospital. This development is a partnership between the HSE and the NRH Foundation and will see the existing facility at the NRH replaced by a new 120 bed ensuite facility including integrated therapy service and will represent an increase of 9% in bed capacity.

This facility will be purpose built specifically to accommodate the needs of those requiring complex specialist rehabilitation services complying with best international practice and the Strategy for the Control of Antimicrobial Resistance in Ireland (SARI).

Domestic Violence Refuges

33. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the way the Health Service Executive proposes to deal with the current crisis in the provision of domestic violence services which has recently resulted in the downgrading of services at Wexford women's refuge; his plans to increase the HSE's funding for the provision of such services in view of the fact that Ireland currently only provides one third of the EU-recommended refuge places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40059/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Wexford Women's Refuge is a Limited Company run by a voluntary Board of Management. While the HSE commission the service of the Wexford women's refuge through a service level agreement, it is the voluntary Board of Management who are legally responsible for any decisions that are made in relation to how the service is delivered.

The reduction in service provision in Wexford Women's Refuge was based on a decision taken by the Board of Management to reduce services for 13 weeks. The decision is based on ensuring the long term sustainability of the service while working within a realistic budget as the Refuge has had a reduction in HSE funding over the past 5 years similar to other organisations. The plan will enable the refuge to continue to provide outreach and drop in services to the end of December 2013. While there is a reduction in service provision it is important to note that there is no reduction in funding from the HSE to the service in 2013 other than 2.5% which is in line with other government cuts. It is within this context that the voluntary Board of Management has been working in partnership with the staff, Trade Unions and funding agencies to devise a plan that will ensure the long term sustainability and delivery of the service to women and children in Wexford. The voluntary Board of Management is committed to ensuring that there continues to be a Refuge in Wexford. They are working in partnership with the other relevant bodies to overcome the immediate challenges and are confident that a Refuge service will continue to be available in Wexford once the current difficulties are addressed. HSE Children and Families Services are committed to supporting the Board in their efforts to develop this plan in partnership with staff, management and the Local Authority.

The National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence was published in 2010. It aims to provide a framework for sustainable intervention to prevent and effectively respond to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and is lead by Cosc which is the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. In relation to Ireland providing only one third of EU recommended places I would like to refer the Deputy to a COSC publication '*Domestic and Sexual Violence Services in Ireland: Service Provision and Co-ordination*' which states "In 2007, the levels of domestic and sexual violence services in Ireland satisfied the criteria established by the Council of Europe" (Page 68, section 3.7).

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Oversight

34. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health if it is within his power by means of regulations, or if legislation is needed, to require private and voluntary nursing homes who are in the nursing home support scheme to provide a minimum number of places for higher dependency patients in order to avoid cherry-picking by these homes, resulting in higher dependency patients remaining at the back of the queue for places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40047/13]

42. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to

maintain and upgrade public nursing home facilities to meet the Health Information and Quality Authority standards, to invest sufficiently to do so and to ensure that the public nursing home sector is enhanced, in view of the growing need for, and overall shortage of, nursing home beds and the over-reliance on private nursing home provision, leading to cherry-picking by private providers with higher dependency applicants for nursing home places left at the back of the queue. [40033/13]

54. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to provide for increased public beds in community hospitals in order to prepare for the doubling of the over 65 population here over the next ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40062/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 34, 42 and 54 together.

Government policy is to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Where this is not feasible, the health service supports access to appropriate quality long-term residential care. Access to appropriate quality long-term residential care is underpinned by both the system of registration and inspection of nursing homes and the financial support available under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme.

The Department is working closely with the Health Service Executive to develop an overall plan regarding future public provision of long-stay residential care services. The plan will reflect both national and regional requirements and will have regard to the current severe financial constraints, restrictions on public sector staffing and recruitment and the on-going need to meet service and safety standards, all of which pose challenges for community nursing units across the country.

The review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme will also influence the future direction of residential care services. This review will consider the long-term sustainability of the Scheme as well as looking at the community based services. Work on the review is on-going and it is expected that the review will be completed in late 2013 or early 2014. A longer-term plan for public residential facilities is therefore expected to be completed by approximately mid-2014 following completion of the review of the Scheme.

The Health Act 2009 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2009 provide that each nursing home must have a Statement of Purpose. The Statement of Purpose must include details of the range of needs that the designated centre is intended to meet. It would be inappropriate for the Minister for Health to require all private and voluntary nursing homes to provide a minimum number of places for higher dependency patients because the nursing homes may not be able to adequately cater for needs of the residents.

Our aim is to ensure that people are being cared for at the point of lowest complexity. People should only be entering long-term nursing home when this becomes absolutely necessary. This means that only the most dependent people should be in long-term nursing home care. One of the key priorities identified in the HSE's *National Operational Plan 2013* is the progression of a single assessment tool for older people. This standardised framework will ensure that there is a robust, equitable standardised care needs assessment nationally. It will also allow resources to be targeted towards those with the greatest needs and enable supports and services to be designed in the most appropriate way possible.

Home Care Packages

35. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce paediatric care packages for children with life-limiting conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40017/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The issue of the provision of home care packages for children with life-limiting conditions is complex, encompassing those requiring short to medium-term care, those with a disability requiring long-term care and also sick children for whom there is no reasonable hope of a cure and who are expected to die.

Palliative Care for Children with Life-limiting Conditions in Ireland – a National Policy (2010) provides the foundation and clear direction for the development of an integrated palliative care service for children and their families, across all care settings.

Following its publication the National Development Committee for Children’s Palliative Care (NDC) was established by the HSE to oversee the implementation of the national policy. Membership includes statutory, professional, parent and voluntary representatives, including the IHF, Lauralynn and The Jack & Jill Foundation. The NDC has commenced working in partnership with these providers to develop a model for the provision of Hospice at Home care.

In 2012 HSE spent approximately €8.58m on home nursing for children with life-limiting conditions. It is widely acknowledged that this did not capture all relevant expenditure, which is significantly higher. It is also acknowledged that children with life-limiting conditions, particularly palliative care needs, are prioritised. Every effort is made to provide care to the maximum extent possible, including home care for them and their families.

The HSE is committed to proper governance, that care provided is clinically sound and that those providing care are adequately trained. A suitable national programme of continuing professional education has been established in partnership with the HSE, IHF and Crumlin Children’s Hospital. A working group has been established in HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster to restructure the financial system so that relevant expenditure is effectively accounted for. This will be replicated across all regions.

Eight children’s Outreach Nurses are in place in throughout the country to facilitate a co-ordinated support structure for children and families. They will identify the needs of each child and link families to appropriate local services.

The first Consultant Paediatrician with a Special Interest in Paediatric Palliative Medicine has been appointed to Crumlin Hospital and is available to provide an advisory service to other paediatric and maternity hospitals.

Obesity Strategy

36. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the initiatives he intends to undertake to deal with serious obesity levels here. [39922/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Comprehensive, multi-level approaches are required to address the obesity epidemic. For this reason the Minister for Health has established a Special Action Group on Obesity (SAGO) whom he meets with regularly to progress the obesity prevention agenda. SAGO is concentrating on a range of measures and initiatives to help reverse the growing prevalence of obesity in the Irish population.

Calorie posting has already commenced in a number of establishments and it is envisaged

that in the coming months, when the necessary implementation mechanism has been devised it will be further implemented. There is strong support for the calorie posting in restaurants initiative among the general public and also, in fact, within much of the food industry itself.

Healthy Eating Guidelines were launched in 2012 which will help inform people about the food and drink choices required for a healthy lifestyle and set out in plain and simple language the food servings the Irish population need to consume to maintain health and wellbeing.

A Health Impact Assessment on the health and economic aspects of introducing a Sugar Sweetened Drinks tax was completed and presented to the Minister for Health and SAGO has recently established a sub-committee to investigate and develop a range of options to support healthy eating.

The Department of Health has worked with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, with regard to the marketing of food and drink to children towards a new Children's Code up to 18 years, to restrict marketing of high fat, high salt and high sugar foods and drinks up to 7pm.

Treatment algorithms inform primary care staff of the steps to be taken with regard to managing obesity. Both 'adult' and 'child' algorithms have been agreed with health care professionals and are now available.

Research is underway in association with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to establish the use and types of foods and drinks stocked in vending machines in post primary schools. SAGO has met with The Food and Drink Industry Ireland (FDII).

A key feature of the development of *Healthy Ireland* was engagement and collaboration across Government Departments. Such collaboration will continue to be a significant feature of the implementation strategy, which is now focused on, among other things, the development of an outcomes framework and a National Physical Activity Plan.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 6.

Vaccination Programme

38. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the supports he has provided and will provide to persons who contracted narcolepsy as a result of being vaccinated by the flu vaccine Pandemrix; if he will provide a full medical card in each case, access to international medical expertise, access to new drug treatments where appropriate, the official recognition of narcolepsy as a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40037/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I would like to assure the Deputy that addressing the health needs of those affected by narcolepsy, with symptom onset post pandemic vaccination, continues to be a priority for my Department. This includes consideration of all possible supports which may need to be put in place for those diagnosed. I, along with officials of my Department continue to work closely with the Health Service Executive and the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that a range of supports and services are available to address the needs of this group.

The Health Service Executive has responsibility for health service delivery, and at my request, have developed a range of measures including access to rapid diagnosis, clear treatment pathways, and reimbursement of expenses incurred. This includes expenses for counselling services for individuals and also for families of children affected by narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination, in cases where such services are not already available through the HSE.

Medical Cards have been provided to all those diagnosed and in line with the legislation and protocols these are required to be reviewed periodically.

Multi-disciplinary assessment which allow for appropriate individualised health and educational supports are ongoing. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is also engaging with the HSE and with the individual schools and parents of children concerned to identify and provide educational supports for the children and adolescents affected.

There are a number of definitions of disability that are used for particular purposes (e.g Disability Act, Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act, Equal Status Act, Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004, the Census, and qualifying criteria for income supports such as Domiciliary Care Allowance, disability allowance etc). These definitions define disability in terms of an individual's functional ability in their environment rather than medical diagnosis or condition.

Health Services Expenditure

39. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which any budgetary overruns have occurred throughout the health service; the precise areas which have shown such overruns; when any such overruns became obvious monthly or otherwise since January last; if any particular action is merited to address any such recurrences in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40055/13]

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which he and his Department continues to monitor expenditure overruns in all areas throughout the health service; the extent to which those areas most prone to such have been identified and the likely remedial action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40295/13]

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he and his Department has curtailed expenditure overruns throughout the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40296/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39, 260 and 261 together.

There is ongoing and intensive engagement each month between officials of my Department and the HSE in the context of regular monitoring of expenditure. My Department also provides detailed analysis each month on expenditure trends to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and there is regular engagement between officials from that Department, my Department and the HSE. The HSE's Performance Report, which is published every month, provides an overall analysis of key performance data from Finance, HR, Hospital and Primary & Community Services. The activity data reported is based on Performance Activity and Key Performance Indicators outlined in the HSE National Service Plan. The June Performance Report, which is the most recent report available, is published on the HSE's website - www.hse.ie

Based on the most recent review of financial data, the HSE is not flagging any new concerns beyond those which were set out within the National Service Plan 2013 (NSP) as approved by me in January this year.

The projected outlook, as set out in the June Performance Report, is indicating a projected deficit of €104m in direct services, of which €75m is in Hospitals. Outside of this, the primary risks lie in PCRS, Child & Family Agency, PHI Legislation and the Haddington Road Agreement.

Cost containment plans are under review. The Executive is pro-actively engaged on inter-

nal efforts to address slippage in cost containment plans and to ensure that additional measures are identified and safely implemented to mitigate the projected deficits which are within HSE direct control, while engaging on an ongoing basis with my Department. The Chief Financial Officer has informed me that a number of site visits are underway, particularly where underperformance has been identified.

Commencement of Legislation

40. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the operation of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39926/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill was signed into law by the President on 30th July 2013.

There are operational issues which need to be addressed before it can be commenced and the Department is liaising with the HSE in this regard. These include the establishment of a panel of medical practitioners for the purpose of the formal medical review provisions and administrative facilities to enable the review committee, drawn from the review panel, to perform its functions.

The Act will be commenced as soon as is practicable.

Health Services Charges

41. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if cancer patients who have to pay for their own treatment also have to pay for cancer-related surgery. [40066/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Under the provision of the Health Act 1970, a person with full eligibility (i.e. a medical card holder) is eligible for public hospital out-patient and in-patient services, including consultant services, without charge.

A person with limited eligibility (i.e. a non-medical card holder) is entitled, subject to certain charges, to all in-patient public hospital services in public wards including consultant services and out-patient public hospital services including consultant services. The current public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €75 per night subject to a maximum of €750 in any period of 12 consecutive months. Attendance at accident and emergency department is subject to a charge of €100 where the patient does not have a referral note from his/her doctor. This charge applies only to the first episode of care.

Under the Health Acts, a person can also opt to be private to their consultant for out-patient and in-patient services. In doing so they are liable for the fees of all consultants involved in their care. Private consultant fees are a private contractual matter between the consultant and their patient. In addition, patients opting to be private to their consultant for the purposes of in-patient services in public hospitals are also liable for the daily private accommodation charges directed by the Minister under Section 55 of the Health Act 1970 (as amended): a maintenance charge and a daily charge. The maintenance charge ranges from €586 to €1,046 per day for private patients who are accommodated in a private designated bed. The private in-patient daily charge is €75 and is applicable to all private patients without exception.

Question No. 42 answered with Question No. 34.

Organ Donation

43. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the additional measures or resources that will be provided to assist organ donation and transplant services here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40044/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE, through its National Organ Donation and Transplantation Office, in conjunction with my Department, has identified further priority areas for action to enhance the organ donation and transplantation system. These are being considered in the context of the current Estimates process.

Meanwhile, approval has been given for 30 wholetime equivalent posts at various levels for the expansion of kidney transplantation services at Beaumont Hospital and for the development of urology services at Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown. 8 of these 30 wholetime equivalents are in post and the remaining are in the final stages of the recruitment process. A capital allocation of €5m has been approved for phase 1 of the Kidney Transplant Expansion Programme in Beaumont. An additional operating theatre will be equipped by the beginning of October and the refurbishment and fit out of St Damien's Ward and the expansion and fit out of the Histo-compatibility and Immunogenetics Laboratory will follow in 2014.

Hospital Waiting Lists

44. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the measures he will take to reduce the number of persons waiting for initial appointments with hospital consultants; the current number of people waiting for such appointments at present; the number waiting for a year or more; if he has a target for reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40043/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Under this Government, clear data on outpatient waiting lists is being published for the first time following a national project undertaken by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). The waiting list for outpatients is updated monthly and includes numbers waiting by hospital, by timeframe and by specialty.

In August 2013, there were 374,104 people overall on outpatient waiting lists. 84,167 were waiting more than one year. This compares with 384,632 people waiting on outpatient appointments in March 2013 (when electronic data collection was introduced). A maximum waiting time target of 12 months for a first-time outpatient appointment has now been set, as shown in the HSE Service Plan 2013. Hospitals are working closely with the HSE Special Delivery Unit and the NTPF, and have developed and commenced necessary action plans to achieve the national target by December 2013.

The availability now of clear data allows resources to be targeted appropriately, including tackling long waits, while the delivery of outpatient services is being reformed through the Outpatient (OP) Service Performance Improvement Programme. The overall aim of the Programme is to ensure timely, appropriate access to OP services.

Services for People with Disabilities

45. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if funding for day services for young persons with severe disabilities who have completed school in 2013 will be fully restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40039/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I recognise the importance of life-skills training and day support services to young people with disabilities who have left the education system and its importance to their future progression. It is not a question of funding being withdrawn as funding through the formal education route ceases once a person's education comes to an end. The Department of Education and Skills is responsible for making educational provision for young people with disabilities up to age eighteen. In relation to young adults over eighteen years of age with special needs the Health Service Executive (HSE) has the lead role for the provision of specialised disability support services.

This year the HSE's National Service Plan includes an additional €4m in demographic funding to help to provide training places and day services for school-leavers and Rehabilitative Training (RT) graduates. The HSE indicate there are 850 young people this year who are making the transition to HSE services compared to 695 school-leavers who required places last year. The provision of services to these young people with support needs is extremely challenging in all regions of the country and the HSE and service providers are making every effort to provide day services to people with disabilities over the age of 18 who require continuing supports. This has always been dependent on the availability and location of appropriate places coupled with the needs of the individual school-leaver and the available resources. Each person is assessed on an individual basis to plan for their services and to identify the most suitable training place or day service placement depending on their particular needs and abilities.

Places have now been provided for 831 school-leavers. Currently 19 school-leavers and 8 RT graduates still require a place and 163 individuals have been provided with a partial placement and require additional hours to fully address their assessed need. Work is underway in each region to address the needs of those individuals who have not been provided with placements or those placements requiring additional hours.

From within the existing disability allocation, resources are being made available by the HSE to enable these remaining places to be provided. The HSE in collaboration with voluntary service providers and umbrella representative groups will put in place the necessary monitoring and oversight arrangements to ensure that these remaining places are in place as speedily as possible.

Health Services Reform

46. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Health his health priorities for the Dáil Éireann term ahead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39928/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I remain committed to a wide series of health reform as outlined in the document Future Health. Those areas of reform that I have prioritised for this Dáil term are:

To publish a White Paper on Universal Health Insurance.

To establish a new Patient Safety Agency on an administrative basis.

In conjunction with the HSE and the State Claims Agency to rollout the National Adverse Management System to develop a risk based approach for the provision of indemnity to services and professionals.

To conduct with the HSE a review of the Integrated Service Areas.

As funding for the health service will be provided from the Vote of the Office of the Minister for Health from 2014 the Department will work closely with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the detailed arrangements required to bring about this

change and will work with the HSE to implement the recommendations in the 2012 Reviews of Financial Management Systems in the Health Service.

To pursue cost control in the private health insurance market throughout 2013 and address the regulatory status of the VHI by the end of the year.

To work with the HSE to increase the number of health care professional working in primary care and implement a programme of investment in primary care centres.

To continue to work with the HSE to implement programmes aimed at reducing waiting times for scheduled and unscheduled care and to oversee the establishment of administrative hospital groups as a first step to the establishment of hospital trusts by December 2015.

To support the HSE in rolling out a Single Assessment tool for older people services in 2013. To extend the HIQA regulatory scheme to residential services for people with disabilities and will review the applicability of the Fair Deal Scheme to other sectors. The Department will work with the HSE to move toward a person centred model of service and supports for disability services and to complete a prospective funding model for palliative care.

Develop an e Health strategy and work with the HSE to establish an Information and ICT Strategy Unit.

In relation to legislation I will bring forward a number of Bills as outlined in the Governments Legislative Programme published last week

Services for People with Disabilities

47. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that there are no funding cuts to St. Michael's House, in order to reduce the harsh impact on services such as residential and respite care. [39921/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services, including disability services. The HSE either directly provides or contracts disability agencies such as St. Michael House to provide a range of disability services through service level arrangements.

St. Michael's House received over €70 million in 2012 in funding from the HSE to provide a range of services to approximately 1,660 children and adults with an intellectual disability in over 170 centres in the Greater Dublin Area and Navan, Co. Meath.

The HSE and St. Michael's House work in close collaboration with regard to the funding and delivery of services to people with an intellectual disability. As a voluntary agency, St. Michael's House are obliged to work within the resources available to them and in that regard have introduced significant efficiencies over recent years to remain within budget. The HSE has advised that these changes to date have not resulted in service contraction.

The Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) sets out measures relating to productivity, cost extraction and reform which together intends to achieve a required pay bill reduction of €150m identified in the HSE Service Plan 2013. The agreement provides a framework and opportunities for managers within the health services, including agencies such as St. Michael's House, to reduce their costs associated with agency and overtime and a wide range of other pay costs, particularly through measures such as additional working hours and revised rates in respect of

overtime.

The HSE has advised the Department of Health that the recent application of additional budget cuts under the HRA has presented a significant challenge to St. Michael's House. A process is now underway between the HSE and St. Michael's House to identify the impact of these budget reductions on services. The Department of Health has received assurances from the HSE that both organisations are committed to working within the terms of the HRA to ensure that services are impacted upon only as a measure of last resort.

Domestic Violence Policy

48. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the strategy the Health Service Executive has in place to improve the protection of those who fall victim to domestic violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40060/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In 2010 the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence was published. It aims to provide a framework for sustainable intervention to prevent and effectively respond to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and is lead by Cosc which is the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence.

The HSE subsequently published its own Policy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. The principal actions are in line with the National Strategy. The HSE's policy states that a health-focused analysis of violence is crucial, not only because the consequences of such violence require a significant amount of healthcare system resources, but most importantly because the health care system is often the first route through which victims seek to access supports.

The Children and Family Agency within the forthcoming new Child and Family Agency Bill (1)(c) has responsibility for providing care and protection for victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence whether in the context of the family or otherwise. Going forward this will ensure that there is an integrated care pathway for identifying, referring and providing a range of supports for families who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence including referral pathways to services funded by the Children and Family Agency through service level or grant aid agreements.

Hospitals Capital Programme

49. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the additional resources he will make available to assist the rebuilding of Letterkenny General Hospital following flood damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40041/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Following the flooding in Letterkenny General Hospital a major emergency plan was put into operation. As part of this plan a Rebuild Steering Group was established and is supported by a design team.

The Group identified the Scope of Works (11 projects), indicative timescales and costs to restore services to the hospital. Emergency capital funding has been made available to fund the projects which include, inter alia;

- Gynae Department restored;

- Temporary cardiac investigations area completed;
- Interim kitchens/Staff canteen are in place and in operation;
- Interim Emergency Department and Radiology Department including two mobile DR (X Ray) trailers are in place and providing service;
- Planning permission submitted for culvert works;
- Option appraisal and detailed design completed for temporary outpatients.

In parallel there is an ongoing process regarding settling the insurance claim to cover the extensive damage. This claim will fund a significant part of the identified costs but is very much work in process. Any deficit in costs, not covered by the insurance claim will be met (subject to the normal scrutiny) by the Health Service Executive.

I am satisfied that every possible resource has been made available and will continue to be made available to Letterkenny General Hospital to implement the scope of works identified by the Rebuild Steering Group.

Budget 2014

50. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the mechanisms that are in place to assess the impact budget 2014 will have on the health, safety, quality of care and provision of services for patients in our public health system; and if he acknowledges the need to healthcare-proof this and all future budgets. [40029/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The health care system has, over recent years, had to deal with a number of major challenges, including reduced overall levels of funding and employment levels, demographic pressures, and increased numbers of people with chronic illnesses.

Despite this, major improvements in mortality and morbidity rates have been achieved in certain core areas, including diseases of the circulatory system, where the death rate per 100,000 has fallen by almost 36% since 2002, and overall cancer rates, which have witnessed an 8% overall reduction in the same period. This has been achieved during a period when the average length of stay in acute hospitals has also reduced and the number of patients receiving the treatment they require without having to stay in hospital (that is day case patients) has increased as a percentage of total discharges by over 50%.

The 2013 Service Plan required the HSE to continue to focus its delivery of services on the dual challenge of protecting patient outcomes while, at the same time, reducing costs. 2014 will be no different in this regard and any measures impacting on the health system as a result of Budget 2014 will also be assessed against these criteria – with the outcomes of this consideration set out in the HSE's National Service Plan for 2014, which will be submitted to me for approval within a matter of weeks of the Budget.

The National Service Plan, in setting out the operating framework for the delivery of HSE services throughout 2014, will look to deliver the maximum level of safe services possible, with prioritisation, where necessary, of certain services to meet the most urgent needs. The Plan will also set out targets in respect of each programme area to ensure that performance can be evaluated throughout the year in order to identify any emerging areas of concern, and, should any such concerns arise, implement necessary remedial measures without delay.

