

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 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Aviation Policy

12. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the national aviation policy will be published; if the policy will contain measures to redress the decline in passenger numbers at Cork Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27135/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Following on from the public consultation process over the last year a draft National Aviation Policy for Ireland was published on 21 May 2014 and is available on my Department's website. The consultation process covered all elements of aviation policy and the draft National Aviation Policy takes account of the submissions received. Stakeholders now have an opportunity to provide further input before the policy is formally adopted and published. The closing date for submissions is 31 July. The new policy will be designed to ensure that the right conditions exist for a flourishing aviation industry into the future. It will facilitate the expansion of the industry, help make it more competitive, tackle barriers to growth and facilitate the development of new air transport links. I expect to publish the National Aviation Policy later in the year.

Cork airport is an important part of Ireland's civil aviation infrastructure and this was highlighted during the consultation process. It is Ireland's second busiest airport after Dublin. The Government has already decided that the future of Cork airport is best safeguarded by it remaining for the present as part of the DAA. I am conscious of the importance of Cork Airport in the development of the economy of the region as a whole and, in particular, for tourism. DAA has established a Development Council for Cork airport which will provide for strong engagement with, and alignment among, key stakeholders in the Cork region. It will serve to foster a common understanding, particularly at local level, of issues of concern, potential opportunities for growth and the operating performance of the airport. I hope the Council will be successful in its work, as a vibrant Cork Airport will ultimately benefit both Cork and the wider region.

Question No. 13 answered orally.

Haulage Industry Regulation

14. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the work of the interdepartmental working group considering the establishment of a pay-as-you-go road tax scheme for HGVs here similar to that introduced in the

UK, in view of the pressures facing road hauliers at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27388/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I refer the Deputy to my answer to Question 8.

Tourism Industry

15. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the performance of the tourism sector here to date in 2014, in comparison with the previous two years and projecting forward for the rest of the year, including the increased numbers in employment. [27315/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The most recent CSO figures for overseas visits to Ireland show that visitor numbers grew by 7.5% in the period from February to April 2014 when compared to the corresponding period of 2013. 2014 looks set to be the fourth year of consecutive growth in overseas visitor numbers according to these figures. Since the Government came to office, the total number of international visitors coming to Ireland per annum has increased by more than a million and is likely to exceed 7 million this year.

The recently published CSO Tourism & Travel release provides a breakdown of the purpose of visits, as well as expenditure and choice of accommodation for the first quarter. The number of trips to Ireland in the key target market of holidaymakers rose by 7.5% in the first quarter of 2014, when compared with the same period in 2013. Although spending by overseas visitors remained more or less flat when compared to 2013, this may reflect the fact that Easter fell in the second quarter of 2014 and the first quarter of 2013. In overall terms overseas revenue has increased from under €3.7 billion in 2011 to over €4.1 billion in 2013 - an increase of over 12 per cent.

The buoyancy in the sector is also being reflected in employment numbers. By the end of last year, it was estimated by the CSO that 137,000 people were employed in the accommodation and food service sectors alone. This represented an increase of almost 14% or 17,300 extra jobs since 2012. Fáilte Ireland estimates that total tourism employment is approximately 200,000 and could grow by 6-8,000 this year on current trends.

The most recent CSO Quarterly National Household Survey reported that seasonally adjusted employment in the accommodation and food sector increased by 14,000 from the first quarter of 2014 when compared to the equivalent period in 2013. That is an increase of 11% in the year to Quarter 1 2014. It is also equal to the highest ever employment figure for the sector in the first quarter, which was recorded in Q1 2007.

Road Projects

16. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the possibility of building the new road from Kerry to Cork via Ballyvourney and Macroom to Ovens; if he recognises the economic need for this new road and that it would make Kerry far more attractive for foreign direct investment and tourism by cutting journey times from Cork, that it would provide opportunities for many Kerry persons to commute to jobs in Cork safely and in viable travel times and that it would have a positive impact on health care provision, in view of the large volume of persons that travel from Kerry to Cork daily for

medical treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27095/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): It should be noted that the overall Ballyvourney to Ovens scheme has been divided into 2 sections; namely Ballyvourney to Macroom and Macroom to Ovens and that the first section (Ballyvourney to Macroom) is considered the higher priority by the NRA.

The general approach I have taken to future capital projects is to keep under review projects at various stages of planning and design which have been evaluated and appraised in order to have a pipeline of suitable “shovel ready” projects ready to avail of any funding opportunities that may arise. The N22 Ballyvourney - Macroom project which has been approved by An Bord Pleanála and where land is being acquired is such a project. This project could be advanced as a PPP in the future. Given the state of the public finances it will only prove possible in the medium term to advance projects such as this through PPPs rather than direct Exchequer funding.

Work has started on the preparation of the next capital programme. As the Deputy will appreciate, I will have to prioritise the maintenance and upkeep of existing infrastructure and the scope for progressing new projects under this programme will very much depend on the level of funding available. However I recognise the benefit of this road to the counties of Cork and Kerry and am keen to see it progressed if possible.

Road Projects Status

17. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has completed its assessment of the report submitted by Cork County Council in 2013 on the proposals to upgrade the N71 between Bandon and Skibbereen; the present status of this proposal; the possible timetable for the completion of this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27104/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Furthermore, within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects, such as the N71, is a matter for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

My Department had no record of a report from Cork County Council on proposals to upgrade the N71 between Bandon and Skibbereen. However following inquiries I understand that while a report on this scheme was first prepared in October 2008, the report was updated subsequently and the most recent update was in August 2013. Following the Deputy’s query and following contact with both the NRA and Cork County Council, the Department has clarified that the August 2013 report divides the full scheme into 8 sections and prioritises those sections that would bring the most benefits. The total estimated cost for the improvement works is €74.82m. To date the NRA has not been in a position to progress this proposed project.

The Government’s Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2015-2017 and Capital Review 2015-2019 have commenced. The Current and Capital Reviews will consider new ways of achieving Government objectives in the current tight fiscal climate, including the extent to which funding will be available for the maintenance and development of the road network. I cannot say at this point what the outcome of the Comprehensive Review and of the Capital Review process will be.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

18. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the 2014 sports capital programme; when it will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27096/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I was delighted to be able to launch the 2014 round of the Sports Capital Programme earlier this year. €40 million is available for allocation. The 2,036 applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Every application will be assessed by one official and reviewed by another. Given the number of applications received and the detail contained therein, this process takes a number of months to complete. I hope to announce allocations in the next number of weeks.

Applications are first checked to ensure eligibility. All eligible applications are initially assessed against five criteria, namely the likelihood of increasing participation and/or improving performance and sharing of facilities, level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area, technical merits of the project, level of own funding available and level of Sports Capital Programme funding received in the past. These criteria are designed to give higher scores to applications that increase participation, where facilities will be shared, that are from designated disadvantaged areas, that have not received substantial funding in the past and that are ready to be progressed as soon as possible.

In deciding the final allocations within each county, Minister Varadkar and I will have regard to a number of additional factors, including: ensuring a geographic spread of projects within each county; ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas within each county; and ensuring that there is a spread of projects among different sports.

Road Projects Status

19. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of proposals for the Bonagee link project to provide a new inner relief road and bridge across the River Swilly into Letterkenny; the projected cost of delivering the project; the amount that has been spent to date; his plans for funding it in the immediate future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27380/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I refer to my earlier answer to the same question from the Deputy.

Tourism Promotion

20. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on an official Fáilte Ireland tour map (details supplied) which is widely distributed to American holiday makers travelling here; his views on whether the people of the south east of Ireland, in particular County Waterford, are adequately represented by this; if he will make a commitment to directing Fáilte Ireland to include Waterford in any further publication of this nature; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27379/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I understand that the matter raised by the Deputy concerns the Explore Ireland map, which is jointly produced by Tourism Ireland and the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. As the Deputy will be aware, Tourism

Ireland is the organisation that markets the island of Ireland overseas as a compelling holiday and business tourism destination. Fáilte Ireland did not produce the map.

The Explore Ireland map is a full Ordnance Survey map of the island of Ireland, tailored for the international visitor, with tourist information on the reverse side, including various suggested car tour itineraries in Ireland. The segment of the tour from Dublin to Tramore in Co. Waterford does not pass through Waterford City. I have been recently advised by Tourism Ireland that the next edition of the map will include Waterford City in a new selection of tours.

Other publications produced recently by Tourism Ireland feature Waterford, including touring and city focused publications featuring the Viking Triangle and Waterford City generally. A classic driving tour guide was featured at the World Travel Market in London last November and has been used extensively since then, in particular in the Great Britain market. Furthermore, I am assured that Tourism Ireland continues to highlight Waterford city and its environs, and the fact that Ireland's oldest city is celebrating 1,100 years in 2014. Waterford City and its events, history, heritage, gardens, outdoor and other activities, the Viking Triangle, the Copper Coast and many other aspects of the area feature prominently in Tourism Ireland's 2014 marketing communications overseas. I am advised by Tourism Ireland that last year alone, it generated over €24 million (in advertising equivalent values) in positive publicity for Waterford and the South East in key markets overseas.

Road Improvement Schemes

21. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make funds available to upgrade the R624, Fota Road, and Slatty Bridge which connects Cobh to the mainland. [27093/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area, is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded from these monies is a matter for each local authority.

I am familiar with the R624 Cobh Road project which Deputy Stanton has raised with me on a number of occasions, most recently last Friday when I was at the Irish Open. I appreciate the need to upgrade access to Cobh island. However the position at present is that we do not have the funds to complete a project of this scale.

For the Deputy's information, an application was received from Cork County Council in 2010 for 100% funding of the R624 Cobh Road Project. This project involves the construction of a new road and bridge at an estimated cost of close to €60 million under the Strategic Regional and Local Roads Programme. The reduced funding available for regional and local roads has meant that it has been necessary to suspend grant allocations for major new road and realignment schemes and concentrate resources on the maintenance and rehabilitation of road pavements. Given the reduction in the available funding the Department is not, at this time, in a position to make a commitment to major improvement projects such as the Cobh scheme.

Cycling Policy

22. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans

to extend the network of greenways across the country; if he will provide an update on the greenways canal route between Dublin, Sallins and Naas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27097/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): This Government fully supports the development of greenways. In recent months, more than €16 million has been allocated to the delivery of cycle projects nationally, with the majority of funding been invested in off-road greenways. €10 million of this amount was provided under the recently announced stimulus package for infrastructure development.

In relation to County Kildare, the National Transport Authority (in cooperation with Kildare County Council) is the body responsible for the delivery of cycling infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). Detailed plans for the development of cycling infrastructure in Kildare are contained in the National Transport Authority's Cycle Network Plan for the GDA. I am copying your request to the NTA for follow up in relation to delivery timeframes. Please contact my office if you have not received a response from the NTA within 10 working days of this response. It should be noted that responsibility for local area cycle infrastructure development rests with Kildare County Council as the competent authority.

Separately, my Department received two proposals from the Council under the National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016 for the delivery of the Arthur's Way Greenway and sections of greenway between Maynooth to Longwood along the Royal Canal. While the applications submitted by the Council were of a high standard, competition was strong and it was not possible to award funding to these projects under the Programme. However, Kildare has subsequently received funding for the Arthur's Way project from the Stimulus fund.

It is likely, given the popularity and success of greenways already delivered, that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years and I look forward to the participation of Kildare County Council in future funding initiatives. It will be a matter for the Council to prioritise greenway projects within the county and to examine the merits of projects, such as the canal greenway between Dublin, Sallins and Naas, in conjunction with the NTA's Cycle Network Plan.

Sports Capital Programme Application Numbers

23. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications received by his Department this year under the sports capital grants scheme; if he will indicate the timescale for completion of the application process; when he expects to be in a position to confirm the applications that have been deemed successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27378/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I was delighted to be able to launch the 2014 round of the Sports Capital Programme earlier this year. €40 million is available for allocation. The 2,036 applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Every application will be assessed by one official and reviewed by another. Given the number of applications received and the detail contained therein, this process takes a number of months to complete. I hope to announce allocations in the next number of weeks.

Applications are first checked to ensure eligibility. All eligible applications are initially assessed against five criteria, namely the likelihood of increasing participation and/or improving performance and sharing of facilities, level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area, techni-

cal merits of the project, level of own funding available and level of Sports Capital Programme funding received in the past. These criteria are designed to give higher scores to applications that increase participation, where facilities will be shared, that are from designated disadvantaged areas, that have not received substantial funding in the past and that are ready to be progressed as soon as possible.

In deciding the final allocations within each county, Minister Varadkar and I will have regard to a number of additional factors, including: ensuring a geographic spread of projects within each county; ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas within each county; and ensuring that there is a spread of projects among different sports.

Irish Airlines Superannuation Scheme

24. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has made a decision in his position as a shareholder in relation to the recommendations of the expert panel convened to deal with the IASS pension deficit. [27338/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I welcomed the report of the Expert Panel that was published on 16 June. It has been clear for a long time that any solution to this issue will require significant contributions from both the employers and the members of the scheme. The Panel's task was to identify the fairest way to distribute the burden, while addressing a range of other impediments. I have urged all parties to the scheme to give the report very careful consideration, use its recommendations as the basis for timely constructive engagement, and achieve a resolution in the best interests of all parties. This represents the last best chance to resolve this long-standing problem and to give the scheme members certainty about their future pension entitlements.

Aer Lingus has stated that it is reviewing the recommendations of the report and it will issue a further announcement to shareholders in due course. The company has made it clear that any proposal to address the deficit in the IAS scheme would be subject to shareholder approval. However, there are a number of steps to be completed before the matter is put to shareholders. I would in principle be in favour of a proposal put to the shareholders based on the recommendations of the Expert Panel Report. However, a final decision would have to await consideration of the company's proposal to shareholders and consultation with my Cabinet colleagues.

Cycling Policy

25. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to extend the network of greenways across the country, with specific reference to County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27389/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority (in cooperation with Kildare County Council) is the body responsible for the delivery of cycling infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). Detailed plans for the development of cycling infrastructure in Kildare are contained in the NTA's Cycle Network Plan for the GDA. I am copying your request to the NTA for follow up in relation to delivery timeframes. Please contact my office if you have not received a response from the NTA within 10 working days of this response. It should be noted that responsibility for local area cycle infrastructure development rests with Kildare County Council (KCC) as the competent authority.

Separately, my Department received two proposals from KCC under the National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016 for the delivery of the Arthur's Way Greenway and sections of greenway between Maynooth to Longwood along the Royal Canal. While the applications submitted by the Council were of a high standard, it was not possible to award funding under the NCN Programme as the number of applications significantly outweighed the level of funding available at that time. However, KCC have subsequently received the full amount of funding requested for the Arthur's Way Greenway from the recently announced €200 million Stimulus Package. €10 million of this package was earmarked for the development of cycling infrastructure.

I look forward to the participation of KCC in future funding initiatives. It is likely, given the popularity and success of the greenways already delivered, that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years. It is also worth noting that the EU Structural Funds Programme 2014 to 2020 is currently being finalised and there may be significant opportunities for cycle infrastructure development and promotion under the various sub programmes. I understand that many local authorities are already positioning themselves to avail of such opportunities.

Mountain Rescue Service

26. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration is being given to assisting mountain rescue teams with the purchase of new vehicles which are essential in the performance of the organisations' duties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27111/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware the current arrangements concerning mountain rescue teams (MRTs) create some confusion. Under Ireland's Framework for Emergency Management, MRTs fall under the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality and are coordinated and tasked by An Garda Síochána. However, my Department does administer a grant scheme to the mountain rescue teams and the Coast Guard also chair the National Coordinating Committee for Mountain and Cave Rescue (NCCMCR). This creates a level of confusion as to which Department is responsible for funding and supporting MRTs. I have discussed this with my colleague Minister Fitzgerald and we are keen to examine this issue and end the perception of MRTs falling between two stools, so to speak.

Separate to this, on foot of Deputy Kyne's suggestion late last year, I undertook to consider the possibility of providing a capital grant to assist mountain rescue services. I asked my officials to examine this. Given the role of MRTs in supporting participation in mountaineering and hill walking, I am now in a position to announce a special once-off sports capital allocation of €200,000 to mountain rescue services. These funds are to be used for the purchase of vehicles and equipment, with the precise details to be arranged between my Department and Mountain Rescue Ireland.

Public Transport

27. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the public transport performance in the year to date; the initiatives that will be taken to increase use of public transport; if a special dedicated approach will be implemented for cities outside of Dublin, such as Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27136/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): Both Minister Varadkar and I have regular meetings with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and transport operators to progress one of our key objectives of increasing the number of people using public transport by 2% this year, or 5 million journeys. The most recent figures to mid-May show that passenger numbers have increased by 3.4%. The NTA together with the transport operators have launched a number of promotions to encourage people to use public transport and a number of other initiatives are planned for this year.

At national level, the NTA also manages, on behalf of my Department, the Regional Cities Public Transport Programme, which covers the cities of Cork, Waterford, Galway and Limerick. Their remit includes the provision of Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG), where funding is provided for various traffic management, bus priority and sustainable projects, such as improvements to cycle and walking routes. I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA to respond in relation to the specific initiatives being undertaken to increase public transport patronage and the funding provided for projects in regional cities. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Tourism Industry

28. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on tourism performance in the year to date and since this Government came into office both in terms of visitor numbers and employment. [27266/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I refer the Deputy to my answer to question 15 answered earlier.

Road Traffic Legislation

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a further report on the work of the criminal justice (fixed charge processing system) working group; and the recommendations and actions that have been outlined by the group regarding the much needed implementation of section 44 of Road Traffic Act 2010. [27103/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The first report of the Criminal Justice Working Group, established following the publication of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate report into the Fixed Charge Processing System, will be submitted to Government in July and the progress made to date towards resolving the technical and administrative issues to allow for commencement of Section 44 of the Road Traffic Act 2010 will form part of that report. A sub-group of the Criminal Justice Working Group has been examining the issues to be addressed to give effect to Section 44 of the Road Traffic Act 2010, known as the 3rd payment option. The sub-group and the Working Group itself is identifying what changes to existing systems, including IT systems, and the practices and procedures of the Gardaí and the Courts Services are necessary so that this option can be implemented.

Aviation Policy

30. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will indicate the publication date of the national aviation policy document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27382/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Following on from the public consultation process over the last year, a draft National Aviation Policy for Ireland was published on 21 May 2014 and is available on my Department's website. The consultation process covered all elements of aviation policy and the draft National Aviation Policy takes account of the submissions received. Stakeholders now have an opportunity to provide further input before the policy is formally adopted and published. The closing date for receipt of submissions is 31 July.

The new policy will be designed to ensure that the right conditions exist for a flourishing aviation industry into the future. It will facilitate the expansion of the industry, help make it more competitive, tackle barriers to growth and facilitate the development of new air transport links. I expect to finalise, adopt and publish the new National Aviation Policy before the end of 2014.

The Gathering Revenue

31. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the success of The Gathering 2013 in terms of tourism generated and the promotion of Ireland to the world; the amount of Government funding allocated to the promotion of The Gathering 2013; the estimated revenue directly generated as a result of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27377/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Working closely with Fáilte Ireland which supported local communities and other stakeholders in creating the many gatherings and events around the country, the Gathering Ireland 2013 was also a major focus of Tourism Ireland's overseas promotions throughout 2012 and 2013. In this regard, the agency engaged with the Irish diaspora worldwide and undertook an increased focus on the promotion of roots tourism. Tourism Ireland estimates that the international marketing of The Gathering Ireland reached 200 million people worldwide through a wide range of media and promotional activity. Publicity was an integral element of the promotional programme; 1,500 international journalists visited during the year and subsequently wrote and broadcast about the Gathering, generating an estimated €75 million in positive publicity worldwide.

A designated budget of €12 million was provided for the project by my Department; €5 million in 2012 and a further €7 million in 2013. This was supplemented by a further €1 million provided by Fáilte Ireland. The €13 million core funding was supplemented by a range of cash and non-cash supports leveraged by The Gathering from key partners. The provision of a substantial range of supports by the Dublin Airport Authority and a €1 million Gathering event fund provided by IPB Insurance Ltd were chief among the partner supports secured. Independent research undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland indicates that in 2013 between 250,000 and 275,000 overseas visitors to Ireland travelled specifically because of 'the Gathering'. This growth in visitor numbers, directly attributable to the Gathering, was estimated to be worth approximately €170 million in revenue in 2013.

Tourism Policy

32. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has completed his review of tourism policy here. [27090/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Tourism Policy Review commenced in September 2013 when Minister Ring and I launched a consultation

document, raising a series of questions regarding policy priorities, and inviting comments and responses from tourism industry stakeholders. Over 170 submissions were received in response to the consultation document, from a wide variety of interested parties. Reflecting the diverse nature of tourism itself, a wide range of issues emerged in this feedback. The consultation process was also progressed by means of a series of regional seminars, each of which was chaired by me or Minister Ring. These seminars involved an invited group of regional tourism actors, designed to maximise constructive discussion of the questions raised.

Following examination of all the written submissions, and the issues raised in the regional seminars, a Draft Tourism Policy Statement has now been prepared in my Department and I am currently making final drafting amendments to it. A key aspect of this statement is a switch in focus from targeting growth in overseas visit numbers to targeting overseas visitor revenue, which is the key measure of the substantive economic impact provided by tourism. I will publish the Draft Policy Statement shortly to allow a brief period for further feedback from tourism stakeholders. A finalised Tourism Policy Statement will then be brought to Government for approval.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

33. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the 2014 sports capital programme; when decisions will issue in respect of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27363/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I was delighted to be able to launch the 2014 round of the Sports Capital Programme earlier this year. €40 million is available for allocation. The 2,036 applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Every application will be assessed by one official and reviewed by another. Given the number of applications received and the detail contained therein, this process takes a number of months to complete. I hope to announce allocations shortly.

Applications are first checked to ensure eligibility. All eligible applications are initially assessed against five criteria, namely the likelihood of increasing participation and/or improving performance and sharing of facilities, level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area, technical merits of the project, level of own funding available and level of Sports Capital Programme funding received in the past. These criteria are designed to give higher scores to applications that increase participation, where facilities will be shared, that are from designated disadvantaged areas, that have not received substantial funding in the past and that are ready to be progressed as soon as possible.

In deciding the final allocations within each county, Minister Varadkar and I will have regard to a number of additional factors, including: ensuring a geographic spread of projects within each county; ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas within each county; and ensuring that there is a spread of projects among different sports.

Sports Capital Programme Data

34. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport of the 2,036 applications for funding under the 2014 sports capital grant programme, if he will outline, in tabular form, the number per county that have been deemed invalid and the reason for same. [27089/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2,036 applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Every application is assessed by one official and reviewed by another. Given the number of applications received and the detail contained therein, this process takes a number of months to complete. I hope to announce allocations in the next number of weeks.

The main reasons applications are deemed invalid include failure to comply with the Department's requirements in relation to title/access, planning permission, own funding, quotations and sporting content. At the end of the process we will be writing to those organisations that are deemed invalid indicating specifically why their applications were deemed invalid.

All eligible applications are initially assessed against five criteria, namely the likelihood of increasing participation and/or improving performance and sharing of facilities, level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area, technical merits of the project, level of own funding available and level of Sports Capital Programme funding received in the past. These criteria are designed to give higher scores to applications that increase participation, where facilities will be shared, that are from designated disadvantaged areas, that have not received substantial funding in the past and that are ready to be progressed as soon as possible.

Tourism Industry

35. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which employment in the tourism sector continues to improve; the measures taken or likely to generate growth in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27391/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The most recent CSO figures for overseas visits to Ireland show that visitor numbers grew by 7.5% in the period from February to April 2014 when compared to the corresponding period of 2013. Since the Government came to office, the annual total number of international visitors coming to Ireland has increased by more than a million and is almost certain to exceed 7 million this year. By the end of last year, it was estimated by the CSO that 137,000 people were employed in the accommodation and food service sectors alone. This represented an increase of almost 14% or 17,300 extra jobs since 2012. The most recent CSO Quarterly National Household Survey reported that seasonally adjusted employment in the sector increased by 14,000 from the first quarter of 2014 when compared to the equivalent period in 2013. That is an increase of 11% in the year to Quarter 1 2014. It is also equal to the highest ever employment figure for the sector in the first quarter, which was recorded in Q1 2007.

In terms of measures to generate further growth in the sector, an extensive promotional programme is underway this year with a view to continuing to grow visitor numbers to Ireland. The year has got off to a positive start and overall sentiment for travel to Ireland is largely positive. In view of this work by the tourism agencies, and other measures such as the retention of the 9% VAT rate, the reduction of the air travel tax to zero, the recently announced joint visa initiative between Ireland and the United Kingdom and increased air access to Ireland, I am confident that the prospects for Irish tourism remain positive.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

36. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the current position of the 2014 sports capital programme. [27267/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I was delighted to be able to launch the 2014 round of the Sports Capital Programme earlier this year. €40 million is available for allocation. The 2,036 applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Every application will be assessed by one official and reviewed by another. Given the number of applications received and the detail contained therein, this process takes a number of months to complete. I hope to announce allocations in the next number of weeks.

Applications are first checked to ensure eligibility. All eligible applications are initially assessed against five criteria, namely the likelihood of increasing participation and/or improving performance and sharing of facilities, level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area, technical merits of the project, level of own funding available and level of Sports Capital Programme funding received in the past. These criteria are designed to give higher scores to applications that increase participation, where facilities will be shared, that are from designated disadvantaged areas, that have not received substantial funding in the past and that are ready to be progressed as soon as possible.

In deciding the final allocations within each county, Minister Varadkar and I will have regard to a number of additional factors, including: ensuring a geographic spread of projects within each county; ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas within each county; and ensuring that there is a spread of projects among different sports.

Capital Programme Expenditure

37. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, the existing infrastructure that is deteriorating due to a lack of funds being received from his Department; if he will provide, in tabular form, infrastructure projects that are under way and funded by his Department; the cost of these infrastructure projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27349/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Around 95% of the capital allocation in my Department's Vote relates to infrastructural investment in land transport, mainly in roads and public transport. A key element of this expenditure relates to the maintenance of existing assets. Apart from the land transport programme, capital funding is directed mainly towards Sports and Tourism programmes which are generally co-financed and do not place a requirement on the Department for their ongoing maintenance. Details of key infrastructure programmes and projects currently underway under the land transport and maritime programmes are either set out below or will be provided in due course by the agencies responsible.

As the level of Exchequer funding available has diminished since the crisis, so too has our capacity to maintain the existing transport network and this has led to a deterioration in parts of our road network in particular. Recent Government Stimulus Plans have gone some way towards addressing this gap.

In this regard, work is well advanced within my Department on a Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport (SFILT). This will provide a framework for future transport investment by prioritising investment that can enhance economic productivity, while also recognising that meeting the needs of people is a critical aspect of transport infrastructure provision. A key element is to estimate the level of funding necessary to maintain, manage and renew our existing transport infrastructure so as to keep it in an adequate condition, including any ongoing contractual commitments, and so avoid a backlog of maintenance and renewal which could re-

sult in their degradation over time and ultimately lead to higher costs.

My Department's submission as part of the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure and Capital Review post-2015 reflects these issues. The outcome of this process will be a matter for Government in the context of the Estimates for 2015 and beyond. The SFILT document is nearing completion and I intend to publish it as a consultation document.

As I mentioned already, I have asked the relevant Agencies under my remit - principally, the National Roads Authority and the National Transport Authority - to provide details on specific roads and public transport projects currently underway. Under the Smarter Travel programme which is administered by my Department, projects under the National Cycle Network, Active Travel Towns and Smarter Travel Areas, are set out below.

National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016

County	Project	km	Grant amount
Kerry	Glenbeigh-Reenard Trail (Phase 2 and Phase 3)	26	3,458,281
Galway	Galway to Moyculen Greenway	12.4	2,000,000
Waterford	Clonea to Durrow Greenway (Phase 1)	7.2	897,739

National Cycle Network - Stimulus Funding 2014

County	Project	km	Grant amount
Clare	West Clare Greenway -Phase 1 - Ennis to Balllymacquiggan	5	400,000
Kerry	Caherciveen to Reenard Point (Phase 1 Fertha Greenway)	5.75	450,000
Kerry	Tralee Fenit Trail - Phase 1 Rock Street to Casement Station	0.42	345,000
Kildare	Arthur's Way Greenway	25	311,000
Limerick	Patrickswell to Limerick City cycleway	4.14	420,000
Mayo	Monasteries of the Moy - part funding for project	14	250,000
Roscommon	Boyle to Lough Key Forest Park	24	400,000
Tipperary	Clonmel to Carrickon-Suir Greenway	20	1,900,000
Waterford	Kilmeaden to Bilberry Greenway	9.6	1,100,000

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County	Project	km	Grant amount
Westmeath	Athlone to Mullingar Greenway	40	4,000,000
Westmeath	Coolnahay to the County Boundary	14.4	700,000

In relation to the Active Travel Towns Programme, a multi-annual budget of €6.6m has been approved for the period 2014-16 and 9 towns have been granted funding. While the majority of the funding will be invested in infrastructure, some funding will be directed towards softer measures to encourage behavioural change. The following is a list of projects being funded over the period 2014 to 2016:

Name of Town	Amount of Funding 2014-2016- €	Nature of Works
Clonmel	1,000,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips
Thurles	510,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips
Birr	954,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips
Sligo	500,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips
Tralee	1,363,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips
Wexford	648,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips

Name of Town	Amount of Funding 2014-2016- €	Nature of Works
Cavan	500,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips
Ennis	650,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips
Claremorris	432,000	Investment in cycling/walking infrastructure and other softer measures to encourage behavioural change away from using the car for shorter trips

In February 2012, the local authorities of Limerick City & County, Waterford and Mayo, as winners of the National Competition for Smarter Travel Areas, were awarded total funding of €21.7 million over a 5-year period. The funding is being provided to transform the respective areas of Limerick City & Environs, Dungarvan and Westport into Smarter Travel Areas. While a proportion of the funding will be used to develop infrastructure, some will be allocated towards supporting softer, behavioural change measures. The funding being provided to each local authority over the period is as follows:

- Limerick Smarter Travel - €9 million
- Smarter Travel Go Dungarvan - €7.2 million
- Smarter Travel Westport - €5 million

On the maritime side, some capital funding is available to Harbour Authorities for remedial works. Infrastructure projects currently underway are:

Projects	Funding	Harbours
Cork Co Co	€1,000,000	Remedial works Baltimore & Kinsale Harbours
Wexford Co Co	€ 100,000	Remedial Works Wexford Harbour
Wicklow Co Co	€2,000,000	Remedial Works Arklow Harbour

Approximately €450,000 has been allocated to the IRCG programme for 2014, in respect of the commencement of the building of a new Coast Guard station at Greystones for the volunteer unit. The commencement of the project is subject to completion of the contract award process by the OPW.

State Airports

38. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on discussions with the management of Ireland West Airport, Knock, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27101/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department was represented on and provided secretarial support to the IWA Knock Study Group which reported in December 2013. The recommendations of the Study Group were fed into the Regional Airports Programme 2015 to 2019 which is currently being finalised in my Department and Ireland's Aviation Policy, which has been circulated in draft form for final consultation. The Regional Airports Programme will be submitted for approval in due course to the EU Commission. Discussions will be held with IWA Knock and the other three regional airports concerned regarding their future growth and funding under that Programme, subsequent to its approval by the EU.

Sports Sponsorship

39. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to prohibit sports sponsorship by alcoholic drinks companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27105/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In October 2013, as part of a suite of measures to deal with alcohol misuse, the Government decided to establish a working group to consider the impact of regulating alcohol sponsorship of major sporting events by alcohol companies. This group is due to report to Government by October of this year. The working group is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and my Department is represented on it. I look forward to receiving a copy of the Working Group's report when it has concluded its work.

Tourism Industry

40. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has been in contact with the Department of Justice and Equality for the purpose of improving the tourist experience in Dublin city centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27350/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I take it that the Deputy is referring to incidents of anti-social behaviour and other problems on the streets of Dublin city centre, which are matters for the Minister for Justice and Equality, given her responsibility for policing. In my capacity as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I am aware of the negative impact such incidents can have on visitors' holiday experience and on their impressions of our country. I have previously raised my concerns with both the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Dublin City Manager and I understand that the Garda Síochána and the civic authorities in Dublin are working to tackle these problems.