Medical Card Eligibility

51. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that all children diagnosed with cancer are granted, or allowed to retain, medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40038/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Under the provisions of the Health Act 1970, the assessment for a medical card is determined primarily by reference to the means, including the income and expenditure, of the applicant and his or her partner and dependants. There is no automatic entitlement to a medical card for persons of any age with a specific illness, such as cancer.

However, under the legislation, there is provision for discretion by the HSE to grant a medical card where a person's income exceeds the income guidelines. The HSE takes a person's social and medical issues into account in determining whether or not "undue hardship" exists for a person in providing a health service for themselves or his or her dependents.

The HSE has an effective system in place for the provision of emergency medical cards for patients who are terminally ill, or who are seriously ill and in urgent need of medical care that they cannot afford. They are issued within twenty-four hours of receipt of the required patient details and the letter of confirmation of the condition from a doctor or a medical consultant. With the exception of terminally ill patients, the HSE issues all emergency cards on the basis that the patient is eligible for a medical card on the basis of means or undue hardship, and that the applicant will follow up with a full application within a number of weeks of receiving the emergency card. As a result, emergency medical cards are issued to a named individual, with a limited eligibility period of six months.

For persons with a terminal illness, no means test applies. Once the terminal illness is verified, patients are given an emergency medical card for six months. Given the nature and urgency of the issue, the HSE has appropriate escalation routes to ensure that the person gets the card as quickly as possible.

National Children's Hospital Status

52. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a progress report on the development of the new National Children's Hospital [40049/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is the body with statutory responsibility for building the new children's hospital. Last month I announced appointments to this Board to replace the transitional Board which had been in place since January 2013. These appointments ensure appropriate professional membership with the necessary capital development expertise and experience in complex healthcare capital projects. Also in August I announced the appointment of members to the Children's Hospital Group Board. This Board will oversee the operational integration of the three existing paediatric hospitals in advance of the move to the new hospital and is also the client for the new hospital, and hence is critically important for the project as a whole. Earlier this month, Ms Eilish Hardiman was selected as CEO of the Children's Hospital Group following an open recruitment process through the Public Appointments Service.

With regard to the progress of the capital project, the tender process for the procurement of a new design team is well underway, and the aim is to have the new design team in place by the end of 2013. Pre-application planning discussions have commenced and the aim is to secure planning permission by December 2014. A review of urgent care centre(s) configuration is almost complete; the number and location of these satellite centres in the Dublin area is a key

decision, as the size, activity and infrastructure of these satellite centre(s) has implications for the main hospital brief. In parallel, St. James's Hospital is working closely with HSE Estates and the National Paediatric Development Board in regard to the decant phase of the project.

The new children's hospital is a priority for me and for this Government. I am confident that the appointments made to the two Boards will ensure the new hospital is completed as swiftly as possible, with optimal design and value for money.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 21.

Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 34.

Hospital Services

55. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the additional support that will be provided to the three existing children's hospitals pending the completion of the new hospital at the St. James's site, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40050/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The three existing paediatric hospitals in Dublin - Children's University Hospital Temple Street, Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin and the paediatric service at Tallaght - will come together in the new children's hospital when built. The HSE National Service Plan 2013 sets out the quantum and type of health services to be provided in 2013 by the three hospitals, within the overall level of funding provided.

The three hospitals have stated their commitment to becoming a single service across three sites and are working closely together, with a single Clinical Director across the three sites, to ensure optimisation of resources and facilities. Ms Eilish Hardiman has now been selected as the Chief Executive Officer of the new Children's Hospital Group, in an open recruitment process through the Public Appointments Service. Ms Hardiman's appointment follows the appointment in April of Dr Jim Browne as Chairman of the Board of the Children's Hospital Group and the appointment in August of nine Board members, including the Chairs of the three existing paediatric hospitals. This is an important step in moving towards a single entity and in supporting the operational integration of the three existing hospitals in advance of the new hospital being completed.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

56. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to address the waiting lists for orthodontic services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40054/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE has commissioned an independent review of orthodontic services. The outcome of this review, which is near completion, will give guidance as to what changes will be desirable to provide the best possible model of care delivery, given the current resources available and future demand for services.

Health Services Expenditure

57. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost savings he will make in 2013 in charging the full cost of private care in public hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40051/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The details of the new in-patient charges are

set out in the Health (Amendment) Act 2013. As a result of the discussions my Department has had with the private insurance industry, in order to agree a phasing in of the charges for all private patients, including those who occupy public beds, I have decided to implement these charges from 1 January 2014. It is expected that the new in-patient charges will generate an additional €30 million in revenue in 2014 for public hospitals providing in-patient services to patients being treated privately by a consultant.

The deferral of the implementation date to 1 January 2014 allows time to carry out an independent assessment of private patient activity, to ensure that the new charges raise only the intended €30 million in 2014. This assessment is currently underway. If it is necessary, I will amend the rates by amending legislation to deliver the €30 million.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 6.

Medical Card Data

59. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to any instances where the Health Service Executive fails to inform a card holder and their GP about the cancellation of a medical card; the number of medical cards that have been rescinded in 2011, 2012 and 2013 contrasted with the overall numbers of active medical cards in those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40063/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I have been advised by the HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service that it is unaware of any incident where a medical card has been cancelled or withdrawn without any notice. If you have a particular instance, you should forward the medical card number or PPS number of the person concerned and PCRS will investigate further.

In circumstance where eligibility is rescinded following a review process, the person concerned is notified accordingly and the respective GP is also notified automatically. Should a person, to whom a renewal notification is issued, fail to engage with the HSE during the review process, his/her medical card or GP Visit Card will expire automatically on the expiry date referenced in correspondence to that person.

The number of cards that have been withdrawn is not readily available in the format requested by the Deputy. Details of the number of medical cards and GP Visit Cards are provided to my Department each month by the HSE. These figures are currently provided on a net basis, showing the balance after new cards have been issued and other cards, as appropriate, have been deleted from the Executive's database, e.g. following a review of a person's circumstances. The most recent figures provided to my Department by the HSE reflect the position as at 1 September 2013 and show 1,863,062 medical card holders and 124,361 GP Visit Card holders.

Universal Health Insurance White Paper

60. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when the promised White Paper on financing universal health insurance will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40036/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government is committed to a major reform programme for the health system, the aim of which is to deliver a single-tier health service, supported by universal health insurance (UHI), where access is based on need, not on

income. Under UHI, everyone will be insured and will have equal access to a standard package of primary and acute hospital services, including acute mental health services. An Insurance Fund will subsidise or pay insurance premiums for those who qualify for a subsidy.

The Department is currently preparing a *White Paper on Universal Health Insurance* which will provide further detail on UHI. Intensive work is proceeding with a view to publishing the White Paper by the end of the year.

More detail in relation to the overall process for producing the White Paper, including the projects, studies and policy appraisals that need to be undertaken, is set out in the preliminary document on UHI, *The Path to Universal Healthcare*, published by the Department in February 2013 and available on its website, www.doh.gov.ie.

Services for People with Disabilities

61. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he will reverse the cuts that are affecting the services of over 2,000 persons with intellectual disabilities using the day and residential services of St. Michael's House; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40040/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services, including disability services. The HSE either directly provides or contracts disability agencies such as St Michael House to provide a range of disability services through service level arrangements.

St Michael's House received over €70 million in 2012 in funding from the HSE to provide a range of services to approximately 1,660 children and adults with an intellectual disability in over 170 centres in the Greater Dublin Area and Navan Co. Meath. The HSE and St Michael's House work in close collaboration with regard to the funding and delivery of services to people with an intellectual disability. As a voluntary agency, St Michael's house are obliged to work within the resources available to them and in that regard have introduced significant efficiencies over recent years to remain within budget. The HSE has advised that these changes to date have not resulted in service contraction.

The Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) sets out measures relating to productivity, cost extraction and reform which together intends to achieve a required pay bill reduction of €150m identified in the HSE Service Plan 2013. The agreement provides a framework and opportunities for managers within the health services, including agencies such as St Michael's House, to reduce their costs associated with agency and overtime and a wide range of other pay costs, particularly through measures such as additional working hours and revised rates in respect of overtime.

The HSE has advised the Department of Health that the recent application of additional budget cuts under the HRA has presented a significant challenge to St Michael's House. A process is now underway between the HSE and St Michael's House to identify the impact of these budget reductions on services. The Department of Health has received assurances from the HSE that both organisations are committed to working within the terms of the HRA to ensure that services are impacted upon only as a measure of last resort.

Drug Rehabilitation Clinics

62. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of dedicated

drug recovery beds in Dublin north city Health Service Executive; their location and the way the issues of density of drug recovery/supported housing accommodation are addressed within the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40065/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Report of the Working Group on Drug Rehabilitation (2007) defined rehabilitation in terms of ‘providing a continuum of care to problem drug users, enabling them to address their needs as most appropriate for them. These needs may include health, social, housing, employment, education and /or vocational’.

Arising from this report and in line with the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016, the National Drug Rehabilitation Implementation Committee, chaired by the Health Service Executive, has developed a framework providing protocols & guidelines for multiple agencies to work together toward a service user centred, case management approach to drug rehabilitation.

As the matter raised by the Deputy is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Millenium Development Goals

63. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the Millennium Development Goals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40185/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed by world leaders at the United Nations in 2000 as the framework for international development policy up to 2015. They provide a clearly measurable way to track progress in the fight against global poverty. The Goals are central to Ireland’s development programme, and to our renewed policy on International Development, “One World, One Future”, which reaffirms our commitment to the fight against poverty and hunger as an integral part of our foreign policy. The Tánaiste and I took part yesterday in a major high level international meeting at the UN General Assembly in New York to review progress on the MDGs as the 2015 target date approaches and discuss the shaping of global development policy for the years ahead. We believe it is essential that the entire international community strengthens and accelerates its efforts to maximize progress on the remaining targets set by the MDGs by 2015. Ireland is recognised internationally for the strong lead we have taken in this process, and for the effectiveness of our aid programme, in some of the poorest countries in the world.

The Government’s new Policy on International Development also clearly restates our commitment to achieving the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) for Official Development Assistance (ODA) when economic circumstances permit. Over the past two years, the Government has broadly stabilised the budget for development assistance, a significant achievement in the context of the very difficult conditions facing the country. Last year, we provided some €629 million in ODA, representing 0.47% of GNP. For 2013 we have allocated a total of €622 million to ODA. These represent very significant allocations of public funds and a genuine investment on behalf of the Irish people in assisting those less fortunate than ourselves.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

64. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to his Depart-

ment since the current Government came into office; the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40221/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My Department does not engage external consultants for public relations purposes. Occasionally, consultants or companies with some communications experience are commissioned to provide services such as project management, logistics and event management. I am very conscious of the need to achieve value for money on all consultant expenditure and commissioning of such work is in full compliance with national and EU procurement regulations concerning tendering requirements. DHR Communications has been contracted since 2010 to manage and administer the Simon Cumbers Media Fund (SCMF) grants scheme. This involves managing two funding rounds each year, including through national and regional information workshops; managing and administering the application process; organising the judging process and providing detailed feedback to all applicants; processing grant payments and keeping detailed administrative and financial records; maintaining and updating the SCMF website and managing the SCMF student competition. DHR was awarded a two-year contract to 2012 and was re-engaged in February 2012 for a further two years following a competitive tendering process. Following a competitive tendering process, DHR has been engaged to plan, manage and execute a national Africa Day flagship event in Dublin. This includes the administration of a small grants scheme for regional events which DHR managed on behalf of my Department in partnership with a number of local authorities. DHR also worked to raise public awareness of the Africa Day events, including through the use of social media and the Africa Day website. This work represented a very minor element of the project and was conducted in close cooperation with my Department's communications office.

Africa Day Family Days, incorporating musical entertainment, cultural activities and an African Bazaar, were hosted by the Department in Iveagh Gardens in 2009 and 2010, in CHQ in Georges Dock in 2012 and at the Farnleigh Estate in 2013. In 2011, the Department supported a smaller-scale series of performances, family events, art exhibitions, debates and educational activities instead of hosting a flagship event.

DHR also provided short-term management support services for the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid, including the logistical management of the nationwide public consultation activities.

The table below sets out fees and third party expenses paid to DHR Communications since 9 March 2011.

DHR Communications' business address is 80 Francis Street, Dublin 8.

Project and Event Management 9 March 2011 to date

Name of Project/Event	2011	2012	2013
SCMF	€50,988	€47,430	€55,112
White Paper Review	€25,000	€26,026	nil
Africa Day	€6,806	€90,851	€102,670

Question No. 65 withdrawn.

Departmental Expenditure

66. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure profile for his Department up to the end of August 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40321/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Monthly profiles for expenditure and receipts are in place in my Department. Performance against profile is reported regularly to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and published by the Department of Finance as part of the Monthly Exchequer Statement. The Monthly Exchequer Statement for August has been published on the website of the Department of Finance. In some areas, expenditure and receipts are evenly distributed throughout the year. In other areas, there are considerable variations that are foreseeable. The profiles as far as possible take account of known variations. At the end of August, my Department had spent €418m out of a total net voted allocation for 2013 of €670m. This represents 62% of the net annual allocation. It is expected that the year-end out-turn will be close to or within the overall net voted amount. At the end of August, receipts classed as Appropriations-in-Aid were ahead of profile, largely due to increased passport fee receipts.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

67. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to provide additional overseas development assistance for Syria and that region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40322/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The tragic crisis unfolding in Syria and in neighbouring countries has resulted in enormous humanitarian needs, requiring an urgent and sustained response from the international community. With the number of fatalities surpassing 100,000, there are now close to 7 million people who are in need of immediate life saving support. In addition to more than 4 million people who are displaced within Syria, there are in excess of 2 million Syrians who have fled the violence to take refuge in neighbouring countries, one million of whom are children. In the face of this terrible suffering, it is imperative that the international community is united in demanding greater protection for Syria's civilian population. The world has rarely seen a humanitarian crisis as bad as that caused by the conflict in Syria.

Ireland has been unwavering in its support to the international humanitarian response. To date, we have provided almost 11 million Euros to the relief effort and are one of the world's most generous donors – on a per capita basis - to the response to this crisis. Through trusted NGO partners here in Ireland, as well as the UN and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, we are playing a considerable part in the international effort to meet the massive needs both inside Syria and in the wider region.

My officials are continuously monitoring the evolving situation in Syria and the surrounding region, and my proposed visit to Lebanon next month will provide an opportunity to review the relief effort and assess humanitarian needs on the ground. In view of the immense needs in Syria and neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees, Ireland is likely to provide further assistance, within our means, to the humanitarian response.

Passport Applications

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if an Irish passport will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [40330/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Department has no record of any application lodged for the person in question. However I can say that the Passports Act, 2008 requires that before issuing a passport to a person, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade shall be satisfied as to the identity of each applicant and that the person is an Irish citizen. Documentary proof in respect of identity and entitlement to citizenship are required for all passport applications. These requirements are outlined in the passport application form notes that accompany each application form. Details are also available on the Department's website.

Question No. 69 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

70. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40704/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The information requested by the Deputy for 2011 and 2013 is set out as follows. Reliable comparable information for 1981, which the Deputy will appreciate is 32 years ago, is not available.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade - Eamon Gilmore, TD, September 2013

Office of the Tánaiste	Constituency Office
2 Special Advisers	1 Personal Assistant
1 Personal Assistant	1 Personal Secretary
Private Office – Foreign Affairs and Trade	-
2 Special Advisers	-

Minister of State for Trade and Development - Joe Costello, TD, September 2013

Constituency Office
1 Personal Assistant
1 Personal Secretary

Minister of State for European Affairs - Paschal Donohoe, TD, September 2013

Private Office	Constituency Office
1 Civilian Driver	1 Personal Assistant
-	1 Personal Secretary

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade - Eamon Gilmore, TD, September 2011

Office of the Tánaiste	Constituency Office
2 Special Advisers	1 Personal Assistant
1 Personal Assistant	1 Personal Secretary
Private Office – Foreign Affairs and Trade	-
1 Special Adviser	-

Minister of State for Trade and Development - Jan O’Sullivan, TD, September 2011

Private Office	Constituency Office
2 Civilian Drivers	1 Personal Assistant
-	1 Personal Secretary

Minister of State for European Affairs - Lucinda Creighton, TD, September 2011

Private Office	Constituency Office
1 Personal Assistant	1 Personal Secretary
2 Civilian Drivers	-

The Department’s Press Section is currently staffed by an Assistant Principal, four Third Secretaries and one Clerical Officer. The Press Office now handles matters relating to Irish Aid which in 2011 were dealt with by a separate Press Officer. A number of officers serving in missions abroad are engaged in press work in addition to other duties.

Job Creation Data

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the number of jobs created under the Revenue job assist schemes; the cost of the scheme in each year from 2010 to 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40144/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Figures of the estimated cost to the Exchequer of the Revenue Job Assist Scheme, and the number of employee claimants availing of it in each of the years 2010 and 2011, the latest year for which the necessary detailed information is available, are set out as follows.

Year	Number of Employees availing of Revenue Job Assist	Cost to Exchequer €M
2010	650	0.5
2011	1,220	1.1

Debt Management Services

72. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the implications of the Central Bank Act 2013 on bank mediation particularly in relation to personnel who do not deal with clients’ money and simply negotiate with the financial institution on behalf of a stressed borrower; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that the legislation is treating those persons in a similar way to debt payment companies and consequential compliance and audit associated with this category of mediator; if he will review matters

due to the service to consumers that is required for many persons in these difficult financial times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40154/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Central Bank that following the commencement of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013, the Bank is now responsible for regulating debt management firms. Firms engaged in the provision of debt management services will now require to be authorised by the Central Bank pursuant to Part V of the Central Bank Act 1997 (as amended) (the Act).

The Act defines a “debt management firm” as meaning: “a person who for remuneration provides debt management services to one or more consumers, other than an excepted person”. The Act also defines “debt management services” as meaning:

(a) giving advice about the discharge of debts (in whole or in part), including advice about budgeting in connection with the discharge of debts,

(b) negotiating with a person’s creditors for the discharge of the person’s debts (in whole or in part), or

(c) any similar activity associated with the discharge of debts”.

Firms that provide debt management services may also provide other services and may therefore require to be authorised for several different activities. For example, firms may require to be authorised as money transmission businesses and/or payment institutions, as well as requiring a separate authorisation to provide debt management services, if they make payments on behalf of their clients.

The Central Bank issued a consultation paper on 1 August 2013 in respect of the proposed regulatory regime to apply to debt management firms. The proposals set out a robust set of requirements for what is an important sector, particularly for the clients of debt management firms many of whom struggle to manage their financial commitments and seek advice and assistance from such firms. The consultation paper closed for submissions on 23 September 2013. The Bank is currently considering the submissions received before finalising the proposed Authorisation Requirements & Standards for Debt Management Firms.

The proposals set out requirements in respect of compliance and audit arrangements that seek to ensure an appropriate level of oversight is in place in respect of the services provided by debt management firms to ensure compliance with their regulatory obligations. The Central Bank acknowledges that there is potentially a wide range of entity types that will seek authorisation as debt management firms. The Bank has further advised me that, it proposes to take the nature, scale and complexity of the entity into account when considering applications which will be assessed on a case by case basis. For example, it is not envisaged that a full time compliance officer will be required in every instance. Alternative arrangements put forward by applicants will be considered in this regard.

Tax Forms

73. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will be furnished with a P21 for the years 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40155/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that P21s for the years 2002 – 2008 inclusive have issued previously to the

person concerned. I am further advised that in response to the Deputy's question, copies of these statements have now also been issued. The person in question had not requested a P21 for 2009. However, the tax liability for 2009 has now been reviewed and a PAYE Balancing Statement (P21), for 2009, will issue shortly.

Seed Capital Scheme Eligibility

74. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider providing a concession in the upcoming Finance Bill regarding the conditions of the seed capital scheme (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40169/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Seed Capital Scheme is designed for individuals who are or were in employment that was subject to PAYE. In general, it operates by providing that an individual, who makes an investment in new ordinary shares in a new company, may set off the amount of that investment against his or her taxable income in any of the previous 6 years, which will result in an overpayment of tax. The individual may then claim a refund of the tax overpaid. The individual must take up full-time employment with the company. The claim for relief must be made within 2 years of the end of the year of assessment in which the shares are issued.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the individual concerned made a general enquiry to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners recently regarding eligibility for the Seed Capital Scheme with respect to investments made in 2009 and 2010 but was informed that the investments would not qualify as any application would be outside the 2 year time limit. The Deputy's suggestion will be considered as part of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill.

Financial Services Regulation

75. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Finance the options that are available to persons who do not have utility bills to prove their address when applying to open a bank account; the acceptable ways to prove a person's address; if an affidavit, letter from the Garda or politician will be accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40184/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The customer due diligence requirements are set out in the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 (as amended by the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2013). Section 33 of the 2010 Act requires designated persons (such as banks) to apply customer due diligence measures prior to establishing a business relationship with a customer e.g. opening a bank account. The customer due diligence measures require that the designated person must identify and verify the customer's identity on the basis of documents or information that the designated person has reasonable grounds to believe can be relied upon to confirm the identity of the customer. The 2010 Act does not limit the range of documents or information that a designated person may have reasonable grounds to believe can be relied upon to confirm the identity of the customer.

My Department has published Guidelines on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purpose of money laundering and terrorist financing on the application of the 2010 Act. These guidelines specify a non-exhaustive range of documentation which the bank may choose to accept for the purposes of verifying identity. The range of documentation includes utility bills but also many other types of documentation issued by Government Departments, state agencies and financial institutions. In the event that an individual provides a plausible

explanation as to why the suggested documentation cannot be provided, the bank may choose from an additional specified list of methods to assist in confirming the identity of the customer.

Ultimately, it is up to each bank to decide, on a risk based approach, whether it accepts other forms of customer identification. However, there is a clear statement in the draft guidelines to the effect that “*where an individual is genuinely not in a position to provide standard evidence of identity it is important that he/she is not prevented from gaining access to the financial system solely due to not being able to produce particular documentation.*”

Tax Code

76. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the actions he will take to help reduce the cost to the consumer of gluten free products, which are an essential dietary requirement for coeliacs and persons with other digestive disorders; if he will consider applying a lower rate of VAT on gluten free products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40194/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that food products, including gluten-free products, which meet the definition of food and drink for human consumption contained in paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to the Value Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 are liable to the zero rate of VAT. There is no scope under the VAT Directive to zero rate gluten free products that do not meet this definition. The zero rate applies to basic foodstuffs, for example, bread, butter, tea, sugar, meat, milk and vegetables. However, certain food items which are specifically excluded from the zero rate of VAT are subject to either the reduced VAT rate of 13.5% or the standard rate of 23%. Examples of foods which are subject to the reduced VAT rate of 13.5% include flour or egg-based bakery products such as cakes, crackers and certain wafers and biscuits. These are provided for under paragraph 3(5) of Schedule 3 to the Value Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010. Examples of foods which are subject to the standard VAT rate of 23% include sweets, chocolates, chocolate wafers and biscuits and other similar products, confectionery, crisps, ice-creams and soft drinks, and also frozen desserts, frozen yoghurts and similar frozen products.

Banking Sector Redundancies

77. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if all staff accepting voluntary redundancy/retiring from AIB were offered briefing on their retirement entitlements; if these seminars were made available to all retiring staff equally; where these briefings were held; if they were more than one day events, if the bank covered accommodation and hospitality costs for the employees attending; if so, what was the overall cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40206/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed that the Severance Programme in AIB commenced in June 2012 and involved the preparation of briefing packs for all staff considering early retirement or voluntary severance. In respect of Early Retirement, AIB Staff Pensions Department prepare individual figures for staff in advance of them accepting an offer from the Bank. This information is provided directly to individual staff members and does not involve seminars. I have been informed by AIB that a separate, long-standing process exists where staff who are retiring at normal retirement date or earlier may attend a Retirement Seminar around the time of their departure from AIB. This is provided by many companies in the public and private sector to retiring staff and is considered good practice to help staff adjust to retirement. This service has been provided by AIB to its staff going back over many years.