The Deputy may also be interested to know that in the unfortunate event that tourists are the victims of crime, they can avail of the services of Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS). ITAS, which is part funded by Fáilte Ireland as well as the Department of Justice and Equality, provides a specialist service offering immediate support and assistance to tourists who are

victimised while visiting Ireland. In relation to improving the broader tourist experience, following the report of the Grow Dublin Taskforce, the tourism agencies, the City Council and the tourism industry are working together to refresh the tourism offering in the capital.

Tourism Promotion

41. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the avenues for funding or investment available for natural landscapes, like Malin Head, Inishowen, County Donegal, which have great tourism potential, but lack basic facilities such as toilets and rest areas, which are essential for growing visitor numbers to the area; his views on a visit to the area by relevant official-officials from his Department to view first hand the potential tourism opportunity at Malin Head and to meet with community and business representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27314/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): While my Department provides capital funding for investment in tourism attractions through Fáilte Ireland, neither my Department nor I are directly involved in the development of specific tourist attractions and locations. The development of the Wild Atlantic Way is a matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland, while the development of tourism facilities associated with the route is a matter for the local stakeholders in the direct instance, with the support of Fáilte Ireland where appropriate. In this regard, I am aware that Fáilte Ireland has offered to meet with the local community group in the coming weeks to discuss the development of Malin Head. I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

42. **Deputy Ray Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the 2014 sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27098/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I was delighted to be able to launch the 2014 round of the Sports Capital Programme earlier this year. €40 million is available for allocation. The 2,036 applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Every application will be assessed by one official and reviewed by another. Given the number of applications received and the detail contained therein, this process takes a number of months to complete. I hope to announce allocations shortly.

Applications are first checked to ensure eligibility. All eligible applications are initially assessed against five criteria, namely the likelihood of increasing participation and/or improving performance and sharing of facilities, level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area, technical merits of the project, level of own funding available and level of Sports Capital Programme funding received in the past. These criteria are designed to give higher scores to applications that increase participation, where facilities will be shared, that are from designated disadvantaged areas, that have not received substantial funding in the past and that are ready to be progressed as soon as possible.

In deciding the final allocations within each county, Minister Varadkar and I will have regard to a number of additional factors, including: ensuring a geographic spread of projects within each county; ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas

within each county; and ensuring that there is a spread of projects among different sports.

Tourism Projects Funding

43. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his long-term plans in relation to the western rail corridor as a railway line for both freight and passenger travel; if he will seek funds from the EU for its development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27106/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The lifetime of the Government's current capital investment plan runs to 2016 and with the available funding the priority for heavy rail is to protect the operational network and maintain safety standards, rather than the expansion of the network. Phase 1 of the Western Rail Corridor (WRC) between Ennis to Athenry opened in March 2010 and final close out payments for this phase have been included in the current capital plan. Consideration of the next phase was deferred.

Preparatory work on a new government capital investment plan to 2020 has begun. This will involve a focused review of the medium-term capital envelope to take account of investment priorities for the next 5 years. If additional funds are available there will be many competing transport projects across all modes and from all regions. Only projects for which there is a clear identifiable need, which are affordable, have a robust business case and add value to existing infrastructure, will be prioritised for funding to 2020.

In terms of specific initiatives being undertaken by Iarnród Éireann, that is a matter for the management of that company. I have referred the Deputy's question to them for a direct reply. If you do not receive a response within ten working days, please contact my private office.

My officials will monitor available European funding opportunities to see if any present themselves. I am advised that when funding for Phase 1 of the WRC was considered in 2006, by a Government of which the Deputy was a member, there was no application made to the EU for funding. I understand that this was due to the negative Net Present Value (NPV) of minus €137 million. EU funding is generally only available for projects assessed to have a positive benefit to cost ratio and positive NPV. Irish taxpayers' money has been used more liberally in the past.

Irish Airlines Superannuation Scheme

44. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the report of expert panel on the Irish airlines superannuation scheme which has been published; his views that the recommendations form the basis for a resolution of the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27226/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I refer the Deputy to my answer to Priority Question No. 1 today.

Mountain Rescue Service

45. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has made representations to the Department of Finance in order to have organisations engaged in mountain rescue exempt from VAT. [27227/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Exemption from VAT is entirely a matter for the Revenue Commissioners and my colleague the Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan. I have not made representations to Minister Noonan to have mountain rescue organisations exempted from VAT. In recent exchanges with representatives of the organisations, both my officials and I have advised that it would be more appropriate for them to contact the Department of Finance in relation to this.

Mountain Rescue Service

46. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the introduction of a capital grant scheme for the voluntary mountain rescue teams such as the Galway mountain rescue team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27110/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I refer to my answer to question 26 earlier.

Mountain Rescue Service

47. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider the establishment of a small capital grant for mountain and sub-aqua rescue and recovery groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27102/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In terms of supporting mountain rescue teams (MRTs) I refer the Deputy to my answer to question 26 to Deputy Kyne earlier today.

I appreciate greatly the support that volunteer diving teams provide to the Coast Guard and the other emergency services. For the Deputy's information my Department, through the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG), is responsible for the initiation, control and coordination of maritime emergencies in the Irish territorial waters, harbours and coastline. The Coast Guard carries out this function utilising its own assets and declared resources. Diving support to the IRCG is provided in the first instance by the Garda Water Unit and the Navy Diving team. Volunteer diving teams do on occasion offer assistance but in such scenarios their participation is based on an offer of support.

Under previous rounds of the Sports Capital Programme grants have been allocated to sub aqua rescue clubs. Regrettably, in terms of the establishment of a specific grant scheme for such bodies, it is not envisaged that any funding assistance will be extended to sub aqua rescue or recovery groups at present.

Semi-State Bodies

48. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his position regarding the sustainability and future success of Irish Rail; the impact the EU's fourth railway package will have on the company; if he is satisfied with the industrial relations between unions and management in the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27347/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised by the Deputy is a matter for Irish Rail management and their employees and trade unions and has been the subject of lengthy negotiations under the auspices of the Labour Relations Committee

(LRC) and the Labour Court.

As you know, Irish Rail is in a precarious financial situation and together with the rest of the CIE Group is dependent on continued bank funding. The problems in Irish Rail are particularly acute - the company has incurred accumulated losses (after subvention) of €148m over the period 2008 to 2013, a position which is unsustainable. I am very supportive of the efforts by Irish Rail to strengthen the company's financial position through cost saving measures and other strategies. The Deputy will be aware that I have publicly commented on the importance of agreement being reached by trade unions and management on payroll savings. There have already been substantial fare increases and the payroll savings must happen in the context of the very difficult financial challenges that the company faces.

The Fourth Railway Package consists of six proposals aimed at removing the remaining barriers to the completion of the Single European Railway Area. The Package comprises three pillars which are referred to as the technical, market opening and governance pillars. The technical pillar of the Package reinforces harmonisation of interoperability and safety arrangements and extends the role of the European Railway Agency. It had been politically agreed within the Council of Ministers and will now be considered by the European Parliament in its second reading. Those measures will not impact significantly on Irish Rail.

Negotiations have not yet commenced in the Council of Ministers on the proposals for market opening and governance. The Commission's proposal is to introduce mandatory tendering for public service contracts and the opening of the domestic passenger markets to competition. The Irish rail market is the subject to a single public service contract and there are no unsubsidised rail passenger services. These proposals would potentially have a very significant impact for Irish Rail if agreed in their current form. It is notable however that the European Parliament has proposed a significant amendment in relation to the mandatory tendering proposal. I am of the view that the size of the market places a constraint on the potential benefits that could be achieved through competitive tendering. In this context, I will consider seeking a derogation for Ireland.

Bus Éireann Services

49. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if proposals to privatise Bus Éireann routes in Waterford city will be reconsidered and preferably halted in view of the current economic climate and uncertainty in Waterford city, and in view of the fact that there are fears this move, which singles out Waterford, may lead to a downgrading of bus services, workers' pay and conditions, and eventually further job losses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27100/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The direct award contracts for the provision of PSO bus market services held by Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann expire later this year. The awarding of subsequent contracts is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA). There are no plans to revisit the decision of the NTA to tender the PSO bus services in Waterford.

The purpose of public transport is not to provide employment to any particular group of people but to provide a good public transport service to the public. The principal concern when looking at the future of bus services in Waterford is to provide a better service to those people who currently use those services, and more importantly, getting those people who don't, to use those bus services. As at present, the fares, timetables and service standards will be set by the NTA. The tendering of these services will therefore not lead to a downgrading of services to

bus users. The purpose of the tendering is to secure a better service for the same cost. It will be good for Waterford, its residents and may yet become an example for other places to follow. It is open to Bus Éireann to compete in this tender.

In the case of Bus Éireann not being successful in the competitive process, staff would be protected under the European Communities (Protection of Employees on Transfer of Undertakings) Regulations 2003 (the “Transfer Regulations” or “TUPE”). Minister of State Alan Kelly and I met with the unions representing Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann workers in November to discuss this matter. Arising from that we asked the NTA to put a structured engagement with unions in place and the NTA met with the NBRU and SIPTU unions in January and March this year.

Cycling Facilities Funding

50. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make funding available to complete greenways from Tralee to Fenit and from Listowel to the Limerick border near Kilmorna along CIE-owned routes; if he will fund a feasibility study for the Tralee to Listowel route; if feasibility studies would be initiated to find a viable route possibly incorporating local back roads in places and so on where historic railway lines used to be in State ownership from Glenbeigh to Farranfore and from Killarney to Kenmare, with absolute recognition being given to landowners along these routes and with an approach of consultation, respect for property rights and co-operation being central to all efforts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27094/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): I was very pleased to be in a position to provide funding to Kerry County Council (KCC) under both the National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016 and the Government Stimulus Package. As you say, almost €4 million has been provided to the Glenbeigh - Reenard Point Greenway. However, I should also mention that funding of €345,000 has also been provided to a phase of the Tralee to Fenit Trail from Rock Street to Casement Station. This was provided under the recently announced Government Stimulus for Infrastructure Development. Additionally, this project was the beneficiary of €200,000 from my Department in 2010, which resulted in the opening of a 1.8km section of the trail last year. I was delighted to have the opportunity to be there on that occasion.

While I do not anticipate any further funding announcements in the near future, it is my intention to continue to seek out funding for such infrastructure. In the meantime, I look forward to the delivery of the projects currently being funded and to the participation of Kerry County Council in future funding initiatives. It is likely, given the popularity of greenways already delivered, that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years which will enable the Council to progress, with the consent and support of the communities involved, those other projects you mention. The local authority is best placed to examine options for the delivery of further cycle routes and to respectfully consult with landowners as projects develop.

It is also worth noting that the EU Structural Funds Programme 2014 to 2020 is currently being finalised and there may be significant opportunities for cycle infrastructure development under its various sub programmes including the Rural Development Programme. I understand that many local authorities are already positioning themselves to avail of such opportunities.

Tourism Attractions

51. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he or his Department had contact with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht regarding the tourism potential for County Galway of a preserved and revamped Naomh Eanna. [27092/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Neither I nor my Department have had contact with the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs regarding the Naomh Eanna. The funding and development of individual tourism attractions is a matter for Fáilte Ireland. I have asked Fáilte Ireland to advise you of any contacts they have had in regard to this proposed project. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days

Multilateral Development Banks

52. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to countries that to date made any evaluation of the benefits for poor persons of the activities of multilateral investment banks, in view of the fact that the Government has indicated in the policy paper “One World, One Future” that it will explore the potential benefits of membership of the African Development Bank. [27614/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): In line with the commitment in the Government’s new policy for international development, ‘One World, One Future’, which was launched in May 2013, the Department of Finance and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are currently exploring the potential benefits of Ireland’s membership of the African Development Bank. The Minister for Finance has the lead role in seeking a Government decision on Ireland’s membership of Multilateral Development Banks.

Ireland is currently a member of several Multilateral Development Banks, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Multilateral Development Banks are important contributors to economic and social development, and membership is valuable in building inter-regional relations and contributing to development results in the fight against global poverty and hunger. The African Development Bank represents a major source of knowledge and expertise in relation to macroeconomic and sector-specific developments across the African continent. We recognise that an enhanced relationship with the African Development Bank could help further the objectives of the Africa Strategy of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in achieving development objectives and fostering economic and business linkages.

Any decision to join a Multilateral Development Bank, however, would be a long term one, with funding implications. In exploring the issues involved, it will be important to consider the strategic fit between the Bank’s and Ireland’s development priorities and economic interests, synergies with our bilateral aid programme, the effectiveness and performance of the Bank, and its contribution to poverty reduction. This process would involve drawing on existing external reviews and evaluations of the Bank and the development results it is achieving, especially the impact on poverty reduction.

Passport Services

53. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to open a passport office in Dundalk, County Louth, to cater for the northern half of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27632/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Passport Service provides a comprehensive range of options for citizens to apply for passports. An appointment service has been in operation at the Molesworth Street Passport Office for over a year. The service allows customers to book via a simple web based system a guaranteed time slot between 9:00 and 17:00, Monday to Friday. The service removes the necessity for any citizen to queue and provides certainty as to the duration of time customers will wait to be seen at the public counter. Over 200 people per day avail of this service during our peak times. A similar service commenced operation in Cork Office earlier this month. The primary purpose of these public offices is to accommodate those with urgent travel needs.

However the vast majority of applications annually are made by Passport Express through some 1,000 post offices across the country and some 70 post offices in Northern Ireland. This means that no Irish citizen on the island need travel a significant distance to renew a passport. The attraction and popularity of this service is reflected in the fact that so far this year over 94% of all persons applying for their on the island have used Passport Express.

I am satisfied that the range of service options meets the current demands of passport applicants. Moreover, given the current financial pressures on the Department's resources, I do not believe there is a value for money basis to justify the opening of any additional regional passport office at this time.

International Relations

54. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed with his UK counterparts the issue of the continued presence of the harp on the UK royal coat of arms to represent Ireland; his views that it is time to replace the harp with a more appropriate symbol in view of the fact that the harp was incorporated into the coat to represent all of Ireland before Irish independence and is now the emblem of the Irish State; if he will provide any reassurance to any citizen who is concerned about this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27684/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have not received any representations on the subject of the Deputy's question nor had any discussions with the British authorities in regard to the presence of a harp on the royal coat of arms. I am however happy to assure the Deputy that the sensitivities around the use of flags and symbols is a matter to which I give very careful attention in my work to promote peace and reconciliation on this island. In this regard, he may also wish to note that a harp forms part of the crest of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

55. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide the details of his recent meetings in the US in relation to the immigration reform legislation; the likely time scale he envisages for the completion of this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27714/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I visited Washington D.C. over the period 17-19 June for various meetings in relation to U.S. immigration reform, which remains a key Government priority. My programme included separate discussions with Cong. Luis Gutierrez, Cong. Paul Ryan, Senator Pat Leahy, members of the Congressional Friends of Ireland Group, House Judiciary Committee Member Cong. Mark

Amodei, Cong. Mario Diaz-Balart, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic Caucus Chairman Cong. Xavier Becerra and White House Domestic Policy Council Director Ms. Cecilia Munoz. I also held a working dinner with Irish-American community leaders, including from the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, the Chicago Celts for Immigration Reform, Irish Apostolate USA and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, with whom the Government has worked closely on our shared U.S. immigration reform agenda.

Each of my meetings proved very useful, offering different insights and analyses into the prospects for when further progress might be achieved towards legislation that would provide relief for currently undocumented Irish migrants and also a facility for additional future legal migration between Ireland and the U.S. There was widespread consensus that an already complex political landscape had become even more complicated by the electoral defeat earlier in the month of the Republican House Majority Leader. The general sense which I received from interlocutors was that further time would be needed to assess the full implications of this for ongoing immigration reform efforts, particularly from the perspective of the upcoming Congressional mid-term elections. I was encouraged to note that proponents of immigration reform in Congress appear determined to persist with these efforts and they hope that further progress may yet prove possible this year.

As my visit took place, Mr. Kevin McCarthy was elected as the new Republican House Majority Leader. Through our Embassy in Washington and also directly, the Government looks forward to working further with Mr. McCarthy, House Speaker John Boehner and other key Congressional figures on both sides of the political aisle, and with the U.S. Administration, with a view to advancing Ireland's immigration reform-related objectives.

European Council Meetings

56. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline the issues discussed at this week's meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27718/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As the Deputy will be aware I attended the most recent meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in Luxembourg on Monday 23 June. The agenda was a very busy one with discussions dominated in the main by the latest events in Ukraine and developments in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, notably Iraq and Libya; a number of other items were addressed at the end of the Council meeting. The first substantive item for discussion was Ukraine and Ministers were joined for part of this session by the recently-appointed Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Pavlo Klimkin which was most welcome.

It is evident that there have been several positive developments in recent weeks – not least the Presidential elections and, the peace plan presented by President Poroshenko. However, as I stated after the Council meeting, the situation in Eastern Ukraine remains volatile and we must continue to support efforts towards de-escalation and stability in Ukraine. The signature of the Association Agreement with Ukraine scheduled to take place on 27 June is an important symbol of the EU's commitment and support, and will provide further impetus to political and economic reform efforts. Importantly, the Council Conclusions agreed at FAC on Monday also re-affirmed the EU's support for the work of the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission and agreed to establish a CSDP mission to assist Ukraine in the field of civilian security sector reform, including police and the rule of law. I welcome these positive developments.

Turning then to the Middle East region, attention was understandably focussed on the grave

situation in Iraq – with some discussion on Syria – arising from the offensive launched earlier this month by ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/al-Sham) which has resulted in the capture of Mosul and several other major cities in northern Iraq. The situation on the ground in Iraq is clearly very worrying and I share the concern of our EU partners. The FAC strongly condemned the activities by terrorist groups and attacks on civilian targets in particular.

Through the Council Conclusions agreed on Monday, the EU has sent a very strong message to the Iraqi government that the emphasis going forward must be on an inclusive political approach which allows for a genuine role for the large Sunni minority. UN Special Representative for Iraq Nikolay Mladenov – a former Foreign Minister of Bulgaria – joined the Council for these discussions and made a valuable contribution towards our understanding of the situation. As the Deputy will be aware, there is now a considerable humanitarian crisis unfolding. I was glad therefore to confirm last week that Ireland would be distributing €200,000 of emergency assistance in the region – through GOAL – in the period ahead.

On Libya, Ministers had a very useful exchange of views, where there was wholesale agreement that the focus needs to be on supporting the political process in order to avoid seeing the country descending into further instability. Comprehensive Conclusions were adopted. It is my sincere hope that the forthcoming elections will represent a turning point and provide an opportunity for a real national dialogue to begin about Libya's future.

Ministers discussed the case of the 3 Al-Jazeera journalists on trial in Egypt whose sentences were strongly condemned by High Representative (HR) Ashton after the meeting; Ireland strongly supports this position.

The Council adopted Conclusions expressing extreme concern at recent developments in Thailand and called on the military leadership to restore the legitimate democratic process and the Constitution, through credible and inclusive elections, and to free all political detainees and remove censorship.

The Council also welcomed the holding of the second round of the presidential elections in Afghanistan which represents the first opportunity for a peaceful and constitutionally mandated transfer of power in the country's history. It called on the new President to reach out to all Afghans and reaffirmed the EU's continuing commitment to support the reform process in Afghanistan, focusing on promoting peace and security, reinforcing democracy, encouraging economic and human development and fostering the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of women and girls.

House Prices

57. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to prevent another property bubble in Dublin housing prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27803/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that the property bubble up to 2007 was concurrent with a dramatic and unsustainable increase in mortgage lending. The recently published Construction 2020 Strategy: A Strategy for A Renewed Construction Sector sets out that mortgage lending decisions must be undertaken on a sustainable and prudential basis by financial institutions and conform fully to regulatory requirements, both in relation to the financial institution itself, and also with regard to the safeguarding of the borrower's interests.

My Department is party to a range of actions as part of the Strategy which addresses among

other issues: housing supply, with a particular focus on planning issues and appropriate and sustainable development financing; transparent and sustainable mortgage lending; the application of the tax code to the construction and property sectors; as well as addressing legacy issues associated with the property bubble. The deputy will find these actions detailed in the Construction 2020 Strategy publication.

In summary, I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department continues to monitor developments in Dublin and nationally in both the purchase and rental property markets. As set out in the Government's Medium Term Economic Strategy and the Construction 2020 Strategy, the Government will continue to work on addressing remaining challenges in the property and construction sectors.

Tax Reliefs Application

58. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who were affected by the tax relief changes to private health insurance in budget 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27603/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that according to its calculations, approximately 577,000 policy holders, covering 1.1 million insured individuals, are likely to be affected by the restriction of tax relief on medical insurance, which was announced as part of Budget 2014. This figure equates to almost 53% of all policies. Revenue's calculations in this regard are based on its analysis of the Returns and gross premium price data provided by the Health Insurers in respect of 2012. The 2012 information is the most current 'full year' data set available to Revenue at this time. The Health Insurers are not obliged to file Returns in respect of 2013 until 30 June 2014.

Revenue also confirmed to me because the budget change took effect from 16 October 2013 and because policy renewal dates occur throughout the year, the full impact of the changes will not be fully apparent until after the submission of the 2014 Returns, which are not due until 30 June 2015.

Property Taxation Collection

59. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the alternatives that are in place for social welfare recipients who are not allowed to have the full amount of property tax deducted from source as the Department of Social Protection has indicated that it cannot bring the rate of payment below €186 per week. [27613/14]

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who have opted to pay their local property tax by means of a deduction from their social welfare payment; the number of instances where the maximum deduction allowable did not cover the full liability and resulted in a shortfall at the end of the year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27777/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 67 together.

I am advised by Revenue that there is ongoing dialogue with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to ensure the deduction at source payment option in respect of Local Property Tax (LPT) and arrears of Household Charge (HHC) operates as smoothly as possible. The situ-

ation referred to in Question [27613] could arise where a weekly LPT/HHC deduction from a property owner's DSP payment reduces the remaining amount below the weekly 'de minimis' of €186. The concept of a DSP 'de minimis' amount is enshrined in Social Welfare legislation and it was considered at the time of the introduction of LPT that it was not appropriate to change the law in this regard.

Given the rates of DSP payments, it is very important that recipients are aware that the LPT legislation provides for full and partial (50%) deferrals of the tax within certain specified thresholds. For example, a property owner can claim a full deferral where his/her gross income does not exceed €15,000 if single/ widowed or, €25,000 in the case of a couple. To qualify for a partial deferral, the property owner's gross income must not exceed €25,000 if single/widowed or, €35,000 in the case of a couple. These income threshold limits can also be adjusted upwards by including 80% of any gross mortgage interest payments. The interest element of any such deferral or partial deferral is 4% as distinct from the normal 8% charge that applies in respect of compliance activity.

I am assured that the application process for deferral and partial deferral is a simple matter and can be done through the online system at www.revenue.ie or by contacting the LPT Helpline at 1890 200 255. In most circumstances where a deferral or partial deferral is granted, it remains in place for the current valuation period, i.e. for the tax years 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Where deferral or partial deferral is not applicable, property owners who wish to pay their LPT/HHC liabilities on a phased basis over the course of the year have a number of different payment options available to them, including deduction at source from DSP payments. Where the DSP deduction at source option does not facilitate an even spread of payments over the year due to the €186 threshold, property owners can avail of monthly direct debits through their financial institution or certain credit union accounts. Alternatively they can make regular weekly or monthly payments to one of the four approved payment service providers, which are An Post, Payzone, PayPoint and Omnivend. Details in regard to the payment service providers including information on the various transaction fees are available on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie.

Revenue has further advised me that where a property owner already availing of deduction at source from a DSP scheme in respect of LPT/HHC liabilities discovers that it is not possible to meet the full amount before the end of the particular year on foot of the €186 threshold, they should immediately contact the LPT Branch helpline at 1890 200 255 to make additional payment arrangements or to avail of the deferral option.

Revenue has confirmed to me that almost 14,000 property owners availed of deduction at source from DSP payments to meet their LPT liabilities during 2013. Shortfalls in payment on foot of the €186 threshold occurred in 1,203 of these cases, of which 200 were for less than €10. Revenue contacted this tranche of property owners in April 2014 to advise on the various payment alternatives available.

The number of property owners opting for deduction at source from DSP payments in respect of both 2014 LPT and arrears of HHC has risen to almost 25,000 to date. Similarly to 2013, Revenue has identified and contacted almost 2,000 of these cases which are impacted by the €186 threshold to advise on the various payment alternatives and in most cases the shortfalls are being catered for by applying an additional payment option that suits individual circumstances best.

Mortgage Interest Rates

60. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide assurances that he will not allow banks here to impose any further increase in variable rate mortgages while the ECB rate remains as low as it is; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27629/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must confirm to the Deputy that neither the Central Bank nor I have any responsibility for any variation in the variable mortgage interest rate charged by regulated financial institutions. The lending institutions in Ireland - including those in which the State has a significant shareholding - are independent commercial entities. I have no statutory role in relation to regulated financial institutions passing on the European Central Bank interest rate change or to the mortgage interest rates charged. It is a commercial matter for each institution concerned. It is not appropriate for me, as Minister for Finance, to comment on or become involved in the detailed mortgage position of mortgage holders.

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

The mortgage interest rates that financial institutions operating in Ireland charge to customers are determined as a result of a commercial decision by the institutions concerned. This interest rate is determined taking into account a broad range of factors, including European Central Bank base rates, deposit rates, market funding costs, the competitive environment and an institution's overall funding. However, as part of the Central Bank's work on mortgage arrears, lenders were asked to consider all avenues to help customers in arrears, including interest rate reductions.

Corporation Tax

61. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on Ireland's international reputation due to the effective rates of corporation tax being paid here by some large firms; his views that the Irish Exchequer could benefit better from corporation tax without moving into diminishing returns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27686/14]

62. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the way of increasing Ireland's effective corporation tax take without hunting firms out of the economy; how far from that tipping point is the current tax regime positioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27687/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 62 together.

My Department recently published a Technical Paper on Effective Rates of Corporation Tax in Ireland to provide clarity to the Dáil about the seemingly conflicting figures and methodologies. The Department commissioned an external and independent academic to ensure that this piece of work was as objective as possible. This report is published on the Department's website and can be viewed at the following link:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/140407%20FINAL%20Technical%20>

Based on data from the Central Statistics Office (using the “Net Operating Surplus”) and the Revenue Commissioners (using the “Taxable Income”), this report highlighted that since 2003 the effective corporate tax rate has averaged 10.9% and 10.7% respectively. While this percentage is lower than the 12.5% headline rate, this can be attributed to the availability of a small number of reliefs such as the R&D tax credit, which was the subject of a comprehensive review last year and which was found to give value for money for the Irish taxpayer.

The extremely low effective rate figures that are sometimes quoted and attributed to Ireland are based on a flawed premise. The figures are running together the profits earned by group companies in Ireland and in other jurisdictions and incorrectly suggesting that Irish tax does or should apply to both. Ireland cannot tax profits that are properly attributable to other jurisdictions. The ability of some multinationals to lower their world-wide rate of tax using international structures reflects the global context in which Ireland and indeed all countries operate. The best way to effectively address this issue is for countries to work together at the international level and the appropriate action is being considered in this regard by the OECD as part of their project on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting and Ireland is participating fully in this process. Unlike some other countries that have a high headline rate of corporation which is then supplemented by a high number of tax reliefs which reduce the overall rate of tax paid, the approach in Ireland is transparent. We have a competitive headline rate of corporation tax which is applied to a broad base.

As to the question of increasing the corporate tax take, I would remind the Deputy of my answer to his question in April this year, where I gave assurances that the need to balance the competitiveness of our corporation tax offering for mobile foreign direct investment while ensuring the maximum benefits to the State is a matter that is considered by my Department and others on an on-going basis. The importance of maintaining the standard 12.5% rate of corporation tax to Ireland’s international competitive position in the current climate must be borne in mind. Ireland, like other smaller member states, is geographically and historically a peripheral country in Europe. A competitive corporate tax rate is a tool to address the economic limitations that come with being a peripheral country, as compared to larger core countries. Ireland’s corporation tax rate plays an important role in attracting foreign direct investment to Ireland and thereby increasing employment here. As to how successful we are at getting this balance right, I would highlight to the Deputy that the revenue generated by Corporation Tax in Ireland is broadly in line with the EU average. In 2013 we collected just over €4.2bn which is 11.3% of overall Exchequer tax revenue and equivalent to 2.6% of Gross Domestic Product (“GDP”).

Any increase in the 12.5% rate could unfortunately result in a behavioural change on the part of taxpayers and potentially have a negative impact on economic growth as a result. In relation to the “tipping point” referred to by the Deputy, I would draw attention to an OECD multi-country study “Tax Effects on Foreign Direct Investment Recent Evidence & Policy Analysis”, which found that a 1% increase in the corporate tax rate reduces inward investment by 3.7% on average. On this basis, it would take only a 2.5% increase in the rate (to 15%) to decrease Ireland’s inward investment by nearly 10%. This assumes the average applies across the board but in fact the effect is likely to be more extreme for Ireland. In another report by the OECD, “Tax Policy Reform and Economic Growth”, corporate taxes were identified as the taxes which are most harmful to economic growth prospects. These are just examples of the types of international reports my Department has identified as relevant when looking at the relationship between tax, foreign direct investment and job creation.

Further, it is worth saying that the certainty around the rate of Irish corporation tax is one of its biggest strengths, and it would be difficult to justify an increase in the context of Ireland’s

firmly stated position that we will not change our corporation tax rate. Even a marginal change in the rate of corporation tax would undermine both our long held stance on this issue and the certainty of business, domestic and international, in our resolve to maintain that position. As I said at Budget time, the 12.5% is settled policy and the Government remains 100% committed to this rate.

Tax Collection

63. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of attachment orders placed by the Revenue Commissioners in 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; if he will provide same by month in each year, on a county basis; the amounts that have been collected by the Revenue Commissioners via these orders in each county on a monthly basis in the years requested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27690/14]

64. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies on whom an attachment order on company accounts was placed by the Revenue Commissioners, who subsequently went into examinership, receivership, liquidation or ceased trading during 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014. [27691/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 and 64 together.

I am advised by Revenue that the debt collection environment continues to be challenging given the ongoing difficult financial environment. In this regard I am assured that Revenue debt management caseworkers are very conscious of the challenges that exist for some taxpayers in meeting their tax obligations in a timely manner. For that reason the caseworkers will always seek to work proactively with taxpayers and viable businesses that engage positively to agree mutually satisfactory arrangements to overcome temporary cashflow difficulties in preference to deploying enforcement options. However, where a business or taxpayer fails to meaningfully engage with Revenue, then I am fully supportive of the deployment of the necessary collection and enforcement measures to secure the taxes and duties due to the Exchequer.

One of the enforcement powers available to Revenue to ensure timely tax collection is Attachment. This power is covered in legislation under Section 1002 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, as amended. Section 1002 allows Revenue to either directly remove funds from any account held by a financial institution in the name of a defaulting taxpayer, or, to instruct any third party that owes a debt to the defaulting taxpayer to pay those funds directly to Revenue. Revenue has confirmed to me that it never deploys its enforcement powers, including Attachment, without giving the taxpayer every opportunity to engage and agree mutually acceptable solutions, including phased payment arrangements. The enforcement process only commences when the caseworker has exhausted all other options to encourage voluntary compliance. Revenue also has strict guidelines in place, including authorisation at a senior level, to ensure Attachment is only used in appropriate circumstances. Revenue is always conscious that the use of Attachment Orders can have adverse consequences for taxpayers and the power is normally only deployed where other enforcement options have failed to secure the outstanding debt. For example, during 2013, Revenue issued Attachment Orders in less than 3,000 cases out of a total of almost 27,000 cases enforced.

In regard to the specific data requested by the Deputy, the number and value of Attachment Orders issued by Revenue and the amounts collected on foot of those Orders in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (to date) is set out at county level in the table in the attached appendix. It is not possible for Revenue to provide breakdown at county level on a monthly basis because certain cases

could become identifiable thereby breaking confidentiality. However, Revenue could provide such a breakdown at provincial level if the information would be helpful to the Deputy.