These seminars conducted over two days, involve a number of presentations from organisations such as the Retirement Planning Council of Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and medical practitioners etc. The Bank covers the cost of the seminars.

Banking Sector Redundancies

78. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if all staff accepting voluntary redundancy/retiring from PTSB were offered briefing on their retirement entitlements; if these seminars were made available to all retiring staff equally; where these briefings were held; if they were more than one day events, if the bank covered accommodation and hospitality costs for the employees attending; if so, the overall cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40207/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Permanent TSB has informed me that staff who were offered and accepted Voluntary Severance were advised that they would be offered the standard deferred pension benefits in accordance with the rules of their pension scheme. Permanent TSB advises me that details of the deferred pension benefits were issued to such staff members by the Trustees of the Pension scheme of which they were a member. I have been advised by Permanent TSB that it did not host briefings or seminars for staff leaving on Voluntary Severance. Permanent TSB has informed me that it did not offer voluntary early retirement to staff.

Banking Sector Redundancies

79. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if all staff accepting voluntary redundancy/retiring from Bank of Ireland were offered briefing on their retirement entitlements; if these seminars were made available to all retiring staff equally; where these briefings were held; if they were more than one day events, if the bank covered accommodation and hospitality costs for the employees attending; if so, the overall cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40208/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Bank of Ireland has informed me that it offers an appropriate range of supports to all employees whose application for Voluntary Parting is accepted by the Group. Bank of Ireland supports include:

- The opportunity to avail of a Financial one-to-one over the telephone with a Qualified Financial Adviser.
- The opportunity to contact a Career Coach to have a telephone coaching session to talk through any career questions.
- Access to an Online Career Centre for 6 months after leaving BOI.
- Opportunity to attend a career support workshop appropriate to parting staff needs.

Pension Provisions

80. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Finance if the AVC withdrawal scheme introduced in Budget 2013 will be extended to cover PRSA's to assist persons to access part of their pension savings particularly in cases where pension schemes are performing

poorly. [40245/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Finance Act 2013 was passed into law on 27th March and section 17 of the Act, which makes provision for pre-retirement access to AVCs, has effect from that date. Section 17 introduces a new section 782A into the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 which provides members of occupational pension schemes with a three-year window of opportunity to draw down, on a once-off basis, up to 30% of the accumulated value of certain AVCs made by them, including additional voluntary PRSA contributions made to AVC PRSAs. This is a restricted measure which enables rather than incentivises individuals to access part of their pension savings beyond their regular or compulsory pension contributions. I do not wish to damage future pension provision and it is important that individuals continue to provide for their retirement. For these reasons, I have no plans to extend the measure beyond AVCs.

NAMA Loans Sale

81. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will make available specific details of asset sales made by the National Assets Management Agency; if he will further make available a list of the National Assets Management Agency's individual debtors and the amount they owe; if he will release details of the number of former employees who have left the National Assets Management Agency to work in the private sector since its establishment; if he will make available details of the safeguards that the National Assets Management Agency have in place to prevent the release of loan information by former employees showing the value of loans and the National Assets Management Agency acquisition price; if he will consider introducing a cooling off period of at least one year preventing former NAMA employees from working for any company who has direct or indirect dealings with the National Assets Management Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40255/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by NAMA that it is precluded by the provisions of various Statutes and by banking confidentiality case law from disclosing details relating its debtors and assets, including property assets, securing its loans. However per latest published information for 31 March 2013, which is available on the NAMA website, www.nama.ie, NAMA debtors in aggregate owe close to €70 billion in par debt. All NAMA staff are employees of the NTMA and are assigned to NAMA by the NTMA. NAMA advises that, since inception, 59 staff assigned to it by the NTMA have left or are due to leave the Agency to take up employment elsewhere, including 53 who have returned or are returning to the private sector – 6 have moved to other businesses within NTMA. Some of those that have left were employed on short term contracts.

Under the NTMA business model, all employees are recruited on the basis of individually negotiated contracts. In addition to NAMA, the NTMA carries out a range of commercial asset and liability functions on behalf of Government and its ability to successfully perform these functions is critically dependent on its ability to attract employees – often with specialist skills – from the private sector, including those at middle and senior management level. That is the basis on which close to 300 staff have been recruited to NAMA from the private sector over the past three years and it would not have been possible to move from a standing start in December 2009 to become fully operational with a €32 billion balance sheet a year later without having that ability to recruit the appropriate expertise and experience from the private sector. Mobility with the private sector is a critical component of the NTMA model and it is important that the NTMA's ability to attract employees from the private sector not be disrupted. In the case of NAMA, employees are recruited on the basis of specified purpose contracts – their employment lasts for as long as their function is required by NAMA only.

There are extensive safeguards in place to protect the confidentiality of information held by NTMA employees, including those assigned to NAMA. Employees assigned to NAMA by the NTMA, as is the case with all other NTMA staff, are subject to Section 14 of the National Treasury Management Agency Act, 1990 which prohibits an employee from disclosing any information obtained while carrying out their duties as employees of the NTMA. Employees assigned to NAMA are also subject to a prohibition on release of confidential data under Sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act 2009. NTMA employees, including those assigned to NAMA, are subject to the Official Secrets Act. Contravention of these prohibitions is a criminal offence. These protections do not cease at the point of resignation but rather apply indefinitely and extend to former employees.

The notice period for NTMA employees assigned to NAMA is typically three months. NTMA contracts for employees assigned to NAMA have a provision entitling the NTMA to place the employee on garden leave at any point during the notice period during the time the employee may not work for another employer.

Following a review of its policy in respect of notice periods and post-termination restrictions on employment, which was conducted on the NTMA's behalf (as employer) by the law firm, Matheson, the NTMA is implementing a number of changes to its employment contracts, including the introduction of longer notice periods of 3 to 6 months (up from 1 to 3 months) for middle and senior management employees and garden leave provisions to be included in all new employment contracts. In addition, a new provision is being added in employment contracts, where relevant, that restricts departing staff from performing services for a new employer, during the first six months following the termination of their employment with the NTMA, relating to a transaction or other matter in respect of which they participated directly or substantially in the course of their employment with the NTMA and were in possession of confidential information as a result. In respect of NTMA employees assigned to NAMA, this provision has been introduced for all new employees and existing employees as they are promoted. As I pointed out above, the three-month notice period and garden leave provisions already apply to NTMA staff assigned to NAMA. Finally as I have stated previously I support interaction between the public and private sectors so as to bring fresh thinking and new ideas.

Tax Reliefs Cost

82. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the most up to date list of discretionary tax reliefs and the revenue that would be saved, per measure, if these tax reliefs were standardised. [40268/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the deductions and reliefs which are allowable for tax at an individual's marginal rate of income tax and for which estimates of cost can be provided are set out below together with estimated costs for the year 2010, the most recent year for which the necessary estimates are available. If relief for these deductions and reliefs was confined to the standard rate of income tax the saving to the Exchequer could be of the order of €800 million. This estimate does not take into account any possible behavioural change on the part of taxpayers as a consequence of such a change or the economic effect of such a change. This applies in particular to the BES, Film Relief and Capital Allowances regime. The standard rating of employee pension reliefs would also have an impact on workers' take home pay.

It should be noted that there have been changes since this period, i.e. some schemes have been abolished or modified and others have been introduced. For instance, as the Deputy will be aware, the BES was re-launched as the Employment and Investment Incentive, with changes to the amount of relief payable and types of companies that can qualify.

Questions - Written Answers

Tax Relief Provision	Total 2010 Cost	Saving if Standard Rated
-	€m	€m
Person Taking Care of Incapacitated Taxpayer	6.9	2.8
Health Expenses (Nursing Homes)	21.0	5.0
Contributions Under Permanent Health Benefit Schemes, after Deduction of Tax on Benefits Received	3.9	1.6
Employees' Contributions To Approved Superannuation Schemes	598.5	283.5
Retirement Annuity Premiums	180.1	78.5
Personal Retirement Savings Accounts	73.0	26.4
Interest paid relating to borrowings for purposes such as acquiring an interest in a company or partnership or to pay death duties	17.5	7.6
Expenses Allowable to Employees under Schedule E	66.5	23.3
Retirement Relief for certain Sports Persons.	0.3	0.1
Revenue Job Assist allowance	0.5	0.0
Allowance for seafarers	0.3	0.1
Investment in Corporate Trades (BES)	24.0	12.3
Investment in Seed Capital	1.8	0.8
Stock Relief	2.0	0.6
Relief for expenditure on significant buildings and gardens	3.9	1.9
Donation of Heritage items	0.2	0.2
Donation of Heritage property to the Irish Heritage Trust	0.0	0.0
Donations to Approved Bodies (Income Tax only)	50.0	20.0
Donations to Sports Bodies (Income Tax only)	0.4	0.2
Capital Allowances (Income Tax only)	704.2	277.4
Rented Residential Relief-Section 23	22.9	11.7

Tax Relief Provision	Total 2010 Cost	Saving if Standard Rated
-	€m	€m
Investment in Films	65.4	33.6
Total	1,843.1	787.6

Revenue Job Assist allowance is no longer available from 1 July 2013.

Tax Yield

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue that would be raised from extending betting tax to online bets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40269/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It was announced in Budget 2011 that the necessary arrangements are being made to ensure that bets placed on the internet by domestic punters are subject to the same level of betting duty as applies to high street betting shops. This will serve to broaden the tax base and increase betting duty receipts. The Finance Act 2011 provides for the taxation of bets that remote bookmakers enter into with persons in the State. This means, for example, that a business which engages in online bookmaking and which accepts bets from people in this country will be liable for betting duty on those bets, irrespective of where that business is based. The existing betting duty (1%) will be applied to such bets. The Finance Act also provides for the taxation of Betting Exchanges under the new arrangements; however the calculation of the tax will take account of their particular business model, in other words a 15% tax on the commission charged. In addition, excise duties are being applied to the granting and renewal of remote bookmakers' and remote betting intermediaries' licences.

The Betting (Amendment) Bill, which was published in July, will establish the regulatory framework for these licences. The tax changes provided for in the Finance Act can only be implemented once the Betting (Amendment) Bill is enacted.

It is estimated that the full year yield from the taxation of remote betting would be around €20 million.

Tax Yield

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue that would be raised from applying a 1% deduction to winning bets including online bets as recommended in the Indecon Report on the Irish Horse Racing Industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40270/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It was announced in Budget 2011 that the necessary arrangements are being made to ensure that bets placed on the internet by domestic punters are subject to the same level of betting duty as applies to high street betting shops. This will serve to broaden the tax base and increase betting duty receipts. The Finance Act 2011 provides for the taxation of bets that remote bookmakers enter into with persons in the State. This means, for example, that a business which engages in online bookmaking and which accepts bets from people in this country will be liable for betting duty on those bets, irrespective of where that business is based. The existing betting duty (1%) will be applied to such bets. The Finance Act also provides for the taxation of Betting Exchanges under the new arrangements; however the calculation of the tax will take account of their particular business model, in other words a tax on the commission charged. In addition, excise duties are being applied to the granting and renewal of remote bookmakers' and remote betting intermediaries' licences.

The proposed Betting (Amendment) Bill, which was published in July will establish the regulatory framework for these licences. The tax changes provided for in the Finance Act can only be implemented once the Betting (Amendment) Bill is enacted.

I am hopeful that by including the high-growth area of the betting sector the tax base from betting will be boosted significantly.

To place the tax on winnings would effectively place the liability on punters. This would, I believe, be an incentive for punters to seek out unlicensed websites, thus increasing the possibility of tax avoidance.

It should be noted that the industry is in favour of continuing to bear the tax instead of it being placed on the punter.

Pension Provisions

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield to date from allowing persons early access to pension as provided for in Budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40271/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Finance Act 2013 provides members of occupational pension schemes with a three-year window of opportunity from 27 March 2013 during which they can opt to draw down, on a once off basis, up to 30% of the accumulated value of additional voluntary contributions (AVCs). Administrators of AVC funds (including PRSA administrators) are required to provide, within 15 working days of the end of each quarter, commencing with the quarter ending on 30 June 2013, certain statistical information to Revenue in relation to AVC pre-retirement transfers or encashments made during the quarter in question.

The information for the first quarter ended 30 June 2013 has been received and the tax yield for that quarter amounted to €10.8 million. It is too early at this stage to comment on the outturn for the year. I have previously stated, however, that this measure enables rather than incentivises individuals to access part of their pension savings beyond their regular or compulsory pension contributions. It is also important that individuals continue to save and provide for their retirement and these are likely factors in the scale of the take-up to date.

Tax Yield

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the yield in each year from 2005 to 2012 from stamp duty on share transactions on the Irish Stock Exchange; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40272/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the available information on the yield in the years 2005 to 2012 from Stamp Duty on transfers of shares, stocks and marketable securities is set out in the following table:

Year	€ million
2005	324
2006	406
2007	608.7
2008	419.4
2009	207.6
2010	181.7

Year	€ million
2011	194.8
2012	171.5

The figures shown are the yields from transfers of stocks and marketable securities in Irish registered companies; they are not confined to companies listed on the Irish Stock Exchange.

Tax Yield

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from abolishing tax credits for persons earning over €150,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40273/13]

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from abolishing tax credits for persons earning over €200,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40274/13]

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from reducing tax credits for persons earning over €100,000 by 50%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40275/13]

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from reducing tax credits for persons earning over €150,000 by 50%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40276/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 to 90, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €150,000, would be of the order of €165 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €200,000 would be of the order of €80 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of reducing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €100,000 by 50% would be of the order of €250 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of reducing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €150,000 by 50% would be of the order of €80 million.

It should be noted that the income ranges referred to above 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. Depending on the incomes of the couples concerned, they may be in a position to elect for separate assessment, which could result in their tax liability remaining unchanged by the proposals above.

Tax Yield

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue that would be raised by reducing the pension fund standard fund threshold to €1.2 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40279/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Standard Fund Threshold (SFT) is the maximum allowable pension fund on retirement for tax purposes which was introduced in Budget and Finance Act 2006 to prevent over-funding of pensions through tax-relieved arrangements. Information on the numbers and values of individual pension funds or on individual accrued benefits are not generally required to be supplied to the Revenue Commissioners by the administrators of pension schemes and personal pension arrangements. There is, therefore, no underlying data readily available to my Department or to the Revenue Commissioners on which to base reliable estimates of the savings that would arise specifically from a change to the SFT of the magnitude indicated in the question.

The Deputy will be aware of the announcement which I made in my Budget 2013 speech that changes to the SFT regime or other possible changes to give effect to the commitment in the Programme for Government to cap taxpayers' subsidies for pension schemes which deliver pension income of more than €60,000 will be put in place in 2014. The extent of the changes required, which are still under consideration, may involve more than simply reducing the SFT and this examination also involves an analysis of data provided from various sources to establish as reliable an estimate as possible of the likely tax savings or yield to the Exchequer.

Tax Yield

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be raised from a 10% levy on alcohol sales in off licence premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40316/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy should be aware that EU Directive 92/93, which governs the structure of alcohol taxation, requires that such taxes are applied by reference to the nature and strength of the product rather than the means of packaging. It does not provide for different tax treatment of alcohol products depending on where the product is sold. Accordingly, the introduction of such a levy would not be possible.

Question No. 93 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

94. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisors, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40703/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): According to our records at end 1981, the Department employed the following:

Title	Number
Special Adviser	1
Personal Assistant	1
Personal Secretary	1
Publicity Officer	1

At end 2011, my Department employed the following:

Title	Number
Special Adviser	2
Press Officer (Civil Servant)	1
Personal Assistant	1
Civilian Driver	2

Currently, my Department employs the following:

Title	Number
Special Adviser	2
Press Officer (Civil Servant)	1
Personal Assistant	1
Civilian Driver	2

Home Tuition Scheme Eligibility

95. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils in County Mayo who have been assessed as eligible for the home tuition scheme for school year 2013/2014; the number who have received teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40204/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the purpose of the Home Tuition Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school or for children who are awaiting a suitable educational placement and also to provide early educational intervention for pre-school children with autism. As tuition takes place outside the usual school structure it is important that home tutors are qualified to provide an educational programme. Accordingly, it is a condition of the scheme that parents must recruit a fully qualified teacher who is registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland. Officials in my Department have confirmed 25 eligible Home Tuition applications have been received, of these 10 are qualified teachers.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

96. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to the Department since the current Government came into office; the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40220/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has not incurred any expenditure on the provision of public relations services since the Government came into office.

Third Level Fees

97. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills with regard to the recent policy change allowing non-EEA nationals who acquire EEA citizenship to avail of reduced tuition fees; if existing students in this situation will also be allowed to avail of reduced fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40229/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The recently announced change referred to by the Deputy involves an amendment to the free fees schemes whereby with effect from the academic year 2013/14, a 'Change of Nationality' clause now forms part of the schemes. This change to the criteria of the schemes provides that students who are not eligible for free fees at the commencement of their course of studies, because they do not meet the nationality clause, and who subsequently acquire EEA citizenship during their study, may be eligible for free fees for the remainder of their course of study subject to certain conditions. This amendment also applies to existing students who, with effect from the 2013/14 academic year, may be eligible for free fees funding where they were ineligible due to not meeting the nationality requirement of the schemes and have subsequently acquired EEA citizenship since the commencement of their course of study. In order to be eligible under this 'Change of Nationality' clause students must have met all other criterion of the Free Fees Schemes, apart from nationality, at date of entry to their course of study. Where students do not meet the terms of the free fees schemes, including nationality, it is the higher education institution that determines, in accordance with its own criteria, the rate of tuition fees (EU or non EU) to be paid by students.

FÁS Local Training Initiatives Places

98. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Clare is only receiving a portion of the training allowance while participating on a FÁS course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40230/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The FÁS training allowance paid to those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance is generally aligned to the amount of the persons Jobseekers Allowance payment as determined by the Department of Social Protection which is subject to means testing. The FÁS training allowance is paid to participants in lieu of Jobseekers Allowance for the duration of the training course.

The majority of Jobseeker's Allowance recipients under 25 years of age are entitled to a reduced jobseeker's rate of either €100 or €144 per week.

As part of Budget 2013, it was decided to provide an incentive to those persons under 25 in receipt of the reduced rate of Jobseekers Allowance by increasing their weekly FÁS training allowance to €160. Increasing the maximum weekly rate that under 25s can receive when they engage in education and training encourages participation rates among this cohort which is a particular concern at EU and local level.

Mental Health Programmes

99. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budget and final cost for programmes (details supplied) in the 2012-2013 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40231/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that last January I launched the Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention, which were developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Health. The guidelines provide practical guidance to post-primary schools on how they can promote mental health and well-being in an integrated way and they also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk of suicidal behaviour. Direct expenditure in 2012/13 related to the production, design and printing of the guidelines which, in the main, was funded by the National Office of Suicide Prevention (N.O.S.P.) but involved a contribution of €3,740 from my Department's National Education Psychological Service. NEPS Psychologists are also raising awareness of the Guidelines at school level. In addition in the same period I had published, along with my colleague, Minister Fitzgerald, an Action Plan on Bullying which sets out twelve actions to help prevent and tackle bullying in primary and second level schools. Officials from my Department have already commenced work on the implementation of the actions. In particular, an awareness raising initiative on cyber bullying targeted at young people is already underway and my Department is supporting the Stand Up! Awareness Week Against Homophobic & Transphobic Bullying in second level schools which took place in March. I have allocated €500,000 to support the implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying. Actual expenditure in respect of 2013 will be known closer to year end. There are no substitution costs involved. My Department's National Behavioural Support Service afforded during 2012/13 post-primary school teachers an opportunity to train in the delivery of the 'Friends for Life' and 'My Friends Youth' programmes which are aimed at reducing anxiety and building resilience among students. For 2012/13 some 193 teachers from 93 schools received training in this regard at a cost of €91,193 (including teacher substitution costs).

Guidance Counselling

100. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that have sought guidance counselling concessionary hours arising from a critical incident in the school; and of these, the number that were granted extra hours over the course of the 2012/13 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40232/13]

101. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide in tabular format, the number of one to one guidance counselling hours received over the past five years in the secondary and further education sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40233/13]

102. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there have been cases over the 2012/13 academic year where teachers have been time-tabled to provide guidance counselling programmes despite not holding a recognised qualification in guidance counselling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40234/13]

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

Guidance is a whole school activity and it does not just involve the guidance counsellor. Under existing arrangements each school develops a school guidance plan as a means of supporting the needs of its students. Since September 2012 guidance provision is now being organised by school management from within the staffing schedule allocation. In this way principals have discretion to balance guidance needs with the pressures to provide subject choice. A framework document was published jointly by the Post Primary Management bodies and the NAPD (National Association of Principals & Deputies) in September, 2012 to provide guidance for school management in the allocation of teaching hours to guidance counselling in

post-primary schools in the context of the decision in Budget 2012 to withdraw the provision of ex-quota guidance hours to schools. This should be of assistance to schools in terms of how they maximise guidance provision. My Department helped shelter the impact for DEIS post-primary schools by improving their standard staffing allocations. All 195 second-level school in DEIS have been given targeted support by a more favourable staffing schedule of 18.25:1. This is a 0.75 point reduction compared to the existing PTR of 19:1 that applies in non fee-paying second-level schools (23:1 in fee-charging schools). My Department also has existing arrangements in place for providing short-term support to schools that are dealing with particularly acute incidents that arise due to tragic accidents, bereavements etc. Five schools were supported in this manner in the 2012/13 school year.

State Examinations Issues

103. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40263/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations including organising the holding of examinations, determining procedures in places where examinations are conducted including the supervision of examinations and making arrangements for the marking of work presented for examination. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

104. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a Student Universal Support Ireland grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [40280/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The independent Student Grants Appeals Board has received an appeal from the student referred to by the Deputy.

The Appeals Board aims to issue appeal determinations as promptly as possible and within the specified timeframe specified in the Student Support Act, 2011.

The student will be notified directly of the outcome by the Appeals Board.

Translation Services Issues

105. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will authorise secondary school pupils to translate public documents from English to Irish in view of the stream of revenue this would generate for schools and considering the commitment given in the Official Languages Act 2003 to publish official documents in both official languages; if this initiative will be included as part of the student's assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40292/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Curriculum is devised to place the needs of our students at the core of what we do and to ensure they have the best possible learning experiences and outcomes that are age appropriate. I don't consider this suggestion appropriate for second level students. Of course the students may consider the content of some of these documents but as they are official documents they require extremely sophisticated translation by professional translators.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the refusal of higher education grants in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40332/13]

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 first named student referred to by the Deputy, following an appeal to the SUSI Appeals Officer the original decision of the awarding authority was upheld and a decision letter issued on 23rd May 2013 stating that the student was ineligible to receive a grant. This student also applied for a grant for the academic year 2013/14. The application will be further reviewed when the outstanding documentation has been received.

In the case of the second named student referred to by the Deputy, following an appeal to the SUSI Appeals Officer the original decision of the awarding authority was upheld and a decision letter issued on 20th September 2013 stating that the student was 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 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. The relevant appeal form is available to download from www.studentfinance.ie.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if and when a higher education grant will be approved by Student Universal Support Ireland in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40333/13]

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, there is no record of the student having made an application under the Student Grant Scheme. The Deputy will appreciate that in the absence of all the details that would be contained in an individual application, it would not be possible to say whether a student would be eligible for funding under the Student Grant Scheme. In order to be assessed under the Student Grant Scheme, the student should complete an online application form and submit to SUSI, which is still accepting late applications. In order to be eligible for a grant, a student must meet certain criteria under nationality, residency, progression and means as set out in the Student Grant Scheme 2013.