Finally, I am informed that data is not maintained by Revenue in such a manner that would facilitate provision of a response to the Question relating to the number of companies where Attachment Orders were served on their bank accounts and who subsequently went into Examinership, Receivership, Liquidation or who ceased trading.

Appendix : Annual distribution of attachment orders by county

-	-	2012 Total	-	-
County	No. of Referrals	Value of Referrals	Payments	No. of Referrals
Carlow	63	€3,884,057	€333,939	23
Cavan	33	€3,007,056	€306,608	51
Clare	105	€3,664,923	€402,635	163
Cork City	202	€6,021,236	€1,959,474	216
Cork County	417	€14,501,545	€1,983,777	353
Donegal	65	€2,682,705	€361,055	52
Dublin City	676	€32,901,213	€5,069,810	742
Dublin County	702	€33,599,502	€6,133,726	710
Foreign Cases	88	€6,568,050	€517,177	69
Galway	169	€8,417,719	€1,132,573	171
Kerry	93	€3,243,582	€270,466	95
Kildare	127	€6,218,298	€732,458	104
Kilkenny	67	€3,555,422	€10,249,713	37
Laois	47	€1,526,319	€140,737	24
Leitrim	17	€1,273,970	€180,024	20
Limerick	156	€5,816,946	€1,407,884	210
Longford	28	€1,196,433	€55,553	28
Louth	115	€4,157,295	€725,658	120
Mayo	87	€3,985,577	€734,701	115
Meath	196	€8,021,616	€1,207,464	160
Monaghan	27	€1,420,055	€672,497	51
Offaly	60	€2,344,477	€268,544	83
Roscommon	24	€2,236,183	€149,046	36
Sligo	43	€1,020,096	€62,033	58
Tipperary	106	€4,071,195	€604,918	108
Waterford	37	€2,458,692	€358,165	68
Westmeath	67	€2,737,769	€260,822	104
Wexford	120	€3,789,010	€1,082,861	98
Wicklow	102	€4,154,649	€1,072,929	130
Total	4,039	€178,475,588	€38,437,243	4,199

2013 Total	-	-	2014 Total (to end May)	-
Value of Referrals	Payments	No. of Referrals	Value of Referrals	Payments
€981,014	€117,383	12	€314,227	€112,291
€1,139,460	€371,201	14	€317,089	€60,316
€3,554,929	€409,618	23	€636,526	€96,503
€12,432,530	€2,551,497	91	€1,778,230	€510,713
€10,697,866	€1,768,634	214	€4,449,051	€831,217

Questions - Written Answers

2013 Total	-	-	2014 Total (to end May)	-
€3,325,732	€302,567	31	€608,126	€136,839
€33,885,151	€6,553,668	360	€15,184,010	€2,255,699
€34,275,924	€4,591,175	290	€11,781,210	€1,532,150
€2,445,000	€525,457	29	€2,815,408	€55,645
€7,924,813	€954,989	114	€2,762,787	€581,731
€1,969,710	€14,969,673	46	€970,026	€316,170
€4,345,137	€915,177	59	€1,484,080	€308,829
€654,343	€249,342	7	€268,139	€38,540
€866,124	€217,782	8	€159,957	€7,572
€355,503	€28,269	4	€70,737	€566
€6,964,722	€744,713	164	€4,733,388	€1,026,193
€1,234,315	€162,355	11	€226,384	€64,656
€4,649,808	€480,642	61	€1,772,120	€154,805
€5,509,882	€576,394	98	€3,141,149	€350,219
€5,612,593	€1,055,006	73	€2,871,736	€625,447
€1,547,063	€665,632	10	€539,797	€400,241
€3,104,458	€1,393,654	26	€973,029	€126,550
€4,898,735	€283,918	12	€397,581	€123,332
€1,891,113	€367,714	17	€742,249	€49,416
€4,906,912	€732,612	27	€1,209,039	€94,065
€2,091,044	€151,752	14	€618,425	€64,986
€3,462,267	€651,341	51	€2,018,000	€398,187
€3,831,158	€675,297	46	€1,188,021	€425,088
€4,974,815	€906,683	60	€1,212,028	€300,615
€173,532,118	€43,374,146	1,972	€65,242,548	€11,048,578

Pensions Levy

65. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will abolish the levy on private pensions during 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27692/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I announced in my Budget 2014 speech that the 0.6% Pension Fund Levy introduced to fund the Jobs Initiative in 2011 will be abolished from 31 December 2014. I have, however, introduced an additional levy on pension funds at 0.15% for 2014 and 2015. I am doing this to, among other things, continue to help fund the Jobs Initiative. Finance (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the application of the levy up to 2015 and not beyond. I have no plans to make any further changes in this regard.

Tax Rebates

66. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance the reasons for the delay in processing a Med1 form in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a tax rebate can be expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27708/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that Med 1 forms relating to years 2010 to 2013 were received in the name of the taxpayer's spouse, who is a PAYE employee, on 15 April 2014. On checking however, it became apparent that the taxpayer is recorded as the assessable spouse for the married couple, and that

he had not submitted self-employed income tax returns for the years since 2009. The taxpayer's present status is unclear because he appears to be proprietary director of a company, and is registered as self-employed. In those circumstances a refund could not be made. The Med 1 forms were returned to the taxpayer's spouse on 13 May and she was advised that the forms should be resubmitted with the appropriate income tax returns. The taxpayer should contact Mr Eugene Larkin at Revenue House, Blackpool, Cork, telephone 021-6027262 to clarify the present position.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 59.

Income Data

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of income tax cases between €17,000 and €18,000 of earnings, €18,000 and €19,000, €19,000 and €20,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27778/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated numbers of income earners earning between €17,000 and €18,000, between €18,000 and €19,000 and between €19,000 and €20,000, by reference to the income tax year 2014, are approximately 41,000, 43,100 and 42,000 respectively (estimated numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred). These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax forecasting model using latest actual data for the year 2011, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are provisional and may be revised. Married persons or civil partners who have elected or have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment are counted as one tax unit.

Tax Code

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the anomaly that a person with earnings of €18,304 who receives a €1 increase in his or her annual income will see his or her take home pay reduce by €731; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27779/14]

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has discussed with the Department of Social Protection the issue of the poverty trap that exists when employees enter the PRSI net and all of their income becomes liable for PRSI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27780/14]

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the effective tax rate paid by a PAYE worker earning €18,000 per annum taking into account income tax, universal social charge and PRSI liabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27782/14]

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the effective tax rate paid by a PAYE worker earning €19,000 per annum taking into account income tax, universal social charge and PRSI liabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27783/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 to 72, inclusive, together.

I assume the Deputy is referring to the "step" effect in the PRSI system which brings all income into charge once the relevant threshold is reached. This occurs because those earning €352 per week are exempted entirely from the charge whereas those who earn more than this

pay PRSI at 4% on their full earnings. This results in an anomalous situation whereby those earning between €353 and €372 per week have a lower take home pay than someone on €352 per week. While such an effect is never ideal, it is necessary to achieve the desired yield, which in itself contributes to keeping workers on incomes lower than the threshold to remain outside the charge to employee PRSI entirely.

The effective tax rate including full PRSI and the USC is estimated to be 4.9% for a single individual earning €18,000 per annum and 10.0% for a single individual earning €19,000 per annum. This differential in the two rates is mainly due to the step effect. However, it must be acknowledged that the level of the effective tax rate is still very low in international terms. A single individual earning the equivalent of €19,000 in the United Kingdom pays an effective tax rate of over 12.5%. According to the recent OECD publication, *Taxing Wages 2014*, Ireland has the lowest tax burden among OECD EU member states on single earners at the average wage in 2013. Furthermore, Ireland has also has the lowest tax wedge among OECD EU member states (6.8%) for one-earner/two children families at the average wage. The average for OECD countries was 26.4%.

The Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare (AGTSW), which includes officials from both my Department and the Department of Social Protection, are considering a range of tax and social welfare issues, with a view to increasing the incentives for individuals to return to work. It is expected that the Group will publish its report later this summer and I anticipate its recommendations will form a useful addition towards informing upcoming budgetary deliberations.

Banks Recapitalisation

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if an independent valuation of the State's holding in AIB has been carried out for the National Pensions Reserve Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27785/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware the NPRFC undertook an independent valuation exercise for the remaining bank investments in the directed portfolio at the end of December 2013. This valuation included the State's holdings in AIB which were valued at circa. €10bn comprising ordinary shares (€6.5bn) and preference shares (€3.5bn). Separately the Minister holds directly a €1.6bn investment in Contingent Capital Notes. Further information on the valuation will be available in the 2013 NPRFC annual report when it is published.

Banks Recapitalisation

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will list the occasion on which preference share dividends due to the State from AIB have been paid in the form of ordinary shares; the number of shares issued; the value on each occasion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27786/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, if the annual coupon payment of €280m on the State's Preference Shares in AIB is not made in cash, AIB must make the payment in shares. Since the first coupon was due in 2010, as a result of the bank's need to preserve capital, AIB has paid this annual coupon each year in shares as set out below.

Year	Number of shares issued	Issue price €
2010	198,089,847	1.4135
2011	1,247,273,565	0.2245
2012	3,623,969,972	0.0773
2013	4,144,055,254	0.0676
2014	2,177,293,934	0.1286

The price at which the shares are issued is calculated based on the average market price for the thirty trading days preceding the 13th of May payment date. Therefore the quantity of shares the State received on each occasion was a function of the coupon due of €280m divided by this formula driven share price. This formula is embedded in the original terms of the Preference Share investment made by the State in 2009 and the bank's Articles of Association which can be found on the bank's website.

Budget Targets

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the deficit that would be achieved in 2015 based on current information if a budget adjustment of €1 billion took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27787/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The most up-to-date budgetary estimates, published in the SPU in April, are based on the assumption of a consolidation package of €2.0bn in 2015 which is designed to deliver a deficit of 2.9 per cent of GDP in 2015. This is within the excessive deficit procedure (EDP) ceiling of 3.0 per cent. The macro-economic forecasts underpinning the SPU have been endorsed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

On the basis of SPU assumptions, reducing this figure to €1bn would, as a first-round effect, add about 0.6 percentage points to the forecast deficit in 2015. However, a lower quantum of consolidation would likely weigh less on economic activity and see higher revenue growth, which would ameliorate the increase in the deficit to a certain extent. It should be noted that the exact impact on revenue and the deficit is difficult to estimate given the significant number of dependent factors, most significantly, assumptions around the composition of adjustment.

Overall, given the number of moving parts and only five months of revenue and expenditure data to hand, it is too early to speculate on what the starting position for the Budget will be. The next formal forecast will be the White Paper on Receipts and Expenditures which will be published in advance of the Budget and will set out the no-policy-change position for 2015. In general, fiscal policy has to continue the process of necessary fiscal consolidation while, at the same time, supporting economic growth and job creation. Achieving an optimal balance between these goals is essential for maintaining and bolstering Ireland's hard-won market confidence.

Bank Debt Restructuring

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has formally put forward specific policy suggestions as to how retrospective bank debt relief could be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27788/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Euro-area Heads of State or Government (HoSG) agreed in June 2012 that "it is imperative to break the vicious circle between

banks and sovereigns”, and that when a Single Supervisory Mechanism, involving the ECB, is in place and operational, the European Stability Mechanism could recapitalize banks directly.

The Eurogroup meeting on 20 June 2013 agreed on the main features of the European Stability Mechanism’s Direct Recapitalisation Instrument or DRI. There is a specific provision included in those main features, which states that “The potential retroactive application of the instrument should be decided on a case-by-case basis and by mutual agreement.” Therefore, the agreement, that we were active in negotiating, keeps open the possibility to apply to the European Stability Mechanism for a retrospective direct recapitalisation of the Irish banks, should we wish to avail of it.

On 10 June 2014, the euro area Member States reached a preliminary agreement on the European Stability Mechanism’s (ESM) direct recapitalisation instrument (DRI). This now requires a decision by mutual agreement of the ESM Board of Governors to create a new ESM instrument in accordance with Article 19 of the ESM treaty and the aim is to have this process completed by November this year. This would allow the ESM DRI to come into effect once the Single Supervisory Mechanism is in place and operational which is expected to be in November of this year.

In relation to retrospective recapitalisation, the preliminary agreement states that the potential retroactive application of the instrument should be decided on a case-by-case basis and by mutual agreement. However, as I indicated last week when I was before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, it is not possible to make a formal application to the ESM for retrospective recapitalisation in advance of the Instrument being in place. Therefore, at this juncture, it is premature to make specific policy suggestions on the implementation of retrospective recapitalisation in advance of the instrument being in place.

I remain confident that the commitment made by the Euro-area Heads of State or Government in June 2012 to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns will be respected. Finally, as I have indicated in the past, both I and my Government colleagues ensure that Ireland’s case for retrospective direct recapitalisation is made at all levels as appropriate.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

77. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a breakdown of the amount of money that has been paid out by Caranua to survivors since it was established; if he will provide in tabular form the purpose of the payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27596/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I understand from enquiries made by my officials that, by 20th June, Caranua has made 249 payments in respect of 113 individual former residents, to the value of €349,174.33. Caranua approves services across three general areas – Health and General Well-being; Housing Support and Education, Learning and Development. The payments made to date are broken down in the attached table. Full details of the range of services that can be provided for are set out in the information and guidelines published on Caranua’s website: <http://www.caranua.ie>. Caranua normally deals directly with the service providers and payments issue directly to them and only issues payments to former residents on submission of valid receipts with Caranua’s prior agreement. The payments made to date include payments made in respect of professional assessments or recommendations which are required by Caranua to determine entitlement to certain services.

Category	No of Payments	No of Former Residents	Value of Payments
Health and General Well-being	126	81	€71,120.75
Housing Support	99	56	€233,958.94
Education, Learning and Development	36	23	€54,094.64
Total	261	113	€359,174.33

Note: As former residents can receive services across service categories, the total number of former residents assisted does not equal the sum of the individual categories.

Teachers' Remuneration

78. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason teachers working under the July provision are not paid until November; if any scheme is in place to give these teachers interim payments or if the July provision rules can be changed in order that teachers can be fully paid before the end of August; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27601/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The July Education Programme is available to all special schools and mainstream primary schools with special classes catering for children with autism that choose to extend their education services through the month of July. The programme is also available for pupils with a severe/profound general learning disability. Where a school chooses not to extend their services for July, all eligible children will be granted home based July provision, on application. This year's common pay date of 6th November 2014 is well advertised prior to the start of the July Education Programme.

In 2013, 167 schools with 2,523 staff offered 2,791 children the July Education Programme in addition to 3,471 children who availed of the home based programme. The Deputy will appreciate therefore, that the major proportion of administrative work is devoted to processing these claims for payment. Staffing resources have been assigned to process payments as speedily as possible. The certainty granted to parents and tutors with a fixed payment date increases efficiency in this regard, as staff will be able to channel their efforts into processing payments rather than dealing with numerous queries on payment dates. This decision was made after consideration of available staffing resources within the Department and there are no plans to change from this arrangement.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

79. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an emergency works scheme application in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27602/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The management authority of the school referred to by the Deputy has been allocated funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme to carry out Health and Safety works to windows in their school building. The school authority have been informed of this decision.

80. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school (details supplied) in Dublin 5 that is losing another teacher this year, having lost one last year; the number of teachers this school is supposed to have based on current numbers; if the school was down a teacher last year and, if so, the reason; the number of special needs assistants the school will have this year; his views on the situation pertaining to a concerned parent who has two children in the school, one whose class is to be split due to the reduction in teacher numbers and whose access to an SNA will also most likely be reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27621/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing arrangements for the 2014/15 school year are set out in Circular 0007/2014 which is available on the Department's website. The staffing schedule currently operates on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 28 pupils with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level.

The staffing schedule includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the criteria for appeal are contained in the staffing schedule, Circular 0007/2014. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

The school referred to by the Deputy did not lose a teacher in the current school year or in the previous school year. The school is due to have one classroom post suppressed in September 2014 due to a fall in enrolments. The school census returns indicated an enrolment on 30th September 2013 of 387 which allows for mainstream staffing of Principal and 14 classroom teachers for the 2014/15 school year.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support. Where children have significant care needs whereby they may need additional support to be able to attend school, the NCSE may make an allocation of SNA support to the school to assist that child.