Question No. 108 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

109. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers, political staff and communication staff employed by the Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40701/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The following table contains details of ministerial staff appointments made as at the 31st December in the years requested

by the Deputy:

Minister/Minister of State	Year	Special Adviser	Personal Assistant	Personal Secretary
Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D.	2013	2	1	1
Mr. Ciaran Cannon T.D.	2013	0	1	1
Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D.	2011	2	1	1
Mr. Ciaran Cannon T.D.	2011	0	1	1
Mr. John Bolland, T.D.	1981	2	1	1
Mr. Michael Keating	1981	0	1	1

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

110. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to the Department since the current Government came into office: the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40224/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question, I can confirm that my Department did not use any provider of public relations services since the formation of this Government.

National Monuments

111. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of visitors to the Desmond Banqueting Hall, Newcastle West during the years 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40259/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Visitor Numbers to Desmond Hall for 2011 and 2012 were 3,702 and 4,290 respectively. There have been 8,538 visitors to date to Desmond Hall in 2013. This large increase was due to a number of factors including a concerted local advertising campaign, an increased number of public events, excellent summer weather and better overall access to the site. The OPW National Monuments Service intends to continue with the strategy of engaging proactively with communities to ensure they encourage greater visitor footfall and facilitate more events at sites such as this nationwide.

Departmental Staff Data

112. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers, political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40314/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As my Department was established in July 2011, I cannot provide figures for 1981 in respect of this Department. The table below provides information for 2011 and 2013.

2011	-
Constituency Secretary	1
Parliamentary Assistant	1
Advisors	2
Programme Managers	0
Press Officers	1
Communication Staff	0

2013	-
Constituency Secretary	1
Parliamentary Assistant	1
Advisors	2
Programme Managers	0
Press Officers	1
Communication Staff	0

Peace and Reconciliation Programme

113. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Peace IV Programme will become operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40319/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The SEUPB is currently involved in drafting the Operational Programme for the PEACE IV Programme in close consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland and the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland.

The first consultation with stakeholders across the eligible regions including the Border Region of Ireland and Northern Ireland for the PEACE IV Programme ran from 28 August until 20 November 2012. Almost 1,000 people attended these consultation events.

Once drafting of the Operational Programme has concluded a second public consultation process will be held in late 2013 and will invite all stakeholders to offer their views on the draft Programme.

It is anticipated that the draft Operational Programmes for PEACE IV will be presented to the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government in early 2014. Formal submission to the EU Commission will take place following the agreement of the two Governments.

Significant progress was made by the Irish Presidency on the Cohesion Legislative Package. However, negotiations are continuing with the Council and European Parliament to finalise the package. Until such time as agreement is reached, operational programmes cannot be agreed with the European Commission.

Question No. 114 withdrawn.

Job Creation Data

115. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the estimated number of full-time permanent jobs which Westmeath County Enterprise Board, Westmeath Community Development, Industrial Development Authority (Midlands) and Enterprise

Ireland (Midlands) has been involved in supporting in each of the main employment sectors, in the years from 2008 to date in 2013. [40152/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Westmeath County Enterprise Board operate under the aegis of my Department. Westmeath Community Development falls under the remit of my colleague, Mr Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Employment data for Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland is collected annually as part of the Forfás Annual Employment Survey. Therefore, figures for 2013 will not be available until early 2014. Full time employment figures in respect of Agency assisted companies in the main employment sectors in the Midlands Region, for the years 2008 to 2012 inclusive, are outlined in Table 1 accompanying this reply.

The estimated number of full-time jobs associated with the financial and non-financial supports provided by Westmeath County Enterprise Board (CEB) for 2010, 2011 and 2012 are set out in Table 2 accompanying this reply. Statistical information for the CEBs is collated on an annual basis so details in relation to 2013 are not yet available.

Prior to 2010, CEBs could report only on the number of jobs existing in CEB supported companies and the measurement of job creation was whether this figure had increased or decreased since the previous year.

Table 1 – Full Time Employment in Agency Assisted Companies in the Midlands Region

-	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Enterprise Ireland	9,558	7,791	7,516	7,433	7,538
Manufacturing	8,741	7,221	6,885	6,712	6,750
International Services	335	282	258	234	243
Other	482	288	373	487	545
IDA Ireland	4,202	3,787	3,502	3,510	3,765
Manufacturing	3,378	2,947	2,567	2,480	2,586
International Services	824	840	935	1,030	1,179

Table 2 - Westmeath County Enterprise Board

-	2010	2011	2012
No. of Jobs	166	188	130

Question No. 116 withdrawn.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

117. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to the Department

since the current Government came into office; the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40223/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The names and business addresses of the providers of public relations services used by my Department and the Offices of my Department, the details of the services supplied by each and the expenditure on each since 9 March 2011 to date are as follows:

Year	Name and Address of PR Services Provider	Details of Services Supplied	Cost
2011	Barberry Limited trading as Keating & Associates, 19 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2.	To provide NERA with Communications Services (including PR; Media Monitoring; advising on the design, content and production of reports & brochures and assisting with website content).	€18,770
2012	Barberry Limited trading as Keating & Associates, 19 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2.	To provide NERA with Communications Services (including PR; Media Monitoring; advising on the design, content and production of reports & brochures and assisting with website content).	€5,268
YTD 2013	Barberry Limited trading as Keating & Associates, 19 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2.	To provide NERA with Communications Services (including PR; Media Monitoring; advising on the design, content and production of reports & brochures and assisting with website content).	€2,076
	MRPA Kinman Communications trading as MKC Communications Limited, The Archway, 4A Lower Pembroke Street, Dublin 2.	To provide the Department with Press and Media Relations Services for the Irish Presidency of the EU. (This was a once off exercise/expenditure due to Presidency events)	€76,480

Employment Appeals Tribunal

118. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to any difficulties regarding the enforcement of decisions made by the Employment Appeals Tribunal, particularly relating to the payment of money owed; the penalties for employers who refuse to abide by the decision of the Employment Appeals Tribunal and if these penalties are enforced; if he is willing to take action to strengthen the remit of the Employment Appeals Tribunal relating to the enforcement of decisions made against employers, particularly with regard to enforcing the payment of wages and entitlements owed to employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40258/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware

of the difficulties experienced on occasion by workers in seeking to enforce awards that have been made in their favour by all of the Employment Rights bodies including the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT).

In terms of the enforcement of EAT awards the holder of an award or their trade union may seek to enforce the award themselves through the Circuit Court or they may seek, in most cases, the assistance of the Minister to have this process carried out on their behalf. This involves the use of the Enforcement Services Unit of the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) to have such awards enforced if appropriate through the civil courts.

In practice upon receipt of a request, NERA will endeavour to engage with the employer to seek compliance with the relevant determination. Should the employer refuse to comply with a determination, NERA may initiate legal proceedings, in the Minister's name. In deciding whether or not to intervene, NERA has regard to the amount of the award, the potential for achieving a favourable outcome for the claimant and the scale of the costs likely to be incurred in doing so. The enforcement of a Circuit Court order in these circumstances is the responsibility of the relevant County Sheriff and my Department has no capacity to intervene.

Where an employer is legally insolvent (liquidation, receivership, bankruptcy etc.) the employee may be entitled to seek redress, through payment of such an award, from the State under the Insolvency Payments Scheme which is operated by the Department of Social Protection. Specifically, in respect of EAT determinations in cases of Redundancy Appeals, where an employer fails to pay the amount awarded; an employee has recourse to the Social Insurance Fund.

I acknowledge that the system of enforcement of awards that has developed over the years has become complex and in some cases involves very long delays. In this context and in relation to industrial relations and employment rights generally I have initiated a root-and-branch reform with the objective of establishing a world-class Workplace Relations Service.

I believe that for a workplace relations system to have credibility it must be supported by proportionate, effective and efficient compliance and enforcement measures. The current system of enforcement of employment rights awards is cumbersome, expensive and not fit for purpose. For this reason, I am proposing to make provision in the Workplace Relations Bill for a range of enhanced compliance measures, including the use of Compliance Notices, Fixed Charge Notices and a new mechanism for enforcing awards of the WRC Adjudicators and Labour Court Determinations. I am confident that the introduction of these measures will provide for more proportionate, efficient and effective enforcement of employment law.

Question No. 119 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

120. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers, political and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40706/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to 2011 and currently in 2013 is as set out in tabular format below. However, in the time available to my Department, it has not been possible to assemble the information in respect of 1981. I will, of course, arrange to supply the Deputy with the 1981 information as soon as possible.

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation	Currently in 2013	end-2011
	1 Special Adviser	1 Special Adviser
	1 Press Adviser	1 Press Adviser
	1 Parliamentary and Policy Adviser	1 Parliamentary and Policy Adviser
	1 Personal Secretary	1 Personal Secretary
Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation	2 Civilian Drivers	2 Civilian Drivers
	1 Personal Assistant	1 Personal Assistant
	1 Personal Secretary	1 Personal Secretary
Minister of State for Research & Innovation	2 Civilian Drivers	2 Civilian Drivers
	1 Personal Assistant	1 Personal Assistant
	1 Personal Secretary	1 Personal Secretary
Minister of State for Small Business	2 Civilian Drivers	2 Civilian Drivers

Question No. 121 withdrawn.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

122. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40131/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on the 17th June 2013. The application was disallowed as it was considered that the child does not meet the eligibility criteria for the allowance. A letter issued on the 19th July 2013 advising of the decision.

In the case of an application which is refused on medical grounds the applicant may submit additional information and/or ask for the decision to be reviewed or they may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within twenty one days.

Social Welfare Appeals Issues

123. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 695 of 18 September 2013, the additional documentation that is outstanding in order to process this application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40137/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the representations submitted by the Deputy have been accepted as grounds of appeal in respect of the person concerned. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based

on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

It is open to the person concerned to submit any additional information that will assist his appeal which will be brought to the attention of the Appeal Officer who is assigned this case.

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

Job Initiatives

124. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of jobs created to date under the jobsplus scheme; the cost of the scheme to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40143/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobsPlus which was launched on 8th July 2013, is a new incentive to encourage employers to recruit and employ persons who have been unemployed for long periods. This incentive replaced this Department's Employer Job PRSI Incentive Scheme and Revenue's Job Assist Scheme. Subject to meeting the eligibility criteria and creating a full-time position, employers will receive a direct cash incentive over two years if the person they hire has been unemployed for a prolonged period. The level of payment is higher where a person who is recruited and retained has been unemployed for a longer period.

Up to Friday 20th September 2013, the Department had received and processed applications from 1,121 employers. Over the same period, applications from 2,125 jobseekers have been received. Of these, 1,577 applications have been deemed eligible with 1,029 qualifying on the basis of being 24 months unemployed and, therefore, attracting a payment to an employer of €10,000 paid over two years. The remaining 548 applications are eligible for a payment of €7,500 over two years, having been unemployed for between 12 and 24 months.

At present, 400 eligible employers and eligible jobseekers have been matched. Of these, 250 employment contracts commenced in July and August and grant payments in respect of 236 cases will be made before the end of September. The projected outlay for these contracts is expected to cost under €400,000 in 2013. The initiative is expected to operate on a pilot basis initially, with €21.25 million allocated to cover costs over three years.

Further information regarding the scheme can be found at www.jobsplus.ie.

Job Initiatives

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of the reduced rate of PRSI as part of the 2011 jobs initiative in each year since its inception; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40145/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The following are the projected costs at the time of the implementation of the measures in July 2011:

Measure	Yield/Cost 2011 €m	Yield/Cost Full Year €m
Halving of the lower rate of PRSI until end 2013 on jobs that pay up to €356 per week	-85	In 2012:-190 In 2013:-183 In 2014:-15
Abolition of employer PRSI on share based remuneration	-9.5	-17.7 in each year thereafter.

Question No. 126 withdrawn.

Garda Vetting Applications

127. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to allow the acceptance of statutory declarations due to the delays in the processing of Garda vetting applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40151/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Approval to work, or train to work, with children and/or vulnerable adults is granted upon successful completion of the recruitment and selection process which includes appropriate vetting checks with the Garda Central Vetting Unit. No individual may work or train with children and/or vulnerable adults pending the outcome of the Garda vetting process. Applicants already sign a declaration of good character as part of the application process. The protection of children is paramount and, therefore, a statutory statement will not suffice.

However, it is important to point out that there has been a substantial reduction in the turn-around time in the vetting of applications for Community Employment and backlogs are being reduced.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

128. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which the Department considers criminality and anti social behaviour in awarding rent allowance, and if, conscious of the fact that some local authorities, prior to allocating social housing, carry out some level of vetting on applicants, the Department is in a position to similarly assess rent allowance applicants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40163/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. There are currently over 82,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million for 2013. In the case of private rented accommodation, tenancy arrangements involve a contract between the landlord and tenant and tenant behaviour is a matter for the landlord in the first instance. There are a number of avenues open to landlords in such cases, including the mediation service for landlords and tenants operated by the Private Residential Tenancies Board and/or recourse to the Garda Síochána and/or the Courts in relation to the enforcement of the law in dealing with anti-social or criminal behaviour. If necessary, the landlord may seek termination of the tenancy which, if affected, would result in the termination of rent supplement. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to review the operation of the rent supplement scheme with a view to introducing a code of conduct for rent supplement eligibility similar to that which

operates for local authority tenants. The purpose of this review is to ensure that tenants who are receiving long term support from the State under the rent supplement scheme are subject to the same type of anti-social behaviour regime as local authority tenants. The most appropriate way for this to happen is for local authorities to take over responsibility for meeting the accommodation needs of these individuals, which would also result in these individuals being subject to the local authority vetting procedures. The Department is currently working closely with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in transferring responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to persons with a long term housing need from this Department to local authorities using a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). It is intended that testing of HAP will be carried out in selected local authorities during 2014 subject to the enactment of the relevant legislation.

Social welfare legislation already provides the Department with the authority to refuse, suspend or terminate payment of a rent supplement in the case of a person who has been required to deliver up possession of a dwelling provided by a housing authority or an approved body where the reasons for that requirement include anti-social behaviour or the interests of good estate management.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

129. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the rationale behind the recent decision to impose an obligation on those moving from a VTOS payment to a back to education allowance, BETA, payment to apply for a jobseeker's payment before being assessed for BTEA; if she will acknowledge this change is causing undue stress to those wishing to move to a BTEA in 2013; if she will commit to enable those persons in the VTOS system to move seamlessly to a BTEA payment and restrict the change to new entrants to the schemes (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40167/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Back To Education Allowance (BTEA) is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to support jobseekers and other categories of social protection payment recipients to improve their skill base and re-enter the labour market. Recipients of the allowance must be in receipt of a qualifying social protection payment immediately prior to the commencement of a course of study.

Changes were introduced to the BTEA as a result of measures agreed in the context of the last Budget, the pressure on resources and following the implementation of a number of recommendations arising from the review of employment support schemes, which was published in January 2013 and was followed by a stakeholder consultation. As a general principle, BTEA will only be considered where a prior entitlement to a social protection payment has been established. BTEA is not intended as an alternative funding mechanism for the pursuit of full-time education, given that options already exist under the student grant schemes operated and funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

The provision that allowed a person on Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and certain other schemes to transfer directly to BTEA ceased in line with the review findings mentioned above. A person participating on VTOS must now establish an underlying entitlement to a DSP payment in order to qualify for BTEA. These changes will ensure that the main source of public income support for persons attending further and higher education are the means-tested student grant schemes. It will also lessen the risk that BTEA may become an alternative funding stream for accessing further and higher education courses involving substantial higher costs for the Exchequer and leading to inequalities for students.

The priority for this Department is that BTEA will be focused, targeted and suitable for the needs of the unemployed and the labour market in the future. In this context it is worth noting that the numbers availing of BTEA and the associated cost of the scheme has risen dramatically in recent years. Numbers for the current 2012/13 academic year are 25,961 which represents a 191% increase on the 2007/08 numbers.

Carer's Allowance Payments

130. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the half rate carer's allowance will be protected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40176/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): No decisions have yet been taken by the government in relation to overall social welfare expenditure for next year, and any such decision in relation to specific social welfare schemes will only be considered in the context of framing Budget 2014.

Employment Support Services

131. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on the establishment of an Intreo office in Bray, County Wicklow, due to be operational in late 2013; the services that will be available at the office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40178/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As the Deputy will be aware, Intreo is the new integrated employment activation and supports service model delivering on the 'Pathways to Work' policy. The 'Pathways to Work' policy commits to the provision of more regular and on-going engagement and greater targeting of activation places and job opportunities for those who are unemployed. It also aims to increase engagement and incentivise employers to provide more jobs for people who are unemployed.

The delivery of the Intreo service comprises a number of elements. The main elements being:

- i. The integration of the various welfare decision making processes to speed up decision making and minimise recourse to supplementary welfare payments.
- ii. The introduction of a profiling process to capture the unique characteristics and service requirements of each jobseeker.
- iii. The implementation of a systematic group activation engagement and one to one process based on clients' profiles.
- iv. The delivery of a 'one-stop-shop' service from an integrated office location.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

132. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an invalidity pension appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40197/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 30th May 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department

of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

If the means of the person concerned are insufficient to meet his needs he should contact the Community Welfare Services regarding his possible entitlement to Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

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

Social Insurance Issues

133. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a detailed explanation regarding credits for past periods of employment for the benefit of receiving social welfare; the lapse periods that are currently in operation and the reason they exist; if a person is permitted to buy back their credits; if she will provide a detailed outline of all the rules in place; when each of the rules currently in place came into effect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40216/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): PRSI credited contributions (“credits”) are an integral part of the social insurance system. For the most part they are linked to having an underlying entitlement to a social welfare payment while temporarily detached from the labour force or having entitlement to statutory leave e.g. parental or maternity leave. The primary purpose of PRSI credits is to secure social welfare benefits and pensions of employees by covering gaps in insurance where they are not in a position to pay PRSI such as during periods of unemployment, illness, etc.

In order to qualify for credits, a person must first have entered insurable employment - he or she must have paid at least one PRSI contribution as an employed contributor. Subsequently, insured workers may be awarded credits if they claim a social welfare payment because they are out of work, or they are ill or incapacitated, or if they are engaged in certain training or educational courses. If at any stage in their working life, a person has no PRSI paid or credited contributions for two full tax years, they cannot be awarded credits again until they return to work and pay PRSI contributions for at least 26 weeks.

The PRSI class at which a contributor paid his or her last PRSI contribution while working, determines the type of credits which may be awarded. Those whose last paid PRSI contribution was at Class A may be awarded Class A credits. Those who paid PRSI, for example, at Class D (modified rate contributor) may only be awarded Class D credits.

Credits do not, on their own, give an individual entitlement to social insurance benefits. They may, however, assist insured workers to qualify for various social insurance benefits. While the contribution conditions applying to the various social insurance schemes can vary, a claimant must, in general, have:

(a) paid a minimum number of weekly contributions (ranging from 52 for short term benefits to 520 in the case of pensions), and

(b) a certain number of contributions or credits over a specified period. In the case of short term benefits the number of contributions or credits relates to the relevant tax year. In the case of long-term benefits (e.g. pensions) this is on the basis of the yearly average number of contributions and/or credits over the person’s working life.

Credits cannot be used to satisfy condition (a). Thus, credits are only of value to a person who satisfies this “paid contribution” test.

The system of credits and the conditions governing the award of credits have evolved over a number of years. When the consolidated system of social insurance was set up under the Social Insurance Act 1952, it was based on the principle that once a person became insured under the Act, that individual would be able to maintain their status as an insured person and their entitlements to various benefits of the system. Since then the system of credits has developed in line with the development of new schemes and payments. The current legislative provisions governing the award of credits are contained in S.I. No. 312 of 1996. Further details relating to credits and the conditions applying to the various social insurance schemes can be found on the Department’s website www.welfare.ie.

Individuals are not permitted to buy back credits in relation to an earlier period of their working life. They may, however, be in a position to establish an underlying entitlement to credits for that period of time. Individuals, who cease to be covered by compulsory social insurance, may opt to protect their existing long-term social insurance pension entitlements by becoming insured on a voluntary basis and paying voluntary contributions. A person who wishes to become a voluntary contributor must satisfy certain contribution conditions and must apply to become a voluntary contributor within 12 months after the end of the contribution year in which he/she was last compulsorily insured.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

134. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Social Protection the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to the Department since the current Government came into office: the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40225/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department’s press office deals with all media queries and public relations matters. No money has been spent by my Department on public relations consultancy during the period in question.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 451 of 2 July 2013, in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, if the relevant medical report from the most recent medical assessment on 27 May 2013 in Oisín House has been requested in respect of a pending appeal; if it is recognised that a person with such a condition is likely to be unacceptable to an employer on health and safety grounds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40247/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an invalidity pension appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 9th May 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

All documentary evidence, including the most recent medical assessment referred to by the Deputy, will be brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer who is assigned this case.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Pro-

tection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Household Benefits Scheme

136. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if, in view of recent figures that almost one in ten persons aged 65 and over is at risk of poverty and almost half of older persons living alone are in the bottom 40% of the income bracket CSO 2013, she will reverse changes to the household benefit package; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40256/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The recently published Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) Thematic Report on the Elderly shows that, in 2011, as in 2010, the elderly had the lowest at risk of poverty rate when compared with other age groups. This was in contrast to 2004 when the elderly had the highest at risk of poverty rate. The at risk of poverty rate for people over 65 fell from 27.1% in 2004 to 9.7% in 2011. There was no statistically significant changes in the rate between 2009, 2010 and 2011.

The Government's target in relation to consistent poverty for older people has been achieved as can be seen in the data which shows that those aged 65 and over had the lowest consistent poverty rate at 1.9% in 2011 when compared with those aged 18-64 (6.8%) and those aged 0-17 (9.3%). Similar patterns could be observed in 2009 and 2010.

The Government has had to make very difficult decisions in recent years. However, at all times, pensioners have been prioritised and there have been no cuts in their primary payments.

In 2013, my Department will spend an estimated €284 million on the household benefits scheme, providing some 410,000 customers with a package of benefits worth almost €700 per year. In addition, during the winter, some 410,000 customers will receive the fuel allowance of €20 per week at a cost of €211 million. As those elderly who live alone and those aged over 80 are among the cohort more at risk of poverty, my Department provides an additional weekly living alone increase of €7.60 and an over 80s increase of €10.

I am not in a position to reverse the changes to the household benefits package. There are considerable challenges ahead to protect, as far as possible, the key income supports provided by my Department which impact in some way on the lives of almost every person in the State. As part of the deliberative process for the budget, my Department will analyse all schemes, and in so far as possible, the distributive and poverty impact of possible welfare changes. No decisions have been made at this time with regard to the upcoming Budget.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

137. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on an appeal for farm assist; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40286/13]

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

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

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

138. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Social Protection if, having awarded rent allowance to a person, the Department carries out any form of monitoring to ensure that the person conforms to the terms of the scheme with no subletting or co-habiting taking place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40294/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. There are approximately 82,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million for 2013. Control is an integral part of the day-to-day administration of the rent supplement scheme. Where a recipient's circumstances change, they must inform the officer dealing with their rent supplement claim who will determine if the change affects their on-going entitlement to the payment. There are a number of operational controls in place to ensure that payment of rent supplement does not continue to those who no longer have an entitlement such as regular review of claims and warning reports issuing to officers where there is a change in the recipients circumstances which would prompt a review of entitlement. Reviews of claims are generally carried out once to twice yearly, when new information becomes available or more frequently where the risk of overpayment is high. Reviews of rent supplement also involve third party verification by landlords and may include home visits if necessary. In 2012 the Department introduced new powers of enquiry to landlords which allow staff to formally request landlords to provide information in respect of their rent supplement tenants, principally to verify the agreed rent and existence of the tenancy. This measure further improves both the governance and oversight arrangements in place.