The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014. The deployment of SNAs within schools is then a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

The NCSE invited schools to make applications for SNA support for children who have assessed care needs for the coming 2014/15 school year by 26th March 2014, for their consideration. The NCSE will shortly advise all schools of their SNA allocations for the coming school year. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

School Staffing

81. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for a contract of indefinite duration for a teacher at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27625/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on whether to issue a contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) to a teacher is one for their school as employer in the first instance. As part of the agreement between the education partners on the implementation of the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003 in the education sector, an adjudication system was established to facilitate resolution of disputes in relation to the awarding of CIDs. This system allows teachers who have been refused a CID, or who are unhappy with the hours of the CID where one is awarded, to submit an appeal to an independent Adjudicator for consideration.

The teacher referred to by the Deputy has submitted an appeal under this adjudication process and her appeal is currently being considered by the Adjudicator. When the Adjudicator issues a decision, this will be communicated to the teacher and school concerned.

School Staffing

82. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an appeal against the reduction of teacher numbers at a school (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27626/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts for the 2014/2015 school year is set out in the Staffing Schedule (Circular 0007/2014) which is available on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the 30 September 2013. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The appeal criteria are published in Circular 0007/2014. The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an appeal under Criterion E - Small Schools to the June, 2014 meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post under Circular 0007/2014. The school was notified accordingly.

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

Third Level Courses Availability

83. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the ALBA course in All Hallows College, a BA in personal and professional development, is closing to new entrants; if he is working with other third level institutions to ensure that such a course is available elsewhere in the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27635/14]

89. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that the students currently enrolled on the adult learning BA course in All Hallows College will be able to complete their BA degrees following the recent announcement that the college is to close; if he will ensure that the ALBA course is continued in another college such as DCU in view of its unique structure and in particular its success with persons who have been

out of education for a long time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27720/14]

90. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that students who had planned to progress from the ALBA course to the masters programme in All Hallows College will be accommodated elsewhere on a similar fee level in view of the fact that the fees in All Hallows College have been far lower and more affordable than elsewhere and that many of the current ALBA students will be unable to afford higher fees for an alternative masters programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27722/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83, 89 and 90 together.

All Hallows College is a private college and is not an approved institution under the Higher Education Authority (HEA). It does not receive core funding, however, my Department provides grant in lieu of tuition fee funding to the College in respect of three approved undergraduate courses. This funding amounted to some €436,000 for the 2013/14 academic year. The ALBA programme referred to by the Deputy is a part-time course and is therefore not an approved course for free fees funding. My Department does not have a role in the placement of students in any third level institution and decisions regarding courses to be run are matters for individual institutions as autonomous bodies. I welcome the fact that the college has stated that it intends to wind down in a phased basis in order to facilitate as much as possible the completion of current students' studies.

School Patronage

84. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the towns and areas that were surveyed regarding divestment of patronage of local schools; the number of persons surveyed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27638/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The full Report on the surveys to which the Deputy refers is published on my Department's website. The link to the Report is <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Report-on-the-surveys-regarding-parental-preferences-on-primary-school-patronage.pdf>. This Report outlines in detail the answers to the questions raised by the Deputy.

Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

85. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills where special needs assistants are being made redundant in a school, whether the years of service in situations where they worked as SNAs in two separate schools that were ultimately amalgamated will include the years when they worked in the previous schools or whether these years are lost; whether they will be entitled to having years of service counted only in respect of the period after the amalgamation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27668/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Special Need Assistants (SNA) resources are allocated by the National Council for Special Education to primary and second level schools. Where the allocation of resources to a school is reduced an SNA employed by the managerial authority of the school is entitled to apply for redundancy provided that they have been employed in the same school for a minimum of one year.

In 2013 a scheme was introduced whereby an SNA had the option of remaining on a panel

for a year while seeking new employment. Where an SNA is appointed to a new post from the panel, service from the previous employment will be counted for redundancy purposes should a further redundancy situation arise. The time limit for inclusion on the panel was extended to two years in 2014. Where schools amalgamate and SNAs transfer to and continue to work in the amalgamated school, service in both schools is counted as continuous service for redundancy purposes.

School Transport Appeals

86. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will introduce an appeals process to be adjudicated upon on an individual basis for primary schools adversely affected by the 2010 changes to school bus catchment areas; if this process will give particular consideration to isolated rural schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27685/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Changes to the Primary School Transport Scheme, including the ‘Closed School Rule (CSR)’, were announced in Budget 2011 and derived from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the Scheme. From the commencement of the 2011/12 school year the distance eligibility criterion of 3.2 kilometres was applied to all children travelling under the primary school transport scheme, including those travelling under the CSR.

The second element of the change which took effect from the commencement of the 2012/13 school year applied only in the case of children commencing their primary education from that date. This second element restricted eligibility for school transport to those children who meet the distance eligibility criterion and are travelling to their nearest school. Children who were eligible for school transport prior to the introduction of these changes and who are availing of school transport services, will retain their eligibility for the duration of their primary education cycle provided there is no change in their current circumstances. The terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis and I am satisfied with the current policy and criteria for determining eligibility.

Adult Education

87. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider the extension of the dates of adult literacy courses being taught in adult literacy and basic education centres nationwide; and if summer courses will be introduced for students who wish to continue their learning during the traditional summer break in education. [27699/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): My Department, through SOLAS, funds adult and community education which is delivered locally by Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The extent of the literacy service to be provided and the organisation of classes is a matter for each ETB to decide in accordance with local demand and needs.

Site Acquisitions

88. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding securing a site for a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [27704/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has been working in conjunction with Cork County Council towards securing a permanent site to meet the needs of the school referred to by the Deputy. I can confirm that potential options have been identified and the Department is progressing the current preferred option. However the acquisition of the preferred site option is subject to the completion of a process which is currently ongoing. The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy was included in the list of projects announced on March 2012, as part of the 5 year School Building Programme, to commence construction in the years 2015/2016.

Questions Nos. 89 and 90 answered with Question No. 83.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the availability of a higher education grant in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27745/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the grant application of the student referred to by the Deputy was initially refused due to late return of documents. The student appealed to the Appeals Officer in SUSI and following a review of the case a letter issued to the student on the 23 June 2014, requesting documentation in relation to previous education. The appeal will be finalised as soon as this information is received.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down, in writing, by SUSI, and remains of the view that SUSI has not interpreted the scheme correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the Student Grant Appeals Board. Applicants have up to 30 days within which to appeal a SUSI decision to the Appeals Board and the Appeals Board has discretion to extend the appeals period by a further 30 days. The relevant appeal form is available to download from http://www.studentfinance.ie/downloads/1375344221/2013_SGAB_appeal_form.pdf.

Education and Training Boards Staff

92. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of the new arrangements for the provision of training through the education and training boards and the proposal to transfer the financial provision for training from Dundalk Training Centre to the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board and similarly the new arrangements for the IT system, if he will confirm that the appropriate staffing complement will also be transferred from Dundalk to the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board by the end of 2014 to enable that ETB to meet its training obligations as provided for in legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27771/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The reform of the further education and training (FET) sector envisages a key role for education and training boards (ETBs) in relation to the future delivery of FET in an integrated manner. Part of this involves the transfer of training centres from SOLAS to ETBs. 7 training centres and their staff transferred to ETBs on 1 January 2014. A further 12 training centres will transfer to 7 ETBs on 1 July 2014. Each training centre is moving to the ETB in whose functional area the centre is located. In the

case of Dundalk Training Centre, it will become part of Louth and Meath ETB on 1 July 2014. 5 ETBs, including Cavan and Monaghan ETB, are not receiving a training centre.

There has been extensive discussion on this matter between ETBs, SOLAS and the Department. While recognising that the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 provides for all ETBs having training functions, the paramount consideration for my Department is the continuity of training services for learners. An agreed position for 2014 is in place whereby ETBs with training centres retain primary responsibility for training and continue to provide services to areas which do not have training centres. There is a process underway to consider the position for 2015 and beyond and a number of options are being examined.

Pension Provisions

93. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether pensions should be paid to former Deputies-Ministers who may have acted outside the law; if there are any proposals to ensure that Deputies'-Ministers' pensions are reduced accordingly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27670/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I refer the Deputy to the position as set out in PQ 11041/13 and 11518/13 of 5 March 2013.

Pensions Reform

94. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 322 of 17 June 2014, his views on the removal of the transition pension, where a 65-year old having to retire is forced to sign on for jobseeker's benefit for the interim year 65-66; and his views on persons, working in the Civil Service and Health Service Executive, who for the second time in their lives will be forced to leave their job - the first time being when ladies married and were no longer allowed to work in the Civil Service, An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive and the second time having to retire at 65 years of age - and are penalised at pension age as their first contribution was paid a long number of years ago and any subsequent pension is divided by the number of years contributions are paid in. [27770/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): It should be pointed out that public service workers who retire at the relevant mandatory retirement age, normally 65, continue to be able to draw their occupational public service pension. The pensions (and contributions) of the majority of public servants who are fully insured and are in defined benefit pension schemes are, like many occupational pension schemes, integrated (or co-ordinated) with social welfare benefits. This means the occupational pension is paid on the assumption that the pensioner also receives the State Pension.

In instances when the State Pension is not payable, a discretionary supplementary pension may be payable under the relevant public service pension scheme to bring the pension up to the same amount as would be paid to a public servant whose pension is not integrated. In such cases, a supplementary pension is only payable where the individual, through no fault of their own, does not qualify for social welfare benefit or qualifies at less than the maximum personal rate. In order to avoid any difficulty in the payment of this supplementary pension, it is necessary to claim any available social welfare benefits in order to receive a supplementary pension. This situation is not new and in particular applies to public servants who have a retirement age below 65. While State Pension provision and entitlements are a matter for my colleague, the

Minister for Social Protection, I have no plans to introduce any special arrangements in respect of retiring public servants in this regard.

IDA Supports

95. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the Industrial Development Agency has been in discussion with the management of Medtronic following the purchase of the Covidien plants in Athlone and Tullamore; the implications of this sale for employment on the three sites at Athlone, Tullamore and Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27701/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): IDA Ireland has ongoing close relationships with both Medtronic and Covidien both in Ireland and in the United States. The Agency informs me that it will continue to engage with all parties to endeavour to influence a positive outcome for Ireland as the structure of the merger develops and decisions are made.

I understand that completion of the transaction is subject to the approval by both Medtronic and Covidien shareholders and requires regulatory clearances in the U.S., the E.U., China and certain other countries. The transaction is expected to close in the fourth calendar quarter of 2014 or early 2015. The combination of Medtronic and Covidien's highly complementary product portfolios will allow the combined entity to address device needs in virtually every major device segment and I will seek to ensure that potential opportunities which may be developed for the Irish plants are rigorously pursued.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

96. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to deal with the problems surrounding rent supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27802/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Government has provided over €344 million for the rent supplement scheme in 2014, the purpose of which is to provide short-term income support to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation who are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources. There are currently approximately 76,000 rent supplement recipients, of which over 50,000 have been in payment for more than 18 months. All prospective tenants, including those seeking to access rent supplement, particularly in urban areas, are now finding it increasingly difficult to secure appropriate accommodation due to the reduced availability of rental properties.

In view of the current supply difficulties being experienced in the Dublin region, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive in conjunction with the Dublin local authorities and voluntary organisations have agreed a protocol with the Department so that families at risk of losing existing private rented accommodation can have more timely and appropriate interventions made on their behalf. It is intended that this arrangement will be reviewed in the third quarter of the year.

While there are no plans to extend this arrangement to other local authority areas at this time, officers administering rent supplement throughout the country have considerable experience in dealing with customers and make every effort to ensure that the accommodation needs of families are met. Staff in the Department's Community Welfare Service have discretionary

powers to award a supplement for rental purposes in exceptional cases where it appears that the circumstances of the case so warrant, for example, when dealing with applicants who are homeless or who are at risk of losing their tenancy. Such cases are examined on a case by case basis having regard to the situation presented.

A review of the maximum rent limits has commenced within the Department and will feed into the budgetary process. This review will involve a comprehensive analysis of information from a range of sources including rental tenancies registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB), the Central Statistics Office rental indices and websites advertising rental properties. The Department will also be seeking the views from a number of stakeholders in this area including the local staff administering the scheme, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Private Residential Tenancies Board and non-Government organisations such as Threshold, Focus Ireland, the Simon Community and Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Officials in the Department are continuing to engage with those in the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in progressing the transfer of customers with long term housing needs on the rent supplement scheme from this Department to the local authorities under the new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

Questions Nos. 97 and 98 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

99. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will allow an appeal application for an invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27633/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 23 June 2014, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

One-Parent Family Payments

100. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is satisfied that the changed rules governing entitlement to the one-parent family payment will not lead to an increase in the number of children in poverty, currently at more than 200,000; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the changes will result in many families being forced into lower household incomes at a time when price inflation in the child care sector is extremely high; if she expects single parents to be able to afford to go to work when they cannot afford child care without supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27640/14]

101. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the numbers of recipients of one-parent family payment who will transfer to a jobseeker's payment, family income supplement or carer's allowance on 3 July next; the achieved or expected saving to the Exchequer arising from the changed rules in each year from 2012 to 2015 inclusive; if her Department has evidence that the changed rules will create a poverty trap; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27642/14]

102. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason she has proceeded to implement the changed rules governing the one-parent family payment when she agreed on the record of Dáil Éireann on 18 April 2012 that seven years was too young for a family to contemplate removal of that support without a system of safe, affordable and accessible child care in place, similar to what is found in Scandinavia, and she further committed not to proceed with said rule change unless she had received a credible and bankable commitment to such a system of child care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27647/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 to 102, inclusive, together.

The one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme has played an important role in providing income support to lone parents since its introduction in 1997. The number of OFP recipients stood at 77,209 in May, 2014, and an estimated €863 million is due to be spent on the scheme in 2014. However, despite significant levels of State spending on the OFP scheme, the results have been poor in terms of tackling poverty and social exclusion rates among one-parent families. These families continue to experience higher rates of 'consistent poverty' in comparison to the population generally.

The reforms to the OFP scheme aim to assist lone parents escape poverty and joblessness by providing them with enhanced access to the Department's broad range of activation supports and services. This will assist lone parents increase their skills set and job-readiness and to facilitate their entry into the workforce and hopefully achieving financial independence. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2012, contains provisions to reduce, on a phased basis, the maximum age limit of the youngest child at which an OFP recipient's payment ceases to 7 years from 2014 for new entrants and from 2015 for existing recipients. This reduction yielded savings of €2 million in 2012 and of €3.94 million in 2013, and will yield estimated savings of €8.85 million in 2014 and €26.85 million in 2015.

The next phase of the OFP reform process will commence on 3 July, 2014, when approximately 5,140 customers are due to exit the OFP scheme. All affected customers have been invited by the Department to attend information sessions, with a view to briefing them on the broad range of Departmental supports that are available. Approximately 850 affected OFP customers who are in receipt of the Family Income Supplement (FIS) will have their FIS payment automatically adjusted to take account of the loss of 60% of their OFP from 3 July. Approximately 186 affected OFP customers who are also in receipt of the half-rate carer's allowance will have their carer's allowance claim re-rated to a full-rate carer's allowance on 3 July when their OFP ceases.

It is expected that approximately 3,600 individuals may apply for the jobseeker's allowance (JA) payment, with approximately 1,500 of these being eligible for the JA transitional arrangement. This transitional arrangement exempts former OFP recipients whose youngest child is under 14 years of age from having to satisfy the jobseeker conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking full time employment. The JA transitional arrangement allows lone parents with children under 14 years of age to balance their caring responsibilities and reduces significantly their requirement for child care.

Child care policy and the delivery of child care services, is the responsibility for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs estimates that the cost of universal child care provision in Ireland could reach around €1 billion per annum. In light of the current fiscal environment, this level of funding is not available. However, as part of a package of measures in Budget 2013, I along with then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced an after-school child care initiative between our two Departments.

The purpose of the scheme is to help to offset some of the after-school child care costs that are associated with availing of an employment opportunity in a bid to encourage more individuals to take up employment. The scheme provides 800 subsidised places and is open to both job-seekers and OFP recipients.

By refocusing some of the scheme's original €14 million budget, both the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and I were able to introduce the community employment (CE) child care programme. This scheme provides approximately 1,800 child care places to CE participants and was implemented in January 2014.

These two schemes are in addition to the existing supports, which are provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. These supports currently provide subsidised child care to approximately 35,000 children of low income parents. This is a vital support to parents that enables them to avail of employment opportunities, which is clearly the best route out of poverty.

Social Welfare Benefits

103. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider restoring the death grant. [27695/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The overall concern in Budget 2014 and previous budgets has been to protect primary social welfare rates. Abolishing the bereavement grant provides an annual saving of €22 million. This allows the Department to protect other more fundamental social welfare payments such as the State pension. I have no plans to reinstate the grant.

There are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. The widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pension which is a weekly payment, based on contributions or a means test. The widowed or surviving civil partner grant is a once-off payment of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension and carer's allowance, continue in payment for six weeks following a death. There are guardian's payments where someone is looking after an orphaned child. If a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease, a special funeral grant of €850 is paid.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department of Social Protection may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. An application can be made under the ENP scheme for assistance with funeral and burial expenses. The assistance is toward the costs of the necessary basic requirements for a dignified funeral. However, there is no automatic entitlement to such an ENP payment. An ENP is a means tested payment payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the individual applicant and that of the deceased person including any savings, property, insurance policies, etc. that would render the applicant or anybody else liable for the burial costs. The Department official will also consider if a bereavement grant is available from any other source including former employer, credit union or trade union.

In 2013 the Department of Social Protection spent some €4.4m on 3,198 funerals and burials. To 23 June 2014, there have been 1,443 payments made in respect of funerals and burials at a cost of some €2.2 million.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

104. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on her invalidity pension appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27712/14]

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 26 March 2014. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 12 May 2014 and the case has been referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Disability Allowance Appeals

105. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on their disability allowance appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27715/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 23 June 2014, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 106 withdrawn.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if rent support is payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27746/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Rent Supplement can be assessed for person in question on receipt of an application, subject to their meeting the qualifying conditions for rent supplement such as verification that they have been assessed as having a housing need and rental being secured within the maximum rent limit for their family composition and location.

Exceptional Needs Payment Eligibility

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will be made available in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27747/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no record of an application for an exceptional needs payment from the couple concerned. If they wish to make an application they should contact their local community welfare service at 045 887830 and leave their contact details and a community welfare officer will get back to them.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if back to education allowance is payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27758/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Records show that the person concerned was last in receipt of a payment (Jobseekers Allowance) in March 2011. He is not currently in receipt of a payment from the Department and therefore would not qualify for Back to Education Allowance.

Social Welfare Code

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the impact on the incentive for persons to take up employment of the poverty trap which exists when employees enter the PRSI net and all of their income becomes liable for PRSI; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27781/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Employee PRSI is not charged where weekly earnings are €352 or less. Where weekly earnings exceed €352, employees become liable for PRSI and PRSI at 4% is charged on all earnings. As Minister for Social Protection, I am on the record as indicating that one of my key goals is to reform the system of social protection and to put it on a sounder financial footing for the future. The abolition of the PRSI-free Allowance provides very substantial and immediate additional revenue for the Fund. When implemented it was estimated that this measure would yield €265 million in 2013 and €289 million in a full year, which contributes substantially towards supporting the future sustainability of the Social Insurance Fund.

While the effect of paying PRSI on all earnings once the €352 employee PRSI threshold is exceeded, is an issue, the yield from those paying PRSI contributes to keeping workers on lower earnings (below the threshold) outside of the PRSI net. For those with families, Family Income Supplement (FIS) plays a significant role in preserving the incentive for persons to take up employment. The level of FIS entitlement is based on net income after all relevant deductions, including the deduction of PRSI. The payment effectively preserves the incentive to take up or remain in employment in circumstances where the employee might only be marginally better off than if s/he were claiming other social welfare payments, even at levels of earnings which bring the worker within the PRSI net.

Social Insurance Yield

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the income raised in 2013 from the abolition of the weekly employee PRSI allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27784/14]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Prior to January 2013, where an

employee's weekly earnings exceeded €352, he or she was liable to pay PRSI on all earnings, less the weekly PRSI free allowance of €127. (For persons paying PRSI at the modified rate of contribution, the PRSI free allowance was €26.) This allowance was abolished in Budget 2013 and PRSI is now payable on all earnings once the €352 weekly threshold is exceeded. When implemented it was estimated that this measure would yield €265 million in 2013 and €289 million in a full year, which contributes substantially towards supporting the future sustainability of the Social Insurance Fund.

Questions Nos. 112 and 113 withdrawn.

Irish Language Issues

114. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will pursue that the derogation on the status of the Irish language in the European Union is ended at the end of 2016 and in order for this to happen, that the Irish Government would inform the Council of the European Union in 2014 that it intends to propose the ending of the derogation on the status at a formal meeting to be held in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27769/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Questions No 316 and 319 of 24 June 2014. As I stated in that reply, a decision on whether or not to extend the derogation for the use of Irish in EU institutions for a further period of time is required by December 2015 at the latest. In this context, my Department, in conjunction with the Department of the Taoiseach, is engaged in discussions with various stakeholders, including the EU institutions, in order to formulate specific proposals on the optimal approach to the derogation. This matter will be brought forward for consideration by Government in due course.

It should also be noted that, as part of the Government's strategy to ensure that a sufficient number of qualified personnel are available to meet the needs arising from the recognition of Irish as an official and working language of the EU, my Department continues to provide substantial funding for a range of specialised third level courses and for the development of Irish language terminology for the EU terminology database, InterActive Terminology for Europe (IATE).

Commemorative Events

115. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht his Department's plan to mark the forthcoming centenary of the Asgard landing arms in Howth, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27656/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): As the Deputy is aware, the arming of the Irish Volunteers was an enabling development in the progress towards the Rising at Easter 1916. Although the landing of arms at Howth was successfully accomplished, the attempted seizure of the weapons by the authorities ended with fatal shootings of civilians at Bachelors Walk. Official commemorations and community initiatives will mark the centenary of these historic events on Saturday, 26th and Sunday, 27th July. The National Museum at Collins Barracks will have special presentations at the Asgard Gallery on Saturday, while commemorations on Sunday will include an acknowledgement at Glasnevin cemetery of those who died. A memorial mass will also be arranged.

An official commemoration will take place at Howth Harbour, followed by a community programme in the harbour with sailing craft of the period. I am very pleased that the commemorative arrangements will include not only relatives of those involved in the historic events, but also those involved in the conservation and preparation of the yacht *Asgard* now on display in the National Museum in Collins Barracks. I am aware that a community programme is also being prepared for 26th and 27th July to commemorate the secondary landing of arms at Kilcoole, Co Wicklow, from the yacht *Kelpie*. Arrangements for these centenary commemorations are at an advanced stage of preparation and further details will be announced shortly.

Buiséad Fhoras na Gaeilge

116. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén laghdú atá déanta ar bhuiséad Fhoras na Gaeilge le ceithre bliana anuas agus an féidir a dheimhniú nach ndéanfar aon chiorrú eile ar an mbuiséad seo do 2015; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [27663/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Mar is eol don Teachta, is áisíneacht den Fhoras Teanga é Foras na Gaeilge agus, dá réir sin, is í an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh Theas a cheadaíonn a bhuiséad. Déantar Foras na Gaeilge a chómhaoiniú ar bhonn 75% ó mo Roinnse agus 25% ón Roinn Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta i dTuaisceart Éireann. Anuas air seo, cuireann mo Roinn maoiniú breise ar leith ar fáil d'Fhoras na Gaeilge i ndáil le nithe imfhálaithe mar a bhaineann le Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge agus Colmcille. Ina theannta sin, faigheann Foras na Gaeilge ioncam ó fhoinsí eile, lena n-áirítear ioncam ó dhíol leabhar. Léirítear sa tábla seo a leanas an caiteachas iarbhír a rinne Foras na Gaeilge ó na hallúntais chómhaoinithe a chuir mo Roinnse ar fáil don eagraíocht le linn na tréimhse ó 2010 go 2013:

Bliain	2010€m	2011€m	2012€m	2013€m
Buiséad	13.635	13.494	13.160	12.386

Ní miste a nótáil nach bhfuil an maoiniú ar leith ó mo Roinnse i ndáil le Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge agus Colmcille san áireamh anseo.

Maidir le 2014, is é €11.519m an soláthar sealadach cómhaoinithe atá ar fáil ag mo Roinn d'Fhoras na Gaeilge, faoi réir ollbhuiséad na bliana reatha a bheith aontaithe go foirmiúil ag an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh Theas.

Ba mhaith liom a mheabhrú don Teachta gur fógraíodh mar chuid de Bhuiséad 2014 go mbeadh athbhreithnithe cuimsitheacha ar chaiteachas caipitil agus reatha le cur i gcrích ag na Ranna Rialtais go léir sa dlínse seo le linn 2014. Tá na hathbhreithnithe seo mar bhunús do chreat buiséid ilbhliantúil an Rialtais agus déantar iad ar bhonn tréimhsiúil le cinntiú go bhfuil caiteachas na Ranna i gcomhréir leis na tosaíochtaí Rialtais. Tá na hathbhreithnithe sin ar bun faoi láthair agus déanfaidh an Rialtas iad a mheas níos deireanaí i mbliana i gcomhthéacs a chuid pleananna caiteachais do 2015 agus do na blianta ina dhiaidh sin.

Cé go leanfaidh mo Roinn ag cur maoiniú ar fáil don Fhoras Teanga i gcomhréir leis an ngnáthphróiseas buiséid, ní miste a shoiléiriú go bhfuil sé aontaithe ag na Ranna Airgeadais sa dá dhlínse go gcaithfidh na forais trasteorainn go léir sábháil éifeachtúlachta de 4% ar a laghad a chur i bhfeidhm in 2015.

Buiséad Údarás na Gaeltachta

117. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén laghdú atá déanta ar bhuiséad Údarás na Gaeltachta le ceithre bliana anuas agus an féidir a dheimhniú nach ndéanfar aon chiorrú eile ar an mbuiséad seo do 2015; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [27664/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): I dtús báire, ní miste dom a mheabhrú don Teachta gur chinn an Rialtas deiridh an soláthar airgid don Údarás ón Státchiste a laghdú ó €32.915m in 2010 go €19.6m in 2011 – laghdú de bhreis ar 40% in aon bhliain amháin. Don tréimhse 2011-2014, tá oll-laghdú de bheagnach 11% curtha i bhfeidhm ar bhuiséad an Údaráis, sa réimse riaracháin go príomha. Tá briseadh síos do na blianta sin léirithe sa tábla thíos.

Bliain	Caipiteal €m	Reatha (Riarachán) €m	Reatha (Teangabhunaithe) €m	Iomlán €m
2011	6.0	10.3	3.3	19.6
2012	5.938	9.871	3.273	19.082
2013	6.0	9.009	3.4	18.409
2014	5.687	8.798	3.0	17.485

Mar is eol don Teachta, cuirtear leis an soláthar airgid ón Státchiste le hioncam an Údaráis óna chuid acmhainní féin (i.e. ioncam ó chíosanna, díol maoine, srl.)

Maidir le buiséad an Údaráis don bhliain 2015, ba mhaith liom a mheabhrú don Teachta gur fógraíodh mar chuid de Bhuiséad 2014 go mbeadh athbhreithnithe cuimsitheacha ar chaiteachas caipitil agus reatha le cur i gcrích ag na Ranna Rialtais go léir le linn 2014. Tá na hathbhreithnithe seo mar bhunús do chreat buiséid ilbhliantúil an Rialtais agus déantar iad ar bhonn tréimhsiúil le cinntiú go bhfuil caiteachas na Ranna i gcomhréir leis na tosaíochtaí Rialtais. Tá na hathbhreithnithe sin ar bun faoi láthair agus déanfaidh an Rialtas iad a mheas níos deireanaí i mbliana i gcomhthéacs a chuid pleananna caiteachais do 2015 agus do na blianta ina dhiaidh sin. Tuigfidh an Teachta go ndéanfar soláthar airgid an Údaráis ón Státchiste don bhliain 2015 a mheas i gcomhthéacs na n-athbhreithnithe sin agus i gcomhthéacs an phróisis meastachán agus cáinainéise níos déanaí i mbliana.

Tionscadal Láthaireacha Catha na hÉireann

118. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén uair a réitíodh tuarascáil ar na láithreacha catha in Éirinn; cén costas a bhí leis an tuarascáil; cén fáth nár foilsíodh í; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [27665/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Tá obair ag teacht chun críche ar Thionscadal Láthaireacha Catha na hÉireann de chuid mo Roinne-se, a cuireadh ar bun chun iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na féidearthachtaí chun cosaint a thabhairt do na Láithreacha Catha sa tír seo faoin reachtaíocht ábhartha. Cuireadh painéal comhairleach saineolaithe sa Stair Mhíleata ar bun chun maoirsiú a dhéanamh ar an dtionscadal. Comhairlítear dom go ndearnadh taighde, ar bhonn chonartha, idir 2008 agus 2010 chun Láithreacha Catha a bhain leis an tréimhse ama roimh 1800 a aithint agus a thaifeadh. Tuigim gur bhain costas de €351,042 leis an obair thaighde sin, CBL san áireamh. Tá athbhreithniú ar na tuarascálacha taighde ar bun faoi láthair agus tá súil agam go mbeidh na torthaí foilsithe roimh dheireadh na

bliana seo.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Eligibility

119. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the circumstances under which farmers have an entitlement to compensation due to the designation of their land as SAC, SPA or NHA respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27666/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and the Wildlife Acts, compensation is payable from my Department where a person has been refused consent by me, as Minister, for a prescribed activity within a European site or natural heritage area, which he or she had been undertaking in the five year period prior to the refusal. As the Deputy is aware, a number of compensation schemes have been put in place to this end, including:

- A scheme for those affected by the cessation of turf cutting on a raised bog habitat nominated for designation as special areas of conservation under the EU Habitats Directive or designated as natural heritage areas under the Wildlife Acts;

- A voluntary bog purchase scheme applicable to raised bog special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas. The voluntary bog purchase scheme is closed to new applicants; and

- Small-scale farm plan schemes, which support farmers in adopting appropriate management practices in the Natura 2000 network. It should be noted that the main farm plan scheme operated by my Department is currently closed to new applicants.

While my Department has the lead role in relation to the implementation of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, significant funding is provided through the rural development programme, operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, which provides for a range of supports for farmers, including payments in respect of sites nominated for designation under the Directives. It should be noted that farmers will also be obliged to farm in accordance with the environmental requirements of the farm supports from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Turbary Rights

120. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the implementation of the national raised bog SAC management plan and NHA review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27706/14]

122. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the possibility of de-designation of part of a bog (details supplied) in County Kildare is being considered with the EU as part of the national plan in view of the lack of suitable alternative bogs nearby; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27716/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 and 122 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the draft *National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan* and the *Review of the Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network* were published earlier this year for consultation. Almost 1,500 submissions have been received and these are being examined at

present.

To enable the draft national SAC plan to be finalised, site specific management plans are being prepared for each of the SACs. These will determine, for example, whether or not there is a case to be made under Article 6.3 of the EU Habitats Directive for continued cutting on the site in question, where such cutting can be shown not to damage the protected habitat, and what approach will be taken to site restoration.

In addition, my Department, in partnership with Bord na Móna, has been working to identify alternative bogs, close to the SACs, to which turf-cutters could be relocated. Potential relocation sites have been identified for all SACs on which there are active cutters and these are now at various stages of further analysis or acquisition. Such a site has been identified close to be SAC referred to by the Deputy and has been found to be suitable for turf-extraction. If, following in-depth examination, it emerges that there are no viable relocation sites for turf-cutters from a particular SAC, there is potential to examine whether the provisions of Article 6.4 of the EU Habitats Directive could be applied. This process is described further in the draft plan.

With regard to the *Review of the Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network*, I hope to be in a position to propose new sites for designation later this year, which will compensate for the loss of those complete or partial NHA sites which are moving towards de-designation. These changes were proposed to improve the conservation value of the NHA network, while avoiding, to the extent possible, impacts on active turf-cutters.