It is also open to any landlord to bring to the attention of the Department any instance where they suspect that a tenant is receiving payment in respect of accommodation where they no longer reside. Where the Department becomes aware that a person is not using rent supplement to meet the accommodation costs at the address provided, payment of the supplement is suspended and the matter investigated.

Social Welfare Overpayments

139. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection in the event where the Department has assessed that a person owes the Department a sum of money as a result of an overpayment associated with customer error and where that person subsequently dies, if the amount due is collected from the person's estate or is the liability rescinded on the death; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40311/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Overpayments arise in cases where individuals receive social welfare payments to which they are not entitled.

People who have received an overpayment from the Department have a liability under law to refund the overpayment (Section 338 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005 (as amended) refers). They have received money to which they were not entitled and my Department has a responsibility to ensure that all overpayments are recovered in full.

An overpayment will remain on record until it is fully recovered. Currently, my Department does not apply interest or penalties on the amounts owing. Recovery can be pursued by deducting from all future entitlements up to pension and following death, where an estate remains. Where there is no estate in respect of a deceased debtor, the debt is rescinded.

Questions - Written Answers
Farm Assist Scheme Data

140. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total amount paid on farm assist claims in 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; the total number of claimants in each of those years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40312/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is collated by the Department annually for inclusion in the Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services report which is laid before the Dáil when published and copies are lodged in the Oireachtas library. Furthermore these reports are available to the public at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx.

I enclose for the Deputy's convenience a tabular statement detailing the number of persons in receipt of farm assist and the provisional cost of the scheme for 2010, 2011, 2012 and at the 31st of August 2013.

-	2010	2011	2012	31st August 2013
Farm Assist Recipients	10,714	11,333	11,162	10,601
Expenditure	€110,931,000	€113,724,000	€108,170,000 (Provisional)	€67,777,000 (Provisional)

National Internship Scheme Places

141. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exception may be made to the JobBridge scheme for an extension of an internship in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork in view of the recent announcement that interns can now undertake placements for a duration of 18 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40318/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): On 18 September, I announced that the maximum cumulative duration of internships would be extended to 18 months. The maximum duration of individual internships will remain 9 months. Individuals will be able to avail of up to 3 internships. However, individuals will be permitted to undertake only one internship with a particular Host Organisation.

These changes reflect both the recommendations contained in the independent evaluation of JobBridge published by the Taoiseach and myself on 1 May 2013, and a significant demand from interns and other individuals made directly to me. This change will be of significant benefit to jobseekers as it will provide jobseekers who may be dissatisfied with their placement more flexibility in finding a suitable alternative placement.

However, those changes have not yet come into force. When they do come into force it will be announced on the Home Page of the JobBridge website www.jobbridge.ie. In the meantime, the Department is not in a position to make exceptions to the Scheme criteria currently in force.

Question No. 142 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when a

decision in respect of eligibility for invalidity pension will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40356/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Invalidity pension is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the contribution conditions.

This department received a claim for invalidity pension for the person concerned on 8 August 2011. The medical evidence provided by the claimant in support of her claim was examined by a medical assessor who was of the opinion, based on the evidence provided, that the person concerned was not eligible for invalidity pension as she did not satisfy the medical criteria. The application for invalidity pension was disallowed by a deciding officer. The person in question was notified of this decision and the reason for it on 14 April 2012.

Further medical evidence was subsequently received from the claimant on several separate dates in the period between October 2012 and April 2013 with requests that the decision be reviewed. This additional evidence, along with the original information, was evaluated by a different medical assessor who also expressed the opinion that the person concerned does not satisfy the medical criteria. The deciding officer has confirmed the original decision and notified the claimant of the outcome on 12 June 2013, advising her of her right to appeal the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The person concerned appealed the decision and submitted further medical evidence with her appeal. This additional evidence, along with the original information, was evaluated by a different medical assessor on 5 September who expressed the opinion that the person concerned does not satisfy the medical criteria required for invalidity pension. Accordingly the original decision of the deciding officer remained unchanged and a submission has been sent to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office for determination of the person's concerned entitlement to an invalidity pension.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Appeals

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when supplementary welfare payment will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40357/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who decided to hold an oral hearing of this case on 25 July 2013.

Prior to the hearing, Citizens Information Centre (CIC), Carlow, submitted a request for a copy of the file of the person concerned under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Acts, 1997 and 2003 and also requested an interpreter to attend the hearing. In view of the time constraints the oral hearing was postponed and re-scheduled for 11 September 2013.

CIC, Carlow, who are representing the person concerned, again contacted the Appeals Office and advised that they were not available to attend the hearing on the 11 September 2013 and requested the postponement of the hearing for an alternative date.

The Appeals Officer agreed to postpone the second scheduled hearing and it is intended to convene the oral hearing in late October 2013.

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

Child Benefit Applications

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when child benefit will be restored to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40358/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child Benefit is paid up to and including the month of a child's 16th birthday, and continues to the month of the 18th birthday provided the child is in full-time education. In order for payment to continue after the age of sixteen, it is necessary for the school to certify that the child is in full time education and will be until the age of eighteen.

In the case of the person concerned, a completed application form has been received and child benefit has been restored. A payment notification has issued her and payment for the months from July 2013 to October 2013 will be lodged to her nominated bank account on Tuesday, 1 October 2013.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when back to school allowance will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40359/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the Department's records there is no trace of receipt of an application for the back to school clothing and footwear allowance from the person concerned. An application form has issued to her. On receipt of the completed form, her entitlement to the allowance will be established.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when jobseeker's allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40360/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A review of this case will be undertaken when all requested documentation has been submitted by the person concerned.

Guardian's Payment Applications

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when payment in respect of guardianship will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40361/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A claim for Guardian's Payment (Contributory) was received from the person concerned on 22nd July 2013 and is being processed. Further information has been requested from the claimant and when this is received, the person's entitlement will be decided and he will be notified of the outcome without delay.

Child Benefit Applications

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when child benefit will be restored to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40362/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child Benefit is paid up to and

including the month of a child's 16th birthday and continues to the month of the 18th birthday provided the child is in full-time education. In order for payment to continue after the age of sixteen, it is necessary for the school to certify that the child is in full time education and will be until the age of eighteen.

In this case, payment of Child Benefit was made up to and including June 2013, the end of the academic year, when the child completed the Leaving Certificate.

An application form issued to the person concerned in August to confirm that the child is returning to full time education. This form has not yet been returned and should now be completed if the child has returned to full-time education. Arrears due from July 2013 will then be paid and payment will continue to October 2013, the month of the child's 18th birthday.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when rent support will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40363/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no record of a rent supplement application in respect of the person concerned. If the person concerned wishes to make an application for rent supplement she should submit same to the Mid Leinster Rents Unit, PO Box 11758, Dublin 24.

Question No. 151 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

152. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the number of advisors, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by her Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40708/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The following table shows the position in the Department for the years 2011 and 2013.

Position	2011	2013
Special Advisor	1	1
Press Advisor	1	1
Personal Assistant	1	1
Personal Secretary	1	1
Civilian Driver	2	2
Press Office staff	4*	4*
Programme Manager	Nil	Nil

* The staff serving in the Press Office are Departmental staff.

Details sought in respect of the specific posts identified by the Deputy are not available for 1981.

Road Improvement Schemes

153. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht his plans to reintroduce the bothair aise scheme for residents in the Gaeltacht area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40130/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): In view of the very limited budget available and in the context of the priorities outlined in the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, there are currently no plans to re-open this scheme in the short to medium-term.

Heritage Council Expenditure

154. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will ensure that the Heritage Councils grant scheme is restored to enable funding to continue to the Irish Wildlife Trust which operates on a shoestring budget and plays a huge role in protecting Ireland's wildlife [40191/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The level of funding allocated from my Department's Vote to the Heritage Council is €4,496,000 in 2013. In addition, the Heritage Council has been allocated €1.6million from my Department's share of the Environment Fund. It is a matter for the Council, within certain parameters, to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports in 2013 and future years, having regard to competing priorities for limited resources.

The scope to provide additional funding for the protection, conservation and development of the State's heritage is constrained by the current national economic difficulties and the significant reduction in the public finances. However, my Department will continue to provide funding for the protection, conservation and development of our built and natural heritage, in so far as resources allow. The allocation to the Heritage Council in 2014 will be subject to the normal budgetary processes.

Question No. 155 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

156. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisors, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40697/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established on 2 June 2011. Accordingly, the details requested by the Deputy in respect of certain categories of staff employed by my Department are set out, for 2011 and 2013 only, in the table below.

-	Minister	Minister	Minister of State	Minister of State
-	2011	2013	2011	2013
Special Adviser	2	2	0	0
Programme Manager	0	0	0	0
Media Adviser	0	0	0	0
Personal Secretary	1	1	1	1
Personal Assistant	1	1	1	1

Energy Schemes Data

157. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the level of funding which householders applied for under the better energy homes scheme and the better energy warmer homes scheme in 2012 and the amount available to the schemes in 2013. [40157/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Better Energy Homes and the Better Energy Warmer Homes schemes are administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) under the Better Energy Programme.

The Better Energy Homes scheme provides financial support to homeowners towards the installation of energy efficiency measures, whereas Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme delivers energy efficiency measures to low-income households vulnerable to energy poverty.

It is not possible to provide details on the value of applications made under the Better Energy Homes scheme as data is not retained for applications that do not proceed to the grant draw-down stage. However, the value of grants provided to householders under the scheme in 2012 was €24,577,211. While the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme is not a grant scheme, the amount spent on energy efficiency measures for low-income households in 2012 was €20,538,101.

The amount currently allocated to the Better Energy Homes scheme in 2013 is €13 million, while €24 million has been allocated to the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme. These allocations are kept under constant review to ensure the available allocations are expended.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Applications

158. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason there is a substantial delay in the processing and administering of the better energy warmer homes scheme for low income households vulnerable to energy poverty; if there has been any improvement made in the administration of the scheme since last year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40158/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme on behalf of my Department. The scheme provides a range of energy efficiency measures to low income households that are vulnerable to energy poverty. The scheme is primarily delivered through Community Based Organisations (CBO) and a panel of private sector contractors. Homes are also addressed on an area-based approach through a separate strand. Measures available include draught proofing, attic insulation, lagging jackets for hot water tanks, low energy light bulbs and cavity wall insulation and are free of charge to the customer.

Eligible homeowners apply for the scheme either directly through SEAI or via their local CBO, although the SEAI maintains a national waiting list in order to ensure appropriate national coverage. While CBOs typically control delivery within their specific area, where the SEAI identify delays private contractors are asked to assist in order to reduce waiting times. My Department has been advised by the SEAI that there were 3,036 homes on the waiting list on 23 September 2013. This is broken down as follows:

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Total Number of Applications	Outstanding Applications (Homes not fully completed yet)	Status: Not yet Surveyed	Status: Survey Completed	Status: Allocated to Contractor for Works	Status: With CBO for Delivery
2011	26,573	4	0	0	4	0
2012	17,346	227	4	10	121	92
2013	9,572	2,805	866	139	581	1,219

There was a significant increase in the volume of applications received over the period from 2009 - 2011, which led to an increase in the waiting list in certain instances. However, as the above table clearly indicates, the number of outstanding applications has greatly reduced in recent years. The four homes on the waiting list from 2011 have been allocated to contractors for delivery. The oldest application is on one of the Aran islands and this will be completed shortly in conjunction with an SEAI Area based project currently under way on the islands.

There are a number of ways in which my Department is working with the SEAI to improve the overall delivery of the scheme. During 2013, the SEAI improved its reporting capability to ensure that they are fully aware of any significant delays in the delivery of the scheme. The waiting list is reviewed on a weekly basis, in conjunction with my Department. Additionally, measures were put in place to ensure there was no break in CBO contracts during the transition from 2012 to 2013, and therefore no break in service as was the case in previous years. This measure ensured that contractors were operational much earlier than in previous years. Furthermore, various operational and IT related improvements have been made to improve delivery of the scheme and plans are being developed to introduce additional improvements to service delivery.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

159. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to his Department since the current Government came into office: the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40219/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The information which the Deputy requested is outlined in tabular format for the years 2011 to date in 2013.

Company Name and Business Address	Amount Spent on Public Relations	Purpose of Consultancy
Morrow Communications Ltd Hanwood House Pavillion Office Park Kinnegar Drive Holywood BT18 1JQ Co Down	€72,050 (excl VAT)	Provision of services in relation to outreach in rural communities with respect to low flying geophysical survey and soil geochemical survey.
Murray Consultants Latin Hall, Golden Lane Dublin 8	€8,349.00	Media Services to the Department.

Company Name and Business Address	Amount Spent on Public Relations	Purpose of Consultancy
McConnells Advertising Agency 20 Northumberland Road Ballsbridge Dublin 4	€119,602	Public information campaign on the Digital Switchover moving from analogue TV to Digital TV.
Communications Consultants Ireland 82 Burnaby Heights Greystones Co Wicklow	€1,797	Management of two Public Information Meetings on new Inland Fisheries Legislation

Broadband Services Provision

160. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to improve broadband in rural areas (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40235/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Ireland's telecommunications market has been fully liberalised since 1999 in accordance with the requirements of binding EU Directives. The market has since developed into a well-regulated market, supporting a multiplicity of commercial operators, providing services over a diverse range of technology platforms. Details of broadband services available in each County, including County Kerry, can be found on ComReg's website at www.callcosts.ie.

The State can only intervene to ensure access to broadband services in areas where the competitive market fails to deliver such services, as in the case of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS) and the Rural Broadband Scheme. Broadband services under the NBS are available since October 2010 from the NBS service provider, "3", to persons with a fixed residence or fixed business in the designated NBS Electoral Divisions. The combination of private investment and State interventions means that Ireland has met the EU Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe target of having a basic broadband service available to all areas by 2013. The area referred to in the Deputy's question is serviced under the NBS.

The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published last Autumn, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses, including those in County Kerry. This will be achieved by providing:

- a policy and regulatory framework that assists in accelerating and incentivising commercial investment, and
- a State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest.

Since the publication of the Plan, investments by the commercial sector are underway in both fixed line and wireless high speed broadband services. In order to progress the State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest, a full procurement process must be designed and EU State Aids approval must be obtained. My Department is engaged in a comprehensive mapping exercise of the current and anticipated investment by the commercial sector to identify where the market is expected to deliver high speed broadband services over the coming years. The results of this mapping exercise will inform the level of

Government intervention that may be required and the precise areas that need to be targeted in the State-led investment as envisaged in the National Broadband Plan. Intensive technical, financial and legal preparations, including stakeholder engagement, are ongoing. The procurement process for the approved intervention will be carried out in accordance with EU and Irish procurement rules and it is expected that it will be launched in 2014. Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, I am committed to ensuring that all parts of Ireland have access to high speed broadband, with a view to ensuring that all citizens and businesses can participate fully in a digitally enabled society.

Energy Prices

161. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason and the basis on which the Energy Regulator decided to deregulate ESB energy prices at 60% market share notwithstanding the conventional wisdom that in order for competition to work best in this sector for the benefit of customers no generator should have in excess of a 40% share; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40251/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Responsibility for the regulation of the retail electricity market is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), which is an independent statutory body. These powers are granted to the CER under the Electricity Regulation Act of 1999 and subsequent Irish and European legislation. The CER has regulated the tariffs of the incumbent electricity supplier since 2000. With strong growth in competition in recent years, the CER decided to cease regulation of the domestic tariffs of Electric Ireland from April 2011. This followed the deregulation of the business markets on 1 October, 2010. I have no statutory function in the regulation of electricity prices.

Energy Prices

162. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason and the basis on which the Energy Regulator decided to deregulate Bord Gáis energy prices at 55% market share notwithstanding the conventional wisdom that in order for competition to work best in this sector for the benefit of customers no generator should have in excess of a 40% share; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40252/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Responsibility for the regulation of gas markets is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) which is an independent statutory body. These regulatory powers are granted to the CER under the Gas (Interim) (Regulation) Act 2002 and subsequent Irish and European legislation. Ireland's gas market, both wholesale and retail, is characterised by increasing competition, regulated by the CER. Since 1 October 2011, the only segment of the market where retail gas prices are regulated by the CER is Bord Gáis Energy's residential customer prices. The Deputy will be aware that a sale process is in progress under which the energy supply business of Bórd Gais Eireann will transfer to the private sector. Prices in the unregulated parts of the retail gas market are wholly commercial, are set by the suppliers and are variable in accordance with supplier offerings.

The CER has published a roadmap setting out the criteria that must be met to allow it to deregulate the residential gas market. The criteria are:

- at least 3 suppliers, of which two are non-Bord Gáis Energy suppliers must be operating in the market - each of these must have a market share in excess of 10% of customers;
- there must be customer switching rates in excess of 10% per year; and

- the threshold for deregulation of Bord Gáis Energy is 60% (customer share) with rebranding of its retail business and without rebranding the threshold is 55%.

I understand that steady progress is being made, with the regulator continuing to monitor progress closely. I have no statutory function in regard to the regulation of prices in the gas market.

ESB Expenditure

163. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount that has been spent by ESB on marketing for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40254/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): This is a day to day operational matter for the ESB and not one in which I have a role or function.

Question No. 164 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

165. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisors, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40699/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): My Department was established in June 2007. Information requested by the Deputy in respect of the period since then is outlined in the following table.

Year	Special Advisors to Minister	Programme Managers	Press Officers	Political Staff	Communication Staff
2011	2	0	1	4	0
2013	2	0	1	4	0

Political staff details refer to one Personal Assistant and one Personal Secretary each appointed to the Minister and the Minister of State at my Department. The Press Officer role is discharged by a member of staff in the Department.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Yield

166. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the revenue that would be raised if the non principal private residency charge was retained and increased by €150; or by €200. [40266/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009 broadened the revenue base of local authorities by introducing a charge on non-principal private residences. The self-assessed charge is set at €200 per annum and liability for it falls, in the main, on owners of rental, holiday and vacant properties. I understand that the Non Principal Private Residence Charge has raised €75.7 m in respect of 2012 liabilities to date, a portion of which has been collected in 2013. As such,

were the Charge to continue to operate in 2014 and if it were to be set at €3 50 or €400 I would anticipate revenue in excess of €1 30 m or €150m respectively, assuming similar compliance levels. However, 2013 will be the final year of the operation of the Charge. The Local Property Tax has been introduced on a half year basis this year and accordingly 50% of the Tax is payable in 2013. From 2014, the Tax will operate on a full year basis.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

167. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the recent and future investments in the Dunlavin sewerage scheme as part of the Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40148/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Dunlavin Sewerage Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 as a scheme to start within the lifetime of the Programme. I recently approved the necessary funding to allow Wicklow County Council to award the €4.9m Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Contract for the Scheme.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Administration

168. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in relation to the abolition of the non-principal private residence tax next year, if late payment fees will continue to accrue following the abolition of the tax; if legislation will be required to deal with this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40170/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009 broadened the revenue base of local authorities by introducing a charge on non-principal private residences. The self-assessed charge is set at €200 per annum and liability for it falls, in the main, on owners of rental, holiday and vacant properties. Since its introduction in 2009, the Charge has been an important source of revenue for local authorities and has funded the provision of vital local services. This year will be the final year of the operation of the Non-Principal Private Residence Charge. Legislation will be required to repeal the relevant provisions of the 2009 Act. Matters such as arrears and non-compliance will also be addressed. I am considering these issues and intend that robust measures be put in place to incentivise compliance.

Pyrite Issues

169. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if fumes from pyrite may affect home owners in view of the fact that five Chinese miners died in Changsha in a pyrite mine earlier this month. [40179/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department is not aware of the details surrounding the deaths of the miners in this particular case. However, in the context of the pyrite problem in Ireland, no evidence has been presented to my Department which would suggest that fumes from pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material have harmful effects on the health of people living in affected dwellings.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Issues

170. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in the event of a developer - a quarry or other contractor - whose properties were remediated by the pyrite resolution board taking legal action, said developer would not gain any moneys for works done on the relevant houses. [40180/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The issue raised in the question is speculative, and it is not appropriate to respond in respect of something which may or may not happen. Operational matters will be determined by the Pyrite Resolution Board in the context of the development and implementation of an efficient and cost effective pyrite remediation scheme.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

171. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the options available to persons who do not have utility bills to prove their address when applying for housing; the acceptable ways to prove a persons address; if an affidavit, letter from Gardaí of politician will be accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40183/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The inclusion of a household by a housing authority on its list of qualified households is a matter for the housing authority concerned under the provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 2009, the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 and having regard to the particular circumstances of each case.

To qualify for social housing support, a household must generally submit a properly completed application form to the housing authority, including providing the supporting documents specified in the application form checklist. Proof of current address is a requirement and may be shown by using, for example, a lease or a rental agreement. It is a matter for the local authority to determine what is required in individual cases. The Department would expect that any such requests by a local authority would be appropriate having regard to the particular circumstances of the applicant.

Road Signage

172. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1692 on 18 September 2013, if there is legislation regarding signs and signage based on lands adjacent to different categories of roads throughout Ireland, in view of his Department’s responsibility for such under the Planning and Development Act 2013 as amended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40193/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Unless otherwise exempt, signs and signage on lands adjacent to roads throughout Ireland are subject to the submission of a planning application in accordance with the provisions of Section 34 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Decisions in this regard are a matter for the relevant planning authority.

Fire Service Staff

173. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department, local authorities or agencies under his control has privatised or outsourced any part or all, of the selection process for potential recruits to the fire services, including psychological or behavioural testing; the parts or processes and the companies or persons that have received contracts and the value of same; the reason for doing this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40214/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The provision of fire services in a local authority area is a statutory function of the local authority. Under Section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981, a fire authority is required to make provision for the delivery of fire services in its functional area, including the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises. Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each City and County Manager is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

Leader Programmes Expenditure

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which LEADER funding has been made available to an organisation (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40253/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): In the context of the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme (RDP), projects that request funding of in excess of €150,000 require final approval from my Department after Local Development Company (LDC) Board approval. The assessment of these higher value projects usually involves detailed consultations between my Department and the relevant LDC. The project referred to in the question is one such project and the request for approval was received on 12 August 2013. My Department expects to have assessed all these projects by the end of October 2013.

Housing Adaptation Grants Funding

175. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of recent figures that almost 1 in 10 persons aged 65 and over are at risk of poverty and that almost half of older people living alone are in the bottom 40% of the income bracket in CSO 2013 if he will reverse the cuts imposed on the housing adaptation grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40257/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The requirement to reduce public expenditure to sustainable levels is impacting on capital programmes all across the public service, including my Department's housing capital programme. The level of capital funding available has declined significantly in recent years along the lines highlighted in the Medium Term Exchequer Framework for Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2012-2016. As a result capital spending on housing programmes is subject to constraint over the short-term. On 22 February 2013 I announced capital allocations to local authorities under the suite of Grants for Older People and People with a Disability amounting to €42.750 million. Through active management of the overall housing budget for 2013, I allocated further funding across all local authorities on 19 July bringing the overall funding for these grants to €45.607 million. My Department is closely monitoring expenditure across all the measures under the housing programme. I will consider allocating further funds to the grants measure in the event of any saving arising elsewhere.

I am currently reviewing the operation of the suite of Grants for Older People and People with a Disability with the objective of targeting those in most need and ensuring that the maximum numbers of households can benefit from these schemes. I intend to announce revised terms and conditions for the grant schemes later this year. Capital allocations to local authorities for next year are currently being considered in the context of the Estimates for 2014.

Housing Adaptation Grants Funding

176. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if additional funding will be provided to Cavan County Council in respect of housing adaptation grant for people with a disability, mobility aids housing grant and housing aid for older people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40320/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): On 22 February 2013 I announced capital allocations to local authorities under the suite of Grants for Older People and People with a Disability amounting to €42.750 million. Through active management of my Department’s overall housing budget for 2013, I allocated further funding across all local authorities on 19 July bringing the overall funding for these grants to €45.607 million.

In the case of Cavan County Council, the initial allocation for the grant schemes in 2013 amounted to €1,038,155. I approved a subsequent supplementary allocation in July, bringing the Council’s overall allocation to €1,101,059. My Department is closely monitoring expenditure across all the measures under the housing programme. I will consider allocating further funds to the grants measure in the event of any saving arising elsewhere.

Question No. 177 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

178. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisors, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40702/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Information in relation to ministerial appointments and staffing levels in the Department’s Press/Communications Office are not readily available for 1981 and would take an inordinate amount of time to retrieve and compile. Staffing levels for 2011 and currently in 2013 are set out in the following tables.

Minister	Staffing Pre March 2011 (30th Dáil)
Minister Gormley	1 Programme Manager for the Green Party (see note below)
-	3 Special Advisers (1 Adviser assigned to press and media matters)*
-	1 Personal Assistant
-	1 Personal Secretary
Minister of State Finneran	1 Personal Assistant
-	1 Personal Secretary
Minister	2013 Current Staffing
Minister Hogan	2 Special Advisers
-	1 Personal Assistant
-	1 Personal Secretary
Minister of State O’Sullivan	2 Special Advisers
-	1 Personal Assistant

Minister	Staffing Pre March 2011 (30th Dáil)
-	1 Personal Secretary

Staffing of the Press/Information Office	Staffing Pre March 2011 (30th Dáil)	Current Staffing 2013
1 HEO	1 Special Adviser* (See above)	1 EO
1 EO	1 HEO	1 CO
-	1 CO	-

Minister Gormley resigned his position in January 2011 and Minister of State Finneran left office on 10 March 2011. The Programme Manager for the Green Party was based in the Office of the Taoiseach but the cost of his salary was borne by my Department. Under the Guidelines on ministerial Appointments, Ministers of State who regularly attend Cabinet are permitted to appoint two special advisers.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

179. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to speed up the Garda vetting process, in view of the fact that the delays are causing severe hardship for persons wishing to take up positions of employment with vulnerable groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40150/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): By way of background to the Deputy's question, I wish to advise that the number of vetting applications received by the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) each year has risen from 187,864 in 2007 to 327,903 in 2012 and it is expected that there will be upwards of 350,000 applications this year.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the current average processing time for applications is approximately 9 weeks from date of receipt. However, seasonal fluctuations and the necessity to seek additional information on particular applications can result in this processing time being exceeded on occasion. In the interest of fairness and equity, Garda vetting applications are processed in chronological order based on the date of receipt in the GCVU and 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.

It is essential that the GCVU has the resources required to perform this most critical of roles effectively and I have given this matter particular priority. In that regard I have been actively engaged with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of that engagement, I am pleased to say that the Commissioner has confirmed to me that there are now 134 whole-time equivalent staff (130 civilians and 4 members of the Garda Síochána) assigned to the GCVU, some 41 of whom have been redeployed from elsewhere in the public service since the end of March 2013. Some of these redeployed staff have only recently completed their training in the vetting process, and the full impact of their work will be seen in the coming weeks. Furthermore, I have also recently received sanction for the redeployment of 40 additional staff to the GCVU. This brings the total number of staff in that service to over 170 which, when compared to the average staff allocation of 78 at the Unit over the past two and a half years, represents an increase of 117%.

Development of an e-Vetting solution is underway. This will facilitate the processing of

all applications in an e-format, thus removing the time-consuming current process of manually managing all applications received. The initial phase of testing this e-vetting system will take place in the fourth quarter of 2013. When this is achieved, this system will streamline the overall vetting process in this jurisdiction, and further contribute to reductions in processing times for all vetting applications.

Asylum Support Services

180. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 459 of 25 June 2013, if he will forward all outstanding responses to the question submitted at the time. [40153/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The outstanding statistics sought as well as updated ones already provided in my answer on 25 June, 2013 will be provided to the Deputy by the end of next week. The delay in collating this is regretted.

Asylum Applications

181. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of asylum seekers currently awaiting a decision; the average waiting time associated with applications for asylum; the number of residential establishments currently housing asylum seekers in the State; the weekly cost to the State to provide residential accommodation for each asylum seeker; during these placement's the attempts made at preparing these persons for future integration into the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40165/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Applications for refugee status in the State are assessed at first instance by the statutory independent Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and on appeal by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT). At the end of August 2013 there were 239 asylum applications pending in ORAC and 533 appeals pending in RAT.

While the current median processing time from date of initial application at ORAC through the appeal stage at RAT, to a final Ministerial decision is 8 months, some cases can take longer to complete due to, for example, delays arising from medical issues, or because of judicial review proceedings. A person who is refused a declaration of refugee status is, in addition to other options, notified of their entitlement under the leave to remain process, to apply for subsidiary protection in the State. This is separate to the refugee status determination process. The Deputy may be aware that I am intending to introduce new arrangements in the near future in regard to the processing of subsidiary protection applications.

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) is responsible for the accommodation of asylum seekers while their application for protection in the State is being processed. Currently, RIA provides accommodation to 4,414 persons in 34 centres located in 16 counties throughout the State. Details on where these centres are located as well as other detailed information and statistics about RIA's functions are on RIA's website: www.ria.gov.ie.

The Deputy's attention is drawn to the *Value for Money Report and Policy Review - Asylum Seeker Accommodation Programme* (also available on RIA's website), which provides an in-depth analysis of the accommodation provided and its costs. Currently, the weekly average cost per person in commercial direct provision centres is €206.25. This figure includes all expenditure on food, school lunch packs, heating, maintenance and housekeeping, water and sewerage, bed linen and towels, toiletries, staffing security, etc. It does not include the cost of medical, educational, and welfare costs for RIA residents.

In relation to the issue of integration, it should be borne in mind that, unlike Programme Refugees for instance, to whom a formal integration process applies, it is not a matter of certainty that an international protection applicant will require 'future integration into the community. Specific measures to promote the integration of asylum seekers into the community are not taken pending clarification as to their status in the State. In reality, a level of integration takes place anyway given that asylum accommodation centres are not closed, children of residents attend local schools and residents avail of medical services in the same way as Irish citizens living in the same locality.

Although not intended as a formal integration process, RIA's contracts for accommodation encourages all contractors to facilitate the provision of any classes or courses provided by any bona fide organisation willing to offer services to residents. Some centres facilitate the provision of a variety of classes such as IT skills, parenting classes, sewing. etc. Projects providing reception supports to asylum seekers are eligible for grants from the European Refugee Fund eg. actions that address social, medical, and information needs of the target group. There is also an added focus on certain vulnerable groups among asylum seekers.

Garda Operations

182. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current guidelines covering the correct and appropriate use of pepper spray by An Garda Síochána; his views that the recent use of this agent against Irish citizens outside Dáil Éireann was both warranted or necessary; if he will make a commitment to review the use of pepper spray in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40168/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): A detailed manual on Garda policy and procedures in relation to the use of incapacitant spray has been developed by the Garda Commissioner and is published on the Garda website. The manual sets out the detailed considerations which must always be taken into account by a member of the Garda Síochána before using incapacitant spray. Any use of incapacitant spray, as with any use of force in general, must be in accordance with law, in particular the law on the use of force set out in the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997. In effect, the use of incapacitant spray must be necessary and must be reasonable in the circumstances.

Garda members are trained in the lawful use of incapacitant spray and, as the manual makes clear, are individually responsible and answerable for their actions in its use. It is also the case that every incident where incapacitant spray is deployed is notified to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, which can investigate any question of misuse. The fundamental principle underpinning Garda policy on the use of force is that any action taken must comply with the fundamental principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and accountability and be applied in a non-discriminatory manner in accordance with the principles of the European Convention of Human Rights. In carrying out their duties, members of An Garda Síochána shall, as far as practicable and in so far as the circumstances dictate, consider non-physical means prior to resorting to the use of force. I believe, therefore, that comprehensive policy and procedures in relation to the use of incapacitant spray, and appropriate safeguards to ensure compliance with those standards, have been put in place. I have been informed that the use of Incapacitant Spray on the 18th September, 2013 during a policing operation in the vicinity of Government Buildings was in accordance with the above policy.

Naturalisation Applications

183. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40186/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that applications for a certificate of naturalisation have been received from the persons referred to by the Deputy. The applications are being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicants meet the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. In this regard, further information has been requested from the first person referred to by the Deputy in a letter issued to his legal representative on 23 September, 2013.

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

Garda Recruitment

184. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department or An Garda Síochána has privatised any part or all of the selection process for potential recruits to the police force, including psychological or behavioural testing; the parts and the companies or persons that have received contracts; the value of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40210/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The recruitment competition for the Garda Síochána, for which I recently secured the approval of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, will be run by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner.

Marriages of Convenience

185. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his position regarding sham marriages, especially in relation to citizens from Latvia and Pakistan; if there are statistics available for offenders from these and other countries involved in this practice; the steps being taken at national and European level to eradicate this problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40217/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Freedom of movement was one of the four freedoms guaranteed with the establishment of the European Community in 1952. While the original objective of free movement was to facilitate labour mobility the focus of Community law has since shifted towards family reunification which dominates more recent secondary legislation and jurisprudence of the Court of Justice in this regard.

However, our experience is no different to that of other Member States where the free movement legal framework has been abused by those seeking to circumvent proper immigration controls to enter the State. One such abuse, which has emerged from the now well documented trend towards unusual patterns of marriage between European citizens and third country nationals, relates to sham marriages or marriages of convenience. Marriages of convenience are notoriously difficult to prove and our constitutional protection of marriage makes uncovering these situations more problematic.

This is a complex issue and there is no single, legislative or operational approach that will permanently eliminate the problem. The authorities deploy a range of measures and cooperate closely in tackling this problem. This is a high priority of all the services, agencies and other organisations tasked with preventing or negating any benefits to the persons who engage in these activities.

In addition to our operational response I have asked my officials to re-examine the provisions in the Immigration Residence and Protection Bill 2010 and to draft amendments dealing with immigration related marriages of convenience and sham marriages. A similar approach is being taken in respect of the Free Movement Regulations that transposed the EU Directive into Irish law. I also understand that officials from the Department of Social Protection are examining possible legislative measures to address the civil registration aspects of marriages of convenience.

At the European level there are also a number of initiatives focused at abuse on legal migration channels such as marriages of convenience. In 2009 the Commission published guidelines on the better implementation of Directive 38/2004/EC on Free Movement. The guidelines contained a specific chapter of abuse and fraud which included some guidance on identifying marriages of convenience. More recently; in 2012, the Commission began work, in consultation with Member States, on drawing up a handbook for practitioners investigation shame marriages or marriages of convenience. We understand that work is well advance in relation to a number of chapters of this handbook. Another initiative, which began under the Irish Presidency of the European Council, focuses on abuses of the free movement legal framework highlighted by a group of concerned Member States earlier this year. The Commission is actively engaged in collecting evidence of the abuses and fraud concerned and will report back to the Council in October and December of this year.

Extradition Arrangements

186. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to broaden the number of countries with whom Ireland has extradition agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40260/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In addition to arrangements within the European Union, Ireland currently has bilateral extradition agreements with the United States of America, Australia and Hong Kong. Negotiations on agreements are at varying stages of progress with Argentina, Canada, Chile and Mexico. Ireland and Brazil recently agreed to commence negotiations on an agreement.

I have no plans for further agreements at this time.

Criminal Assets Recovery Frameworks

187. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the provisions that exist to deal with assets held in Ireland of persons acquired through the proceeds of crime in another jurisdiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40261/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): There are a number of statutory frameworks which could potentially apply in the circumstances outlined by the Deputy.

The question of which particular framework might apply can only be considered by refer-

ence to the particular circumstances including whether it is the State who might take action or a foreign jurisdiction through international cooperation mechanisms or whether it is civil action that might be undertaken.

Specifically with regard to the framework established under the Proceeds of Crime Acts 1996 and 2005 to deal with the seizure, management and disposal of assets that represent the proceeds of criminal conduct, I can inform the Deputy that for the purposes of that Act ‘proceeds of crime’ is defined as any property obtained or received at any time (whether before or after the passing of the Act) by or as a result of or in connection with criminal conduct. In turn the definition of ‘criminal conduct’ makes specific provision in relation to conduct which occurs outside the State. In this regard, ‘criminal conduct is defined as “any conduct —

- (a) which constitutes an offence or more than one offence, or
- (b) which occurs outside the State and which would constitute an offence or more than one offence-
 - (i) if it occurred within the State,
 - (ii) if it constituted an offence under the law of the state or territory concerned, and
 - (iii) if, at the time when an application is being made for an interim order or interlocutory order, any property obtained or received at any time (whether before or after the **passing** of this Act) by or as a result of or in connection with the conduct is situated within the State”

Furthermore, in the context of criminal justice mutual legal assistance, the Criminal Justice (Mutual Assistance) Act 2008 provides a framework for the freezing, confiscation and forfeiture of property which is situated in the State and which was received or obtained as a result of or in connection with conduct which, if it occurred in the State, would constitute an indictable offence.

Question No. 188 withdrawn.

Residency Permits

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which progress has taken place in evaluation of case of residency status/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40334/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that an application for Long Term Residency has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy. The application is currently under consideration and officials from INIS will be writing to the person concerned in the coming days.

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

Immigration Status

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding examination and determination of residency/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40335/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned arrived in the State on 25 January 2004 and claimed asylum the following day. The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner considered the claim and recommended that he not be declared a refugee on 3 May 2005. He was notified of the ORAC recommendation on 26 May 2005. An appeal of the ORAC recommendation was submitted to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal on 14 June 2005. The RAT affirmed the ORAC recommendation on 4 November 2008 and the decision that he was not declared a refugee was notified to him on 12 November 2008.

On 14 January 2009, he was issued with a letter inviting him to make an application for Subsidiary Protection and giving him an opportunity to make representations pursuant to Section 3 of the Immigration Act to state reasons as to why a Deportation Order should not be made in his case. He applied for Subsidiary Protection on 4 February 2009 and made representations to remain in the State on 17 September 2009. Following consideration of these applications Subsidiary Protection was refused, and a Deportation Order was signed and was issued on the 11th September 2011. Judicial Review proceedings were lodged in the High Court on 22nd September 2011 challenging both decisions. As these proceedings are currently ongoing the matter is therefore sub judice and I do not propose to comment further.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Naturalisation Applications

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and or expected position in regard to determination of eligibility for residency/naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40336/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a sibling of an Irish born citizen child of non-EEA parents born in the State prior to 1 January, 2005. The person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on the basis of family dependency in January, 2005. This permission was subsequently renewed and is currently valid until 27 November, 2014.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy.

The application is being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. In this regard, further information has been requested, from the person referred to, in a letter issued to her on

13 September, 2013.

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.

Immigration Status

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and or expected position in regard to determination of eligibility for residency/naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40337/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order so therefore has no right to residency/naturalisation in the State.

The Deportation Order was made following a comprehensive and thorough examination of his asylum claim and of his application to remain temporarily in the State. He has been evading his deportation since 5 October 2010 and should he come to the notice of the Garda authorities, he would be liable to arrest and detention. He should, therefore, present himself to the Garda National Immigration Bureau without any further delay.

As a matter of policy, I do not intend to reward persons who have failed a very fair and comprehensive asylum process, and who have thereafter proceeded to evade their deportation for several years, by granting such persons residency in the State.

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.

Immigration Status

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when residency status/extension of residency entitlement will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40338/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The question of residency status in the case of the person whose details were supplied does not arise at this time. Should the option to apply for permission to remain in the State arise in the future the person concerned will be advised accordingly.

Immigration Status

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure

to be followed in the update of stamp 4 or relevant status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40339/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy contacted the INIS on 23 September 2013 and a reply issued to him on 24 September 2013. His case will be examined upon receipt of the documentation requested.

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

Immigration Status

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed in the assessment of eligibility for residency or naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40340/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy arrived in the State on 27 December 2007 and registered on 17 January 2008 on Student conditions. His permission to remain here expired on 07 February 2012. The person submitted an application to INIS which was received on 27 March 2013. On 29 July 2013 this application was refused as the person did not have enough time to complete a Degree Programme as required in the "new immigration regime for full time non-EEA students" which has been in effect since 01 January 2011. However, he was granted a further 6 weeks on Stamp 2 conditions until 09 September 2013 in order to finalise his affairs and leave the State. The person concerned does not qualify for a Stamp 4 status and he no longer has permission to be in the State.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which as been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process.

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

Immigration Status

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to date and progress made in the determination of residency or eligibility for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40341/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The persons concerned are a husband and wife who entered the State on separate dates in 2005, as students, and were granted permission to remain until 23rd November, 2006 and 22nd February, 2006 respectively. They

have remained in the State without permission since then. Consequently, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the persons concerned were notified it was proposed to make deportation orders in respect of them. They were each given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making written representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have deportation orders made against them. Representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned.

The positions in the State of the persons concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before final decisions are made. Once decisions have been made, these decisions, and the consequences of the decisions, will be conveyed in writing to the persons concerned.

The Deputy should note that as the persons concerned have no current right of residency in the State, they would not be in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to persons applying to my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation.

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.

Residency Permits

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status-eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40342/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that an application for Long Term Residency has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy. The application is currently at an advanced stage and officials from INIS will be writing to the person concerned in the coming days to finalise it.

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

Residency Permits

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when the necessary residency status will be awarded to a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40343/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to has no application for residency pending.

I refer the Deputy to a recent Parliamentary Question No. 36904/13 of the 18th July, 2013 which referred to the father of the person concerned.

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.

Residency Permits

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date in the course of examination of residency status/determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40344/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a failed asylum applicant. Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 30th January, 2008, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making written representations to the then Minister setting out the reasons why he should not have a Deportation Order made against him. In addition, he was notified of his entitlement to apply for subsidiary protection in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

While the person concerned submitted an application for subsidiary protection, this application was subsequently withdrawn.

The case file of the person concerned will now be considered under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be fully considered in advance of a final decision being made. Once a final decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

The Deputy should note that as the person concerned has no current right of residency in the State, he would not be in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to persons applying to my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department 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.

Residency Permits

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed in the case of regularisation of residency/determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40345/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the first person referred to by the Deputy has not had permission to be in the State since 10 May 2010. A non-national may only be in the State in accordance with the terms of any permission given to him or her by or on behalf of the Minister for Justice and Equality. There is no record of this person having made an application to renew her permission to remain in the State; I would strongly advise the person concerned to make such an application immediately.

The second person referred to by the Deputy has been granted Long Term Residency in the State.

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

Citizenship Applications

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40346/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy.

The Deputy will appreciate that the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation as provided for in law is a major step for the State which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process. The application is currently at an advanced stage of processing and the person concerned will be informed of my decision in due course.

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

Citizenship Applications

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding determination of eligibility for stamp 4-naturalisation in the case of a person (details

supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40347/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned was granted temporary permission to remain in the State in 2000 under the arrangements then applicable to the non-EEA national parents of Irish born citizen children. This permission was renewed on a regular basis until 2010. The person concerned applied to the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) to have his permission renewed prior to December 2010. His request was not processed due to concerns regarding his being part of a family unit. However, following consideration and receipt of all requested documentation from the person concerned, my officials granted him a further period of twelve months permission to remain in the State from 9 May, 2012.

The person concerned wrote to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department in April, 2013 to seek further permission to remain in the State. He was requested to provide up to date documentation regarding his family situation and finances by letter dated 22 May, 2013. Some documentation was supplied by the person concerned but it was not considered sufficient. Further documentation regarding the family situation of the person concerned was requested by letter dated 23 July, 2013. To date this additional documentation has not been received. Upon receipt of the appropriate documentation, the case of the person concerned will be examined by the relevant officials in the INIS and a decision communicated to him in due course.

Officials in the Citizenship Division of the INIS inform me that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended.

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.

Residency Permits

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 6 who has previously had residency status based on spousal or personal work permit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40348/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that an application for Long Term Residency has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy. This application is being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the requirements such as good character and lawful residence and will be processed further when these checks are completed.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been established specifically 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 Ques-

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

Residency Permits

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and/or expected residency status-eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; if he will set out any specific or particular requirements in respect of this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40349/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a failed asylum applicant. Arising from the refusal of her asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 30th March, 2009, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making written representations to the then Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against her. In addition, she was notified of her entitlement to apply for subsidiary protection in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

The person concerned submitted an application for subsidiary protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome.

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

The Deputy will appreciate that as the person concerned has no current right of residency in the State, the issue of an application for a Certificate of Naturalisation does not arise at this time.

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

Question No. 205 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

206. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40707/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I take it that the Deputy is re-

ferring to personal appointments made by Ministers during the periods in question. The Deputy will appreciate that, given the considerable passage of time, records in respect of any personal appointments by Ministers in respect of 1981 are not readily available. Information on appointments in respect of 2011 and 2013 is set out below.

In 2011, in my capacity as Minister for Justice and Equality, I appointed two Special Advisers, one Personal Assistant (who performs the role of Press Officer) and one Personal Secretary, all of whom are still serving.

My predecessor, Mr Brendan Smith, did not make any personal appointments. His predecessor, Mr Dermot Ahern appointed two Special Advisers, one Personal Assistant and one Personal Secretary. The individuals concerned served for a short period in 2011.

Defence Forces Recruitment

207. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department or the Defence Forces has privatised or outsourced any part or all of the selection process for potential recruits to the Defence Forces, including psychological or behavioural testing; the parts or processes and the companies or persons that have received contracts and the value of same; the reason for doing this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40212/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The day to day administration of recruitment to the Permanent Defence Force is the responsibility of the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces. The Military Authorities have advised that the administration for the last General Service Recruitment campaign, which was held in 2012, along with the 2012 Army and Naval Service Cadetship Competitions was carried out by Permanent Defence Force personnel with assistance provided by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) in the staging of the Psychometric Testing element of these competitions. No outside recruitment agency was utilised by the Defence Forces for any element of these competitions.

Online psychometric testing was introduced for the first time for the Army and Naval Service Cadetship Competitions in 2013. The services of Cut – E, a company that specialises in online psychometric testing, were used to conduct online psychometric testing as part of the selection process for Army and Naval Service Cadets. This facility is not available in the Defence Forces or PAS. The cost involved in availing of Cut – E services was €5,000 in 2013.

The services of CAE PARC Aviation, a specialist aviation recruitment company, were used to assist in the selection of Air Corps Cadets up to and including the 2012 competition. This company carried out specialist psychometric and psychomotor testing as the expertise in this particular area of testing is not available in the Defence Forces or in PAS. For the 2013 Air Corps Cadetship competition this function was undertaken by specialised aviation consultants, Health Psychology Ireland, following a tendering process. The cost involved in availing of PARC services in 2012 was €52,000. The cost for 2013 was €29,500.

Question No. 208 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

209. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [40700/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): No advisors, programme managers, press officers, political staff and communication staff were employed by this Department in 1981. Prior to my taking office in March 2011, the staffing complement of the Private Office for the Minister for Defence included 2 special advisors.

I have not appointed any special advisors in my role as Minister for Defence. I have however engaged the services of a personal assistant who assists me in constituency matters. My Department's Press Officer is a civil servant at Assistant Principal grade who is also responsible for a range of other duties.

Aquaculture Development

210. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the guidelines and parameters that have been set down by his Department to govern the oyster and mussel collection by a company (details supplied) at Woodstown Beach, County Waterford; if any restrictions have been placed on this company in relation to bringing heavy machinery onto the beach; the regulatory checks carried by his Department in relation to the irrevocable damage and destruction being caused on the beach; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40166/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The company referred to by the Deputy is in receipt of a consent to operate under Section 19A (4) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997 in respect of oyster cultivation at specific sites in Woodstown Bay.

Aquaculture operators subject to this Section may continue to operate, subject to the terms and conditions of their aquaculture licence, pending a determination by the Minister on their renewal application. The terms and conditions of the licence set down the specific conditions under which the relevant aquaculture may take place.

It should be noted that licences issued under the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act are also subject to all other lawful regulations governing activities in the area in question, including bye-laws, where applicable.

Animal Disease Controls

211. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if DEFRA UK has informed his Department of its intention to enforce pet passport regulations for animals being transported to the UK, including the enforcement of rabies vaccinations, micro-chipping of animals, and issuing of passports; if his attention has been drawn to the possible impact this will have on the resources of Irish Rescue centres for costs of vaccinations, costs for animals for 21 days before transportation after vaccination, if he will call for an exemption to the rabies vaccination taking into account that Ireland and the UK are rabies free; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40175/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): EU law relating to the protection of citizens from rabies provides that dogs, cats and ferrets moving between EU Member States must be accompanied by EU Pet Passports certifying microchip identification and rabies vaccination. Given that Ireland and UK have traditionally operated a rabies free zone, both States agreed, on a risk analysis basis, that border compliance checks would not be undertaken.

However, an increased focus by authorities within the UK on illegal puppy imports from elsewhere in the EU has led to two recent incidents of dogs from Ireland being seized/detained in Britain, and the risk of further such incidents is likely to increase. In view of this, any person travelling with dogs to Britain is being advised by my Department to ensure that their exports are compliant with EU law as soon as possible.

While Ireland and the UK have been rabies free for many decades, Western Europe is now also free of rabies. The harmonised EU system under which passports and rabies vaccinations are required allows dog owners to bring their pets into and out of Ireland without a compulsory and lengthy quarantine. While both Ireland and the UK sought and achieved a legal provision providing the possibility of a derogation from rabies vaccination for non commercial pets movements from 2015, this was not extended to commercial traffic which includes any change of ownership. I understand that one charity is undertaking significant capital investment which should to some extent relieve the concerns expressed by some small charities about the cost of complying with EU rules.

Parking Charges

212. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that the proposal to introduce paid parking in Howth Harbour has now been withdrawn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40195/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The position is that a proposal to introduce pay-parking within the Fishery Harbour Centre at Howth has been under consideration for some time.

A broad and complex range of factors must be considered in coming to a decision and I am examining all aspects of the matter at present.

Fish Discards

213. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he would allow fishermen to keep cray fish measuring 100 mm instead of the current 110 mm limit as the rest of Europe allows catches of over 90 mm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40240/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Council Regulation (EC) No. 850/98 presently imposes an EU minimum landing size (MLS) for crawfish of 95mm, but was originally enacted as a MLS of 110mm. The EU Regulation was changed with effect from May 2001 to specify the present EU MLS of 95mm. The EU Regulation permits Member States to enact national measures supplementing or going beyond the minimum requirements specified in the EU Regulation, provided they are restricted to the Member State's own fishing vessels or to persons established in that Member State.

Ireland's Crawfish (Conservation of Stocks) Regulations 2006 (S.I. 232 of 2006) prohibit the landing, transshipment, retention on board, or sale of crawfish below a national minimum landing size of 110mm. Ireland enacted this higher national MLS in 2001 as it was considered that the lower EU MLS introduced in 2001 offered no conservation protection for the species which was suffering from severe over-fishing.

In 2011, I asked BIM and the Marine Institute to conduct a review of Ireland's technical conservation measures for crawfish. The Review was conducted in consultation with crawfish fishermen, shellfish buyers and other stakeholders. That Review concluded that a reduction in

the national MLS to 95mm would lead to a circa 42% reduction in the reproductive potential of the crawfish stock. A sustainable crawfish fishery could not be maintained in those circumstances.

It is worth noting that the Review found that 110mm is in fact the most commonly adopted MLS in Northern Europe.

Fish Discards

214. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will retain the current lobster size restriction of 87 mm and not impose an upper limit of 127 mm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40241/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 20 August 2013 my Department initiated a consultation process on proposals to change the current lobster stock management rules. A parallel consultation is underway on shrimp stock management. The deadline for submissions has been extended to 25 October 2013 which I hope will facilitate the participation of all interested parties.

Currently there are two legal restrictions which provide protection to the lobster stock, namely a minimum landing size of 87mm and a prohibition on fishing v-notched lobsters, all of which are over 87mm. The minimum landing size protects juvenile lobster and allows some spawning to occur before lobsters enter the fishery. The v-notch regulation prohibits the landing of v-notched lobsters until the notch is repaired by growth (usually occurs over 2-4 years) thus allowing such lobsters to contribute to spawning and thereby promote sustainability of the lobster stock.

Recent stock assessments, and evaluation of the existing conservation measures, indicate that spawning stock is not adequately protected and recruitment to lobster stocks may be impaired. Having examined the issue with scientific experts from the Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara, I am now seeking stakeholder input on two alternative proposals; either to introduce a maximum landing size of 127mm or to increase the minimum landing size from 87mm to 90mm. The published consultation documents are available online on my Department's website and copies have been made available at the coastal offices of BIM, the Marine Institute and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority. In addition copies have been circulated to v-notching co-operatives, fisheries producer organisations and the Environmental Pillar.

I would encourage all stakeholders, particularly those currently engaged in lobster fishing, to participate in the assessment of these proposals. On conclusion of the consultation stage, I will review the submissions received with scientific experts before determining the most appropriate measure to ensure the sustainability of the lobster stock.

Fish Imports

215. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department is testing imported fish for artificial whitening additives; if so, if any of these samples have tested positive; if his Department is monitoring scallops for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40242/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Fish or fishery products coming from a non EU country, excluding Norway, Iceland and Switzerland, must

go through an approved Border Inspection Post. Health checks at the posts are carried out by official veterinarians of my Department. The identity and documentation of all products are checked at the first point of entry into the EU and some products are checked physically. Commission Regulation No 136/2004 lays down procedures for veterinary checks at Community border inspection posts on products imported from third countries. Seafood imports from other EU countries do not need to undergo these checks.

In order to import fish or fishery products into Ireland from a non EU country the person who wishes to import fish/fishery products is required to register with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). The SFPA and the Border Inspection Posts operate an agreed sampling plan, which is reviewed annually, to ensure that they meet the EU criteria with respect to potential contaminants, and for the presence of any medical residues or where there is concern that the product may not be fit for human consumption. In accordance with the Commission Regulation, the plan is based upon the nature of the products and the risk they represent, taking into account all relevant monitoring parameters such as frequency and number of incoming consignments and results of previous monitoring.

The SFPA was set up by the Oireachtas under the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006 as the independent Authority for the implementation of sea-fisheries and seafood law from boat up to but excluding retail level (on fishing vessels, in shellfish production areas, in establishments handling preparing and processing seafood). The outcomes of the monitoring procedures are an operational matter for the SFPA in which I have no direct role. If the Deputy has concerns about specific substances or further information with regard to his concerns about scallops he should bring them to the attention of the SFPA.

Harbour Fees

216. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to review harbour dues; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties being faced by fishermen trying to pay these dues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40243/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is responsible for the operation and management of the six Fishery Harbour Centres. Harbour Dues at each of the Fishery Harbour Centres are levied in accordance with the prevailing Rates & Charges Order.

The Fishery Harbour Centres (Rates and Charges) Order 2003 (Statutory Instrument No 439 of 2003) was the subject of a detailed review in 2012. As part of the review my Department engaged in an extensive public consultation process with fishermen and other harbour users. Full consideration was given to all of the submissions received by my Department, and a revised Rates and Charges Order was drafted having due regard to the submissions made.

The Fishery Harbour Centres (Rates and Charges) Order 2012 (Statutory Instrument No 214 of 2012) came into operation on 1 July 2012.

Harbour Services

217. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if fishermen will be provided with written descriptions of the services provided at harbours in the bills that are sent out instead of the current coded system in the interest of transparency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40244/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): All invoices issued by my Department, including those which issue to fishermen, include a text description of the services being charged for, along with the quantity, unit of measure, unit price, VAT and the amount for each item being charged. If there is any issue with a particular invoice, the fisherman can contact the Fishery Harbour Centre that provided the services.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Appeals

218. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a review of a 2011 REP scheme penalty imposed on a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40246/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in May 2008 and received payments for the five years of their contract. During the course of an on-farm inspection in March 2011 areas of non-compliance with the terms and conditions of the scheme were noted in relation to Measure 3 'Protect and Maintain Watercourses and Wells' which resulted in the application of a 50% penalty. The application of this penalty has been appealed by the person named and a review has been completed. The person named has been notified in writing of the outcome of this review.

Sea Lice Controls

219. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the problem of sea lice from sea fisheries; if he has considered this issue in relation to his policy and decisions regarding sea farming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40250/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland's sea lice control protocols are operated by the Marine Institute. These protocols are considered to be more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

- The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.
- Data obtained as a result of inspections is published and made widely available.
- Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

In 2008, the State introduced a new Pest Management Strategy, supplementing the control regime already in place. This has resulted in a steady decline in average sea lice numbers on farmed salmon since its inception.

Applications to my Department for licences for the cultivation of marine finfish are considered under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the 1933 Foreshore Act. The legislation provides for a period of public consultation. Decisions on licences are only made following the fullest consideration by my Department of all scientific, technical and public policy issues associated with each application, including the control of sea lice.

Fish Quotas

220. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if

he will redistribute any leftover tonnage for smaller boats under 17 m from this years herring quota among the same sized boats next year instead of giving some of this to larger boats; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40287/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The position in relation to the management of all fisheries, both pelagic and whitefish, is that the quota is managed on a single year basis and under fishing by any group is not carried forward to the following year for that group. For all stocks, any carry over from 2013, which can be up to 10 % in the case of Celtic Sea Herring, will be added to the national adjusted quota for 2014. Under current policy the Celtic Sea Herring sentinel fishery will receive up to 11% of the adjusted quota, each year.

Fish Quotas

221. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will allow some of the 2014 herring quota for boats under 17 m to be landed in January as well as November and December; if the November opening would begin in 1 November; if he will allow flexibility for small boats to help them cope with the possibility of bad weather; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40288/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Management arrangements for the 2014 Celtic Sea Herring fishery have not yet been considered. I will decide on the arrangements for the fishery following consultation with the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC). The CSHMAC have not yet made any proposals for the 2014 fishery and I will consider any proposals received from the committee including a request for a spring fishery.

Fish Quotas

222. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will allow weekly herring quotas for boats under 17m to be landed the following week if they cannot be landed on time for small boats to cope with the possibility of bad weather; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40289/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The current management arrangements in place for this fishery, which were recommended by the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) do not allow for the carry over of individual vessel allocations from one week to the next. Quota allocations with weekly catch limits will be set following consultation with the CSHMAC for each management period, taking consideration of numbers and size of vessels booked-in. In addition a vessel may choose not to fish in a particular week and this will have no impact on their participation record.

The fishery is divided into two management periods and any unused quota from the first management period will be redistributed in the second management period. Vessels will only have to fish one week of the first management period to qualify for the redistribution in the second period provided they land 50% of their allocation in that week. These arrangements were put in place having regard to the size of the vessels involved in the fishery and the time of year in which the fishing takes place.

Fisheries Protection

223. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if any fishermen from boats under 17m are directly represented on the Sentinell Herring Fishery Committee, other than PO representatives; if he will provide details of the committee member-

ship and their respective vessel sizes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40290/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am not aware of a Sentinel Herring Fishery Committee. I will take it that the Deputy means the Celtic Sea Herring Management Committee (CSHMAC) whose remit covers all herring fisheries in the Celtic Sea. In 2005, the Minister of the day constituted a Management Committee, the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee whose role is to advise the Minister on the management arrangements for the stock.

The Committee has been established on an informal basis i.e. Minister decided to establish the Committee and issued letters to relevant organisations asking them to nominate persons to the Committee. The Committee has been very successful in its operation assisting in a rebuilding of the stock and achieving MSC certification. The Committee comprises representatives of industry and processors and is chaired by the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation (IS&WFPO). The Department is not represented on the Committee nor is any other State agency. However, the Marine Institute advises the Committee from time to time on scientific issues relating to the stock. The representation is as follows: Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation – 2 persons; Irish Fish Producers organisation – 2 persons; Irish South and East Fishermens association – 2 persons; Killybegs Fishermens Organisation – 1 Person; Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association – 2 persons; Irish Federation of Fishing Co-operatives – 1 person.

The membership of the committee changes from time to time while retaining the proportion of representatives from each organisation. I do not ratify the individual representatives which the producer organisations nominate to the committee, nor do I retain a list of individual members. Most Producer Organisations on the committee represent a range of fishing boat owners from small vessels to larger vessels and fishing vessel owner are free to join a producer organisation which best represents their interest.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

224. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application for agri environment option scheme 3 entry in respect of a person (details supplied) [40324/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Agri-environment Options Scheme from the person named was received in my Department on 26 November 2012. 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 predetermined 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).

Based on the funding available farmers in category 4 with 22.06 hectares of utilisable agricultural area and below were successful. Category 4 farmers with areas greater than this and all farmers in category 5 were unsuccessful. The person named comes under category 5 as he had not previously participated in REPS. On this basis a letter issued to the person named on 27 May informing him that he was not successful and setting out the reasons. The person was also informed of right of appeal to AEOS Section. An appeal was received from the person named and it is currently being considered. The person named will be notified in writing of the outcome of this appeal once a decision has been made.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

225. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application for single farm payments where penalty was imposed in respect of a person (details supplied) [40325/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently examining land parcels declared for the purposes of benefiting from payment under the Single Payment Scheme and other area-based Direct Payment Schemes. As part of this review a number of ineligible features were removed from the parcels declared by the person named. My Department has carried a review of land parcels with exclusions declared by the applicant and has established that the amounts in question should be refunded to the applicant. An official of my Department has contacted the person named directly to explain the situation to him.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

226. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application which is at penalty review status and file being processed in respect of a person (details supplied) [40326/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri-environment Options Scheme with effect from the 1 September 2011. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks for 2011 non-compliances with the Terms and Conditions of the scheme were noted in relation to the Planting New Hedgerows and Establishment and Maintenance of Habitats actions which resulted in a penalty being incurred. Full 2011 payment totalling €1,029.98 (net of penalty) has now issued to the person named – 75% payment issued on 17 April 2013 and the balancing 25% payment issued on 24 April 2013.

Payments in respect of the 2012 Scheme year are subject to a similar administrative checking process which includes verification of capital investment through checks on receipts. The person named was selected for a ground inspection which took place on 26 October 2012. During this inspection, areas of non-compliance with the terms and condition of the scheme were noted in relation to the Species Rich Grassland and Traditional Hay Meadow actions which resulted in a further penalty being imposed. On 27 June 2013, a letter issued to the person named informing him of this and outlining his appeal option. To date, there is no record of an appeal having been received by officials in my Department. The application is being finalised on the basis of the inspection findings and payment will issue shortly.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

227. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the agri-environment option scheme 2012 payment in respect of a person (details supplied) and when payment will issue. [40327/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri-environment Options Scheme with effect from the 1 September 2011 and full payment totalling €1,167.17 issued in respect of 2011. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a

comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. Payments in respect of the 2012 Scheme year are subject to a similar administrative checking process which includes verification of capital investment through checks on receipts. During the administrative checks in respect of the 2012 Scheme year issues were identified in relation to the Wild Bird Cover option. The person named was notified of these issues and the matter is currently under review by Officials in my Department. Payment for 2012 will issue at the earliest opportunity once these issues have been resolved and all validations have been successfully completed.

EU Meetings

228. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the parameters of the discussions held with Ministerial colleagues at the Meeting of Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries, AGRI-FISH, in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 23 September 2013; if he will detail any agreement reached; if he will provide an update in matters discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40329/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers on 23 September last took place in Brussels. The main item on the agenda was CAP reform. The Council agreed to a small adjustment in the Council position in order to allow the Lithuanian Presidency to finalise an agreement with the EU Commission and the European Parliament on a number of outstanding MFF related issues not covered by the political agreement on CAP reform reached last June. I am pleased to say that the Lithuanian Presidency went on to have a successful trilogue and I expect the Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament will approve the deal at its meeting next week, paving the way for full endorsement by the European Parliament at its November plenary meeting.

A number of issues were raised under other business. The EU Commission provided an update to Ministers on developments in international trade issues, including the upcoming WTO Ministerial conference in Bali and the bilateral trade negotiations with Canada, USA and Japan. The Commission also made a presentation to Ministers of its proposals for a new EU forest strategy. Ministers also heard reports of recent conferences. I, myself, debriefed my colleagues on the conclusions from the 33rd conference of Directors of EU Paying Agencies, which was held in Dublin in April last. The Presidency provided a report on a recent conference in Vilnius on organic production and Slovenia briefed Ministers about an August conference dedicated to furthering the production of protein crops in the Danube and South European region.

Poland drew Ministers' attention to the risks posed by the outbreak of African swine fever close to the EU border and called for a coordinated approach. Netherlands raised the question of the EU TRACES computer system, which records data on movements of live animals, calling for greater transparency in regard to the information recorded on this system.

Pet Imports

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the procedures applicable to the importation of budgerigars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40331/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Persons may bring their pet birds to Ireland with them from another EU Member State (and Andorra, Croatia, the Faeroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway) on change of resi-

dence or on holiday provided the following conditions are met: an Owner Declaration for Pet birds must accompany the bird/s en route; a Form of Advance Notice of Import must be sent to the Animal Health and Welfare Division of my Department at least 24 hrs in advance of arrival of consignment in Ireland.

Persons bringing their pet birds to Ireland (on change of residence or on holiday only) from a non-EU country (other than Andorra, Croatia, the Faeroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland and the Vatican City State) may import under licence not more than 5 birds provided the birds are accompanied en route by the owner or a person acting on behalf of the owner; individually identified; accompanied by a veterinary health certificate signed by an official veterinarian to confirm compliance with the pre-export requirements as set out in Commission Decision 2007/25/EC; accompanied by a declaration signed by the owner/person representing the owner in the form contained at Annex 111 to in Commission Decision 2007/25/EC; Imported either through Dublin Airport or Shannon Airport.

All information on this is available at www.agriculture.gov.ie/pets.

Question No. 230 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

231. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisors, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40696/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In response to the Deputy's question, I have detailed below the information requested:

-	1981	2011	2013
Special Advisers	1	3*	2
Press Officer	1	1	1

*Includes one Special Adviser appointed by Minister Smith for the period 1 January 2011 to 9 March 2011.

Child Protection Services

232. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the further progress that has been made in implementing the recommendations of the report of the Independent Child Death Review Group since her replies of 28/03/2013 and 18/07/2013; the total number of social workers employed in Children and Family Support Services at present, and this number for each of the past five years; if and when the independent reviews into child deaths referred to by her will be published and if not, the reason for same; when the final progress report of the Ryan Report Implementation Plan will be brought before the Oireachtas; the number of young persons currently in receipt of aftercare services; her plan for developing legislation to strengthen the provision of aftercare; if she will provide details of all cuts to child care and aftercare services that have been implemented in recent years, or any restrictions of services forced by economic necessity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40138/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy has

raised a number of separate issues which I will deal with individually.

In relation to the Independent Child Death Review Group (ICDRG), the Deputy will be aware that when I published the report of the group, I accepted that action in the areas identified was required. The necessary actions are being implemented in the context of the Government's reform programme for children's services. The integrated delivery of these reforms will ensure that responses to many of the ICDRG recommendations will be mainstreamed into the work programme of the new Child and Family Agency. HSE Children and Family Services are proactively planning, and will publish as part of the service planning process, specific actions to continue to improve the quality of its services and to address the recommendations highlighted in ICDRG report. The development of a quality assurance framework for social work services will be an integral part of the progress which is being made in this regard.

In relation to the numbers of social workers employed in Children and Family Services in the HSE, the latest HSE employment census indicates that the number of whole-time equivalent (WTE) social workers employed in the HSE Children and Families service area was 1,405.53 at the end of July 2013. The census numbers reflect the outcome of a process of re-classification of social workers within the HSE into individual care groups, including Children and Families, to support the process of establishing the new Child and Family Agency. Consequently direct comparisons with social work numbers for previous years are not meaningful. It should be noted that there are a variety of reasons for fluctuations in employment census figures at any given time, particularly as the employment census is based on a snapshot of staff who are on the payroll at the date of the census. Among the reasons for staff being removed from the payroll thereby causing changes in employment census numbers (aside from retirements and recruitment) are deaths, career breaks and other unpaid leave, resignations and unpaid sick leave.

In the context of the current budgetary restriction across the public sector and within the HSE there is a general pause on all recruitment including those grades included in the list of specified grades with delegated sanction from the general moratorium on recruitment and promotion within the public service. However due to the importance of child welfare and protection responsibilities every effort is made to maintain staffing levels. In this regard for Children and Family Services a National Employment Control Group has been established to consider all vacancies as they arise. This situation is under constant review. In the event of a change of staffing in the management of particular cases normal procedures are followed to ensure that all files and records are up to date and that there is a process of full briefing and introduction for new staff under the supervision of line management. Statutory child care Regulations and Standards are followed in all circumstances to ensure the best welfare of the child(ren).

As regards the publication of independent reviews into child deaths, I am informed by the HSE that seven review reports have been submitted for publication. These will be published in the next month together with the Child Death Review Panel's Annual reports for 2011 and 2012, outlining in detail the work referred to and completed by the panel.

In relation to the fourth and final progress report on Ryan Report Implementation Plan, this will be published on schedule before the end of 2013

On the matter of aftercare, Section 45 of the Childcare Act 1991 places a statutory duty on the HSE to form a view in relation to each person leaving care as to whether there is a "need for assistance" and if it forms such a view to provide services in accordance with the section and subject to resources. All young people who have had a care history with the HSE are entitled to an Aftercare Service. The extent as to what is provided is based on assessment of need, age and the length of time the young person was in care. Good practice clearly indicates that where a young person needs to be in care, they should remain in their placement until they are ready

to leave. Preparation for leaving care is an integral part of the care placement and is introduced formally to young people usually at 16 years of age. This preparation, determined by a comprehensive needs assessment, sets out a process of targeted and structured support to enable the young person to make a smooth transition from statutory care to independent living, where appropriate. Data in regard to the number of children who left Care on reaching their eighteenth birthday began to be collected in 2012. Similar data was not collected for previous years. The number of young adults aged 18 to 20 (inclusive) in receipt of an aftercare service on the last day of the reporting period at 31.03.2013 was 1,149.

The Deputy will be aware that I am currently examining options, in association with the Attorney General, to strengthen legislation regarding the provision of aftercare. I have recently held round-table discussions with HSE, service providers, advocates and the voluntary sector in relation to the recent improvements in aftercare service delivery and the proposed legislative change. My officials have met with their counterparts in Northern Ireland to discuss the nature and impact of the strengthening of aftercare legislatively in Northern Ireland and issues to do with service provision. The Deputy will be aware that I had previously indicated my intention to bring forward legislative amendments in the legislation to establish the Child and Family Agency, and this remains my focus.

In relation to the Deputy's final query around cuts, it is self evident that reductions in budgets in recent years have provided challenges for Children and Family Services management. The priority has been to continue to deliver the maximum level of safe statutory services possible within available resources. The key areas of service provision are as follows: promoting the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection; providing a wide range of Care services for children requiring care and protection; providing for the provision of a range of family support services, including by voluntary bodies and other persons and providing a range of adoption services.

In responding to this challenging budgetary environment Children and Family Services has, where possible, identified the impact of pre-existing and future risks on delivering the planned service levels outlined in Service Plans while continuing to operate within its budget. The priority has been in all areas of statutory responsibility to maintain, and in some service areas, to increase service levels. Some examples of this increase in service delivery are: Between 2009- 2012 there has been an increase of 44.27% in the number of foster families from 2,959 to 4,269; between 2009 – 2012 child abuse referrals have increased by 58%; between 2009 – 2012 the number of children in Care has increased by 11.5%. There has been a significant increase in the provision of Aftercare services.

In conclusion, I would state that the Government is currently engaged in the most ambitious programme of reform of services to children and families ever undertaken. The central element of this programme is the establishment of the new Child & Family Agency. However, it should be noted that even ahead of the formal establishment of the Agency there is a significant level of work already underway to reform child and family services. The 'change management programme' being developed by the senior management team of the new Agency involves over 100 individual reform projects which will introduce operational improvement to the services for which the Agency will be responsible. Some of the specific initiatives included in this change management programme include reorganisation of residential care centres into a national service under a single national manager; ongoing measures to specify child welfare and protection referral pathways and ensure consistency in the management of referrals; review of caseloads; reforming the interface with the courts system; ongoing support for implementation of Children First; reform of data management including additional performance information and the introduction of a National Child Care Information System; and new internal structures and processes to improve quality assurance.

Departmental Correspondence

233. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied) regarding crèches; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40198/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This correspondence appears to be an invitation to the Deputy. I wish to advise that my office has received a similar invitation.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

234. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to her Department since the current Government came into office: the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40218/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Referendum Unit within my Department engaged MKC Communications, the Archway, 4a Lower Pembroke Street, Dublin 2, to provide communication support services to my Department. In 2012 they were paid €32,350 and have been paid €7,245 to date this year.

Question No. 235 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

236. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communication staff employed by her Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40698/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department was established on the 2nd June 2011 and my personal appointees were made in accordance with the Guidelines on Staffing of Ministerial Offices as issued by the Department of Finance in April 2011 and the information is set out hereunder.

Ministerial Appointees	2011	2013 (to date)
Special Advisors	2*	1.5
Programme Managers	0	0
Personal Assistant	1	0
Personal Secretary	1	1
Civilian Drivers	2	2

*One Special Advisor post filled by two persons on a 50/50 worksharing pattern.

The Press Office within my Department is staffed by civil servants. At the end of 2011 there were two members of staff in the Press Office and a Press Officer and this continues to be the case.

Mental Health Facilities

237. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health if he is concerned at the €2.8 million invested in an acute mental health facility in St Brigid's Hospital in Ballinasloe which is now intended to be used for administrative purposes; if there will there be an investigation by his Department regarding this waste of money; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[40196/13]

245. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health the reason €2.8 million was invested in an acute mental health facility in St. Brigid's Hospital, Ballinasloe, County Galway, if it was intended not to use it; his views on this waste of scarce public money; if there will be an investigation by his Department regarding this waste of money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40187/13]

246. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health if he or his Department approved the expenditure of €2.8 million of capital funding for the refurbishment of an acute mental health facility at St. Brigid's Hospital in Ballinasloe, County Galway; if so, what were the reasons for the investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40188/13]

247. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health the amount that has been invested in each year since 2010 in the acute mental health facilities in St Brigid's Hospital in Ballinasloe which are now intended to be used for administrative purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40189/13]

248. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health the amount it will cost to convert the recently refurbished acute mental health facilities in St Brigid's Hospital in Ballinasloe for its use as administrative purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40190/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 245 to 248, inclusive, together.

The Galway and Roscommon Mental Health Services area has been resourced to implement *A Vision for Change* in order to modernise mental health services in the locality. The re-configuration of services is in line with national policy, and with similar initiatives undertaken or planned elsewhere in the country. It clearly underpins the commitment of the Government to progress further implementation of *A Vision for Change* in line with evolving service priorities and overall resource availability.

At present, there are 35 acute psychiatric beds in Galway city, and 22 acute psychiatric beds in both Ballinasloe and Roscommon. This gives a total of 79 beds, serving a population of around 315,000. *A Vision for Change* recommends 50 beds for a catchment population of 300,000. It is clear therefore, in line with policy and operational norms nationally, that the provision of 22 beds in both Ballinasloe and Roscommon means that the current overall stock of 79 in HSE West is too high in relative terms, allied to a corresponding under-development of community based mental health services.

To address this situation, a purpose built 50 bed acute mental health unit will be completed in Galway University Hospital in 2015, to replace the existing smaller unit. This Unit will consist of 35 general adult mental health beds, with the remaining 15 beds relating to psychiatry of later life, eating disorders, and mental health and intellectual disability. The acute unit in Roscommon will continue to provide 22 general adult mental health beds.

The re-organisation of services by HSE West will provide a total of 57 general adult mental health beds. This will be a sufficient number of acute psychiatric beds, as envisaged under *A Vision for Change*, while allowing the Executive to enhance much needed community based services through re-deployment of some staff from acute services. It is intended that staff from St. Brigid's, Ballinasloe will be redeployed on a phased basis, to both community mental health teams locally and to the acute units in Galway and Roscommon. This initiative will not give rise to any job losses, and there will be no negative impact for existing patients in Ballinasloe.

I am assured by the HSE that the capital investment for the development referred to the Deputy was necessary as the facility required certain infrastructural works to be carried out. In addition, the intention was to refurbish the facility so that it could be adaptable for use for both administrative and front line services. The works were therefore designed to optimise flexibility around future service delivery, including for acute or community based mental health provision.

Each year the HSE multi-annual Capital Plan requires the approval of the Minister for Health, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. This project was included in the HSE capital programme which was approved by the Minister for Health. Approval to commence the specific works was given by HSE Estates, in accordance with normal procedures for capital developments of this nature.

In relation to amounts invested at St Bridget's Hospital, Ballinasloe since 2010, I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE for direct reply on these details.

Water Fluoridation

238. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the practice of water fluoridation including reducing the level of fluoride in the water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40248/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Water fluoridation and the use of appropriate fluorides is a major plank of public health policy in Ireland in the prevention and management of tooth decay. In 2002 the Forum on Fluoridation, which was established to review this policy, concluded that the fluoridation of public piped water supplies should continue as a public health measure. One of the recommendations of the Forum was to amend the Fluoridation of Water Supplies Regulations, 1965 to redefine the optimal level of fluoride in drinking water from 0.8 to 1.0 parts per million (ppm) to between 0.6 and 0.8ppm. This came into effect in 2007.

The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health, established in 2004, continuously monitors new and emerging issues on fluoride and its effects. It advises that the balance of scientific evidence worldwide confirms that water fluoridation, at the optimal level, does not cause any ill effects and protects the oral health of the population. The opinion of the Expert Body is supported by major international scientifically validated reviews. At present a research project "Fluoride and Caring for Children's Teeth" (FACCT) is being conducted by the Oral Health Services Research Centre, University College Cork and supported by the HSE. It is focusing on 5-year old and 12-year old children and will assess the on-going benefits of health promotion initiatives, including water fluoridation, given the changes that have occurred since the levels of fluoride were reduced in 2007. The effects of fluoridation on health and related matters are kept under constant review.

Health Services Issues

239. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Health if a group (details supplied) in County Tipperary has received funding under the section 38/section 39 Health Act 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40132/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

National Lottery Funding Applications

240. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a lotto application in respect of a group (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40139/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has received an application for funding from the 2013 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number currently being assessed by my Department and the Deputy will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision had been made.

Hospital Appointment Status

241. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be called for a rheumatology appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40140/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Improving access to outpatient services is a key priority for the Government. Collaborating with individual hospitals, the SDU, together with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE, has developed the outpatient waiting list minimum dataset. This allows data to be submitted to the NTPF from hospitals on a weekly basis and, for the first time, outpatient data is available on www.ntpf.ie. For 2013, a maximum waiting time target has been set of 12 months for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE service plan. The SDU and the NTPF will work closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

Should a 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. In relation to the specific hospital appointment query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Appointment Status

242. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be called for an orthopaedic appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40141/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Improving access to outpatient services is a key priority for the Government. Collaborating with individual hospitals, the SDU, together with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE, has developed the outpatient waiting list minimum dataset. This allows data to be submitted to the NTPF from hospitals on a weekly basis and, for the first time, outpatient data is available on www.ntpf.ie. For 2013, a maximum waiting time target has been set of 12 months for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE service plan. The SDU and the NTPF will work closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

Should a 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. In relation to the specific hospital appointment query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services Staff Data

243. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the number of cognitive behavioural theory therapists employed by the Health Service Executive in each of their areas; the funding that has been made available to provide training for more such therapists; the target number of CBT therapists to be deployed in each area by the end of 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40156/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy with the information sought.

HSE Properties

244. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm what the Health Service Executive plans to do with a site which it recently bought (details supplied) in Dublin 12; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40177/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Management of the healthcare property portfolio is a service matter. Therefore your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Questions Nos. 245 to 248, inclusive, answered with Question No. 237.

Disability Support Services Provision

249. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support a matter on ability west service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40192/13]

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

Health Services Issues

250. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding back up support in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford. [40199/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

251. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting list for the chronic pain clinic in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin; the number of persons currently waiting to access the service; the average length of time persons have to wait to access this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40205/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Improving access to outpatient services is a key priority for the Government. Collaborating with individual hospitals, the SDU, together

with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE, has developed the outpatient waiting list minimum dataset. This allows data to be submitted to the NTPF from hospitals on a weekly basis and, for the first time, outpatient data is available on www.ntpf.ie. For 2013, a maximum waiting time target has been set of 12 months for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE service plan. The SDU and the NTPF will work closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

Should a 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. In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

252. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hip replacement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40209/13]

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.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

253. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the name and business address of all of the providers of public relations services to his Department since the current Government came into office; the total amount spent on such services in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40222/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Press and Communications Office of my Department liaise with the media on behalf of the Department as well as all Ministers and do not use the services of a PR company. My Department did not spend any money on public relations or communications consultants from March 2011-June 2013. Details in respect of any expenditure in respect of the remaining time is not available at present but will be collated and forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is.

Vaccine Damage Compensation Scheme

254. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his views on the establishment of a no-fault compensation scheme for those who suffer as a result of vaccine administration; the position regarding the establishment of such a compensation fund for the parents of vaccine damaged children; when a decision will be made on the implementation of the recommendations of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40238/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The establishment of a no-fault compensation scheme is being considered by my Department as part of the recommendations of the Vaccine Damage Steering Group. However, this issue is complex and needs to be considered in the wider context of how best to address the long term health and social needs of people who may have experienced adverse outcome from other health services.

Departmental Budgets

255. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the unallocated savings required to meet his Department's expenditure ceiling in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40278/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In the context of the forthcoming Budget, the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform has asked my Department to identify savings which will feed into the expenditure decisions by Government for the Estimates 2014 and the setting of future Ministerial ceilings.

The scale of the adjustments for 2014 were set out in part 1 of the *Expenditure Report 2013*, which was published in December 2012. Government will be making decisions on the future ceilings as part of the forthcoming budgetary deliberations, and decisions regarding the Health Sectors share of the unallocated savings will be taken in this context.

National Drugs Strategy Issues

256. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of times the Oversight Forum on Drugs Committee and the Drugs Advisory Group have met in the past year since September 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40282/13]

257. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update in the review of the structures of the National Drugs Strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40283/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 and 257 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, I announced details of a series of measures last December arising from a review of Drugs Task Forces and the national structures under which they operate. These measures included the extension of the remit of the Task Forces to include alcohol addiction and the establishment of a National Coordinating Committee for Drug and Alcohol Task Forces. This new committee will replace the Drugs Advisory Group, which has met twice since September 2012. The Oversight Forum on Drugs, which I envisage continuing in its present format, has met four times during that period.

As measures to address the abuse of alcohol remain under consideration by the Government, I am not yet in a position to provide clear time-scales for the establishment of the new committee. I am committed to the implementation of the proposals for reform arising from the review. To this end, I have arranged a series of bilateral meetings with Government departments and agencies, the community and voluntary sector and the drugs task forces in the coming weeks. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss how we can maintain and strengthen the inter-agency approach to the National Drugs Strategy in order to ensure successful implementation of the Drugs Task Force reforms.

Medical Card Applications

258. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health if the renewal of a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15 will be expedited; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40284/13]

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 issued to Oireachtas members.

Mobility Allowance Decision

259. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to remove the mobility grant and replace it with a new scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40285/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Government decided in June last that new statutory provisions should be established to provide individual payments to people with severe disabilities who require additional income to address the costs of their mobility needs. An inter-departmental group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, is working to develop detailed proposals for the operation of a new statutory scheme and is due to report back to Government in October.

The Government also decided in June that payments should temporarily continue to be made by the HSE to those persons currently in receipt of the Mobility Allowance for a further number of months, pending the commencement of new statutory provisions, on the basis that this would prevent hardship, and, on an interim basis, alleviate stress, anxiety and uncertainty among a vulnerable group in society.

The Government is very conscious of the needs of people with a disability who have relied on individual payments of Mobility Allowance to support their independence and will take all of this into consideration when making a decision on future arrangements.

Questions Nos. 260 and 261 answered with Question No. 39.

Health Insurance Prices

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which private health insurance costs continue to be affected by the charges in both the public and the private hospitals; the extent if any to which increases in private health insurance have resulted in increased charges for various services/procedures throughout the health system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40297/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The data available on the private health insurance market in recent years shows a number of factors which are affecting private health insurance costs. The reduction in the numbers holding private health insurance, the age profile

of those holding private health insurance, increases in claims costs, increases in premiums, and the overall state of the economy are all having an impact on the private health insurance market and its sustainability.

I am determined to address rising costs in the sector in the interests of consumers. I want insurers to address the base cost of each element of claims which they pay and have made it clear to private health insurers that I believe significant savings can be made, ultimately reducing the impact of rising health costs on health insurance premiums for the consumer.

While pricing decisions in relation to products are a matter for the private health insurers, I understand that key factors influencing price increases generally include the increasing volume and cost of claims and an ageing membership, in addition to ongoing medical innovations, which while welcome, have an impact on the cost of care. A significant number of the private health insurance claims are for procedures which are performed in private facilities, and the negotiated price for procedures in private hospitals is a “package” price, which may include the cost of surgery, drugs, pathology, and accommodation.

Last year I established the Consultative Forum on Health Insurance, comprising representatives from the private health insurance companies, my Department, and the Health Insurance Authority, to generate ideas to address health insurance costs. I appointed an independent Chairperson Mr. Pat McLoughlin, who will work with my Department and the insurers under the auspices of the Forum on a review process to give effect to real cost reductions in the private health insurance market. I want all insurers to address the base cost of their claims and to see all procedures provided in an appropriate, safe, healthcare setting.

It is imperative that the cost of health insurance is contained to secure the sustainability of the private health insurance market and to prepare for the move to a system of Universal Health Insurance.

Hospital Acquired Infections

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the total number of reports of various infections arising from MRSA or other hospital bugs on a monthly basis in each of the past three years to date; the action taken arising therefrom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40298/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter I have referred the Deputy’s question to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

Hospital Staff Issues

264. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which an adequate supply of junior hospital doctors is available throughout the health service in 2013; if they are sourced internally or overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40299/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The overall position regarding the supply of junior hospital doctors has stabilised since the last training rotation took place on 8 July and the majority of vacancies are now filled. While the majority of doctors are sourced internally, a number of posts are filled through recruitment of doctors from overseas.

Some challenges remain, mainly in smaller hospitals and in certain specialties, including Emergency Medicine and General Medicine at Registrar level. Where sites continue to experience challenges in terms of vacancies, hospital management implement contingency plans. If

necessary, hospitals make locum arrangements to ensure continued service delivery. System reform, in particular the implementation of the Report on Hospital Groups and the Framework for the Development of Smaller Hospitals will assist in achievement of a more focused and efficient deployment of NCHD staffing. These changes will build on the significant work that has been done through the HSE National Clinical programmes in recent years.

I am committed to improving the working-conditions of NCHDs and to ensuring that they can have a suitable career pathway within the Irish health system. Intensive work is underway in all hospitals to pursue compliance with the EWTD on junior doctors' working-hours. At the end of July this year, I set up a working group chaired by Professor Brian MacCraith, President of DCU to carry out a strategic review of the medical training and career structure of NCHDs. I see this as a modernising initiative which is needed urgently and which will, in future years, support the retention of sufficient numbers of doctors trained in Ireland within the system.

Question No. 265 answered with Question No. 6.

Nursing Staff Provision

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the number of nurses engaged through the public health service has fluctuated in each of the past four years to date; if he is satisfied regarding the adequacy of nursing levels at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40301/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The number of nurses engaged in the public health service has reduced over the past four years in accordance with Government policy, arising from the requirement that the numbers employed across the public service must be reduced in order to meet fiscal and budgetary targets. The HSE can make essential staff appointments once it remains within its overall employment ceiling and has the financial resources to do so.

The number of nurses employed has reduced as follows:

-	30/6/2010	30/6/2011	30/6/2012	30/6/2013
Total WTE excl. career breaks	37,499	36,853	34,980	34,742

While I acknowledge the pressures that reducing budgets and staff numbers place on health service staff, including nurses, I am confident that the reforms which are ongoing and the flexibility introduced by the Croke Park and Haddington Road Agreements will allow the HSE to continue to meet service demands with the reduced nursing complement.

Health Services Staff Data

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which staffing at all levels throughout the public health system remains adequate to meet requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40302/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has decided that the numbers employed across the public service must be reduced in order to meet its fiscal and budgetary targets. This policy requires that by the end of 2013, the health service achieves a workforce of 98,938 whole time equivalents (WTEs). However, the HSE can make staff appointments

once it remains within its overall employment ceiling and has the financial resources to do so.

The health service is the most complex sector of the Irish public service and employs approximately one-third of all public service staff. Despite the substantial reductions in financial and staff resources which have been necessary in recent years, the health budget accounts for approximately €13 billion annually. In addition, the health service is the subject of an ongoing major programme of reform in line with the Programme for Government. It is essential that the health service has the optimum number and mix of staff necessary for the safe and effective functioning of the the service in accordance with its business needs and Government policy on public service numbers.

While I acknowledge the pressures that reducing budgets and staff numbers place on the Health Service, I am confident that the reforms which are ongoing and the flexibility introduced by the Croke Park and Haddington Road Agreements will allow the HSE to continue to meet service demands within the approved staff ceiling.

Hospital Appointments Administration

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which patients seeking hospital appointments have been placed on waiting lists prior to obtaining a position on the actual hospital list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40303/13]

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 query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to him on the matter.

Primary Care Centres Provision

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which his Department's primary care building programme has progressed; the number of such centres already completed and in operation; the number proposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40304/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Considerable progress is being made in the delivery of primary care centres. 32 Primary Care Centres have opened since May 2011.

The delivery of primary care infrastructure is a dynamic process and must take account of changing circumstances including the feasibility of implementing the delivery of the centres by means of lease, direct- build or PPP. GP engagement and agreement to deliver services from primary care centres is central to the delivery of the necessary infrastructure. 35 potential locations for primary care centres for development by way of PPP were announced in the July 2012 Infrastructure Stimulus Package. The HSE is currently finalising sites and assessing GP engagement at each location to determine their interest in participating in the primary care centre development. While it is not possible, at this time, to give start and completion dates for

any of the individual 20 potential locations, the best estimate is that these primary care centres will be completed by late 2016.

Primary Care Centres Provision

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the full extent of the plans for primary care provision throughout County Kildare; the number of such primary care centres planned or already in existence; the extent to which patients in rural areas will have ready access to such centres where public transport does not exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40305/13]

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the replacement of a health centre (details supplied) in County Kildare which has been of significant convenience to the local population in a rural area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40306/13]

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health his plans, to upgrade the health centre at Johnstownbridge, Enfield, County Kildare which caters for a large catchment area and is extremely overcrowded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40307/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 to 272, inclusive, together.

The HSE has responsibility for the provision of Primary Care Centres and the operation and maintenance of existing health centres. Therefore, these matters have been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service Provision

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which ambulance services throughout North Kildare remain adequate to meet the demand having particular regard to reports to the contrary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40308/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Medical Card Data

274. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the total number of medical cards currently in circulation; the extent to which these numbers have fluctuated over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40309/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): At 1st September 2013, 1,987,423 people have free access to GP services under the GMS Scheme which equates to over 43% of the national population. Of these, 1,863,062 people hold medical cards, 53,888 of which are discretionary. This equates to 40.5% of the national population.

Medical cards statistics over the previous five years are outlined below.

Date	No. of Medical Cards	No. of Medical Cards as % of Population
End 2008	1,352,120	31%
End 2009	1,478,560	33%
End 2010	1,615,809	36%
End 2011	1,694,063	37%
End 2012	1,853,877	40%

Question No. 275 answered with Question No. 19.

Medical Card Eligibility

276. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if in the context of examination of eligibility for medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare cognisance has been taken of their medication and care requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40350/13]

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 issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Applications

277. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40351/13]

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 issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Eligibility

278. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card restored to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in August and withdrawn in September; if the medical card will re-issue without delay in view of the fact that the person is in receipt of invalidity allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40352/13]

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 issued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Waiting Lists

279. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the procedures governing a cosmetic medical procedure in the case of a child (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40353/13]

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 query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to him in the matter.

Medical Card Eligibility

280. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card was refused in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40354/13]

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 issued to Oireachtas members.

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

281. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the circumstances in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in respect of their eligibility for a refund under the ECHI who received treatment while on holiday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40355/13]

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 issued to Oireachtas members.

Question No. 282 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Data

283. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the number of advisers, programme managers, press officers and political staff and communica-

tion staff employed by his Department in 1981, 2011 and currently in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40705/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The information requested by the Deputy regarding advisory staff employed in support of the Minister for Health and Ministers of State at the Department is detailed below:

Minister	1981	2011	2013
Dr. Michael Woods, T.D.	* 1 Political Advisor	-	-
Dr. James Reilly T.D. Minister for Health	-	1 Press Advisor 1 Special Advisor	1 Press Advisor 1 Special Advisor
Róisín Shortall T.D. Minister of State	-	0.5 work sharer - Special Advisor	-
Alex White T.D. Minister of State	-	-	1 Special Advisor

* Despite extensive searches, it is not possible to confirm if there were any other advisors / political staff employed in support of the Minister / Ministers of State in 1981.

The above numbers do not include permanent members of the civil service staff of the Department who may be engaged in functions related to general press and communications work.

Taxi Regulations

284. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of the current 32,877 licensed small public service vehicle drivers that have been awarded additional areas of operation for which they have never sat or passed the area knowledge test. [40202/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the regulation of the taxi industry under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act, 2009, including responsibility for SPSV licensing requirements and the development and administration of the area knowledge and skills development test.

Your correspondence has been forwarded to the NTA for direct reply. If you do not receive a response within ten working days please notify my private Office.

Taxi Regulations

285. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total sum that has been spent since 2008, by the former Commission for Taxi Regulation and now the National Transport Authority to support the development and provision of infrastructure to facilitate and support the operation of small public service vehicles in all local authority areas; if he will provide a breakdown of the total amount spent on all or any projects; the number of local authorities that applied for financial assistance and the number that were refused. [40201/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the regulation of the taxi industry under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act, 2009. This includes, as provided for under Sections 11 and 50 of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2003, powers to give financial assistance to Local Authorities for the development of infrastructure for the small public service vehicles (SPSVs) services.

I have referred your Question to the NTA for direct response. Please advise my private office if you do not get a response within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

286. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding funding in respect of a club (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will outline all streams of funding available through his Department or an agency under its remit. [40291/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The Sports Capital Programme is the Government's primary vehicle for supporting the development of sports facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment. No decision has been made on the timing of the next round of the Programme. My Department does not provide any funding to meet current costs.

It may be possible for the club to raise funds via the 'Tax Relief for Donations to Certain Sports Bodies' scheme (section 847A of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997). This is a Revenue operated scheme which offers tax benefits to individuals or companies who make donations to sports clubs. Further details on this scheme and how it operates can be found on the Revenue Commissioners' website.

Question No. 287 withdrawn.