Turbary Rights

121. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the work that has been carried out on examining options for plot holders on a bog (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27711/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): A total of 143 applications for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme, applicable to raised bog special areas of conservation, has been received and acknowledged by my Department in relation to the bog referred to in the Deputy's Question. Of these, 54 applicants have expressed an interest in relocation to a non-designated bog. Such a bog has been identified and assessed by Bord na Móna in terms of its suitability. The assessment report indicates that 19 turf cutters could be accommodated on the alternative site and my Department has provided a copy of the report to the secretary of the local turf cutters committee. The potential for the accommodation of additional turf cutters on the site is also being investigated by Bord na Móna, in consultation with my Department.

Question No. 122 answered with Question No. 120.

Official Languages Act 2003 Compliance

123. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will insert a new provision in the Official Languages Act to ensure that at least 10% of employees in the Civil Service can communicate with the public through Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27729/14]

124. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will insert a new provision in the Official Languages Act whereby services are made available

in Irish for Gaeltacht communities before the end of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27730/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 124 together.

As I stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 405 on 17 June 2014, following a review of the Official Languages Act 2003, my Department recently published the Heads of the Official Languages (Amendment) Bill 2014. Head 6 of the proposed Bill provides for an amendment to section 13 of the Act. This involves including a new subsection in section 13(2) stating that the posts within public bodies that require an Irish language competency be specified in language schemes. This amendment reflects the Government decision of 30 October 2013 to replace the practice of awarding bonus marks for Irish language proficiency in civil service recruitment and promotion competitions with a new competency-based system, the objective of which is to increase the cohort of functional bilinguals in the civil service. In addition, it should be noted that the workforce plans of Government Departments and Offices will in future specify the posts/areas of work which require staff that can function in both official languages. Having regard to the implementation of the Gaeltacht Act 2012, Departments will be asked to pay particular attention to posts that are located in, or that are serving, Gaeltacht areas.

I understand from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that it had been intended to pilot the new arrangements in the upcoming Executive Officer (EO) recruitment competition. However, as priority is now being given to a Clerical Officer (CO) competition and the EO competition will not take place until later in the year, the new arrangements are being piloted in the CO competition which is currently being undertaken by the Public Appointments Service. It is proposed that a sub-panel of Irish language functional bilinguals, comprising up to 6% of the overall CO panel size, will be created. Successful candidates appointed from this panel must be able to provide a full range of services in Irish. I should also point out that, in accordance with section 13(d) of the Official Languages Act 2003, public bodies, when preparing their language schemes, are required to ensure that the particular Irish language requirements associated with the provision of services in Gaeltacht areas are met.

Petroleum and Gas Exploration

125. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the potential tax returns to the State if the proposed changes to future oil and gas contracts were applied to existing contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27631/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Firstly I should make clear that other than in the case of the 1959 agreement relating to the Kinsale Head gas field, the fiscal regime applying to oil and gas production in Ireland is set down in the Finance Acts and is not a matter of individual contracts. In March 2014 international sectoral experts Wood Mackenzie were engaged to provide independent expert advice on the “fitness-for-purpose” of Ireland’s fiscal terms, such advice to focus on what level of fiscal gain is achievable for the State and its citizens and, equally important, on the mechanisms best suited to produce such a gain.

Having received and considered Wood Mackenzie’s comprehensive and detailed report I sought agreement of the Government that Ireland’s oil and gas fiscal terms should be revised along the lines recommended. The Wood Mackenzie report was published on my Department’s website on 18 June 2014. The principal recommendations made by Wood Mackenzie are as

follows:

- For now Ireland should maintain a concession system, with industry rather than the State bearing the risk associated with investing in exploration;
- Going forward a form of production profit tax should continue to apply in Ireland, but for discoveries made under future licences the form of this tax should be revised;
- The tax should be charged on a field-by-field basis with the rate varying according to the profitability of the field and charged on each field's net profits;
- That the revised tax should include a minimum payment at a rate of 5% which would function like a royalty and would result in the State receiving a share of revenue in every year that a field is selling production;
- That the revised tax rates should be higher than the Profit Resource Rent Tax currently in place, thereby ensuring a higher share for the State from the most profitable fields. This would result in a maximum rate of 55% applying in the case of new licences, compared with a maximum rate of 40% under the current fiscal regime;
- That the corporation tax rate applying to petroleum production should remain at 25%; and
- there should be no retroactive change to the fiscal terms applying to existing exploration authorisations.

These recommendations flow from a comparative analysis between Ireland and nine other comparable hydrocarbon producing nations such as Newfoundland and Labrador, New Zealand, Spain and South Africa amongst others.

In setting out Government policy on this issue, it is my intention to communicate a clear message in relation to the stability of Ireland's fiscal regime for the oil and gas exploration sector. For existing licences no changes are proposed and this is also consistent with the recommendation of the Joint Oireachtas Committee. For future prospective licence holders a clear regime is being set out and the rationale for that regime has been explained. This should further engender industry confidence in the stability and predictability of Ireland's oil and gas fiscal terms and allow the industry to focus on effective and timely exploration effort.

Ireland has three producing gas fields namely the Kinsale, Ballycotton and Seven Heads fields off the coast of Cork. There is no commercial production of oil in the Irish offshore. The revenue generated for the State from the production from these gas fields is received in the form of rental fees, royalty payments (with the exception of the Seven Heads Gas field) and corporation tax. Profits from these three gas fields are taxed at a corporation rate of 25%. The direct financial return to the State from the Corrib gas field, which is expected to come into production in 2015, will be through the 25% corporation tax on profits.

The amount paid in taxation in respect of Ireland's producing gas fields is a matter between the companies concerned and the Revenue Commissioners and not one in respect of which I have a function. I can observe, however, that as one of the principal factors impacting on the level of taxable profits from a producing gas field is the wholesale price of gas, which is subject to significant movement over time, that attempting to accurately estimate future profitability over the life of any gas field, would be a challenging exercise.

In relation to the decision to revise the fiscal regime that will apply in the case of future exploration authorisations, the decision to revise the fiscal regime should be understood as a decision taken in the circumstances that currently prevail and should not be construed as suggesting

that the regime now being introduced would have been appropriate at any particular juncture in the past. This in turn would suggest that a hypothetical comparison would be of no value

Broadband Services Provision

126. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the scheme announced by him in Loughrea on 25 April 2014 (details supplied) will be extended to bring fibre-optic broadband to the townland of Cooleeny, Kilrickle, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27637/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The National Broadband Plan, which I published in August 2012, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses. This will be achieved by providing:-a policy and regulatory framework that assists in accelerating and incentivising commercial investment; and a State-led intervention for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest. Since publication of the Plan, investments by the commercial sector are underway and in some instances have been accelerated in both fixed line and wireless high speed broadband services. Commercial operators combined have either invested, or committed to invest, over €2 billion in their Irish networks, delivering high speed broadband to homes and businesses. As a result of this accelerated investment the addressable area required by the State-led intervention has been reduced by 30% since the National Broadband Plan was launched. While the commercial developments are welcome the acceleration of investment is largely contained to cities and towns. Consequently, the speeds that are available in these areas are demonstrably better than those that are available in more rural areas.

On 25 April last, I signalled the Government's commitment to a major telecommunications network build-out to rural Ireland, with fibre as the foundation of its investment, as part of the State-led intervention under the National Broadband Plan. This commitment is a clear expression of Government's determination to address the connectivity challenge in rural Ireland in a meaningful and sustainable way. Central to the strategy will be a long term, future proofed infrastructure build with next generation backhaul infrastructure (likely to be primarily fibre based) as the key component underpinning whatever access technology delivers the service (fixed or wireless). This infrastructure build will extend to locations in every county in the State identified as having no existing or planned enabling fibre network. It will be part of an end-to-end strategy that will address all parts of Ireland that cannot access commercial high speed broadband services.

A comprehensive mapping exercise is underway in my Department which will identify those areas that will require a State intervention. I have published a county-by-county list of towns and villages which have already been identified for a fibre build-out. This list is available on my Department's website, www.dcenr.gov.ie. Currently, a total of 84 areas in County Galway have been identified as requiring an intervention. This is an indicative list and is subject to the completion of the mapping exercise. Further locations may be identified as this process continues. Similarly, it may be determined that some locations on the list will be addressed by the commercial sector and will therefore not require State intervention. I expect that this mapping exercise will be concluded in the autumn.

I would point out that the EU Commission's guidelines on State aid for high speed broadband infrastructure preclude Member States from intervening in regions in which private investors have demonstrated plans to roll out their own infrastructure within the following three years. In this regard, I understand that at least one network operator has published a programme

to roll out 57 fibre-based broadband networks in County Galway by July 2016.

In tandem with the completion of the mapping exercise, intensive design and planning work is ongoing in my Department with a view to producing a detailed end to end strategy for the State led intervention. It is my intention to conduct a full public consultation on the outcome of the mapping process and the proposed strategy. EU State aid clearance will also be required for the intervention once finalised. This will be followed by a detailed procurement process with a view to commencing construction of the fibre network and provision of services in identified areas as quickly as possible.

Energy Prices

127. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of concerns that larger companies, for example, Electric Ireland, are offering energy services to customers at a reduced rate, thus underpricing small local companies, the regulations that are in place to ensure that smaller companies are not priced out of the market by larger national companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27644/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Article 7 of the Energy Efficiency Directive obliges Member States to achieve energy savings each year from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020 of 1.5% of the annual energy sales to final customers. Ireland has chosen to partially meet the requirements of Article 7 via the imposition of an Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme on energy suppliers. Earlier this year I introduced Statutory Instrument No. 131 of 2014 to give effect to the Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme in Ireland. These Regulations require all energy suppliers above a certain threshold to deliver 550GWh of energy savings every year. Energy suppliers are free to choose the most effective and efficient means of meeting their obligation, be it through internal action or via the use of third parties active in the energy efficiency industry. It is my understanding that most energy suppliers are working with third parties to deliver energy saving solutions to their customers.

Inland Fisheries

128. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the lake at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry will be restocked, even if for just two months of the year, to help support local tourism, as it used to be stocked in the past; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27676/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that the lake in question, Lake Yganavan, is part of a Special Area of Conservation, (SAC no. 000370) and has not been previously stocked by IFI. I am also advised that as the lake in question is in a SAC and any actions there would require submission of a Nature Impact Statement to the Competent Authority, the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), and to IFI in relation to fish. For the information of the House, I should point out that the stocking of lakes that currently hold wild native stocks of fish even where numbers are limited, with fish of farm origin, would not be viewed as best practice where the protection of the diversity of the native populations would be a priority.

Electricity Transmission Network

129. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on the work of the expert panel that was appointed to review the routes for the Grid Link project, with specific reference to considering underground routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27763/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Independent Expert Panel considering the Grid West and Grid Link projects has held five meetings between 10 February 2014 and 10 June 2014. At its meeting on 2 May 2014, the Panel finalised and approved the terms of reference for comprehensive, route specific studies and reports of fully undergrounded and overhead options for each of the Grid West and Grid Link projects, including assessments of potential environmental impacts, technical efficacy and cost factors. The terms of reference were published on 7 May 2014 and are available on my Department's website.

The studies and reports will be undertaken or commissioned by EirGrid in accordance with those terms of reference set by the Panel which will also oversee EirGrid's study and reporting process. In due course, the Panel will provide an opinion to me on the completeness, objectivity and comparability of the studies and reports undertaken or commissioned by EirGrid and will oversee the publication by EirGrid of the two studies and reports prior to EirGrid proceeding to public consultation on the two projects. I also asked the Panel to consider what, if anything, it can do with regard to the North South Transmission Line project. Although the North South project was not covered by the Government's decision concerning the appointment of the Panel, having discussed my request, and in the light of the finalised terms of reference for the studies of the Grid West and Grid Link projects, the Panel decided that it would provide an opinion to me on the compatibility of the methodologies to be employed on the Grid West and Grid Link projects with what has already been done on the North South Transmission Line project.

I understand that the Panel wrote to EirGrid shortly after its May meeting to convey its requirements in regard to Grid West, Grid Link and the North South project and that EirGrid is attending to those requirements. I am advised that EirGrid, in response to the Panel's enquiry regarding the compatibility of the methodologies, provided a detailed submission to the Panel. This submission was discussed by the Panel at its meeting on 10 June. I understand EirGrid made a detailed presentation at that meeting and that the Panel requested additional written material from EirGrid. The Panel will continue its work at its next meeting on 30 June 2014.

On 23 June 2014, the Panel welcomed the announcement by EirGrid of an underground route option for the Grid West project. EirGrid also announced a number of changes to the overhead route corridor and will now conduct public consultation on this underground route for Grid West and also the proposed amendments to the overhead route corridor, following which both the underground and overhead route options will be brought together into a single report which will be presented to the Panel so that it can review the options side by side, as per its Terms of Reference.

Public Service Broadcasters

130. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide continuous multi-year annual funding for TG4 similar to that which RTÉ currently receives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27768/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): RTÉ is funded through both a Grant-In-Aid for a proportion of television licence fee receipts and through the commercial revenue it generates. TG4 is funded by way of a combination of

direct exchequer Grant-In-Aid, television licence fee receipts and commercial revenue. Both Public Service Broadcasters are funded on an annual basis. In regard to the actual mechanism for helping to determine the level of the licence fee, this is set out in Section 124 of the Broadcasting Act 2009. In particular it allows for the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) to recommend in a report to me, as Minister, an annual licence fee modification. This recommendation is based on an annual review of the extent to which both Public Service Broadcasters have fulfilled their commitments in respect of the public service objects stated in their annual statement of performance commitments for that financial year and the adequacy or otherwise of public funding to enable the corporations to meet those public service objects.

The recommendation from the Authority informs any decision I, as Minister, may take in conjunction with the Government on adjusting the current level of television fee or otherwise.

In addition to the statutory requirement for annual reviews of the public service broadcasters, Section 124(8) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 requires the BAI to also carry out a long term forward looking 5-year review on the adequacy or otherwise of the funding of public service broadcasters. The first 5 year review was undertaken by the BAI in 2013 and will assist in informing any policy decisions I may take on the future public funding of public service broadcasters.

Energy Policy Review

131. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on the ongoing review of national energy policy; the timelines that are associated with the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27772/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I launched the public consultation process on the Green Paper on Energy Policy on 12 May 2014 when the Paper was published. It is open to anyone to submit their views electronically via a dedicated mailbox greenpaper@dcenr.gov.ie or in writing to the Department's address at 29-31 Adelaide Road, Dublin 2. A number of special topic seminars covering the six policy priorities will be organised over the coming months to assist in distilling views on how best to address challenges and opportunities so as to support the three pillars of sustainability, security and competitiveness.

The Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland provides an opportunity to reflect and take stock of the current energy landscape in Ireland and internationally and to adopt a long term approach with regard to the policy, regulatory and societal interventions Ireland needs to make in the coming years. Government, regulators, industry, system operators and the public will all need to make sound, evidence-based choices to support a flexible and fit for purpose energy system in Ireland to meet our current and future energy needs. I look forward to an informed and robust debate and encourage everyone to engage actively in the public consultation process, with a view to contributing to the development of Ireland's future energy policy framework.

Voluntary Sector Funding

132. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the timeframe for the release of funds to organisations under the scheme to support national organisations; the reason for the delay in the allocation and distribution of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27604/14]

133. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the total allocation per annum and by organisation under the scheme to support national organisations in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27605/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

The Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector provides multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services. The new Scheme is intended to commence from 1 July 2014, on the basis of a competitive assessment process. I asked Pobal to undertake an assessment of the applications received and they have completed their analysis. I will shortly confirm allocations to the successful organisations.

The first Scheme ran from 2008 until June 2011, with the current Scheme commencing in July 2011. Therefore, as shown in the following table, a number of organisations were funded under the 2008-2011 Scheme only, others received funding under the 2011-2014 Scheme only, and several received funding under both Schemes.

Scheme to Support National Organisations

National Organisation	Total Paid in 2010	Total paid in 2011	Total Paid in 2012	Total Paid in 2013	Total Paid in 2014 to date
Accord Catholic Marriage Care Service	40,608	16,040	0	0	0
Acquired Brain Injury Ireland (Trading as the Peter Bradley Foundation)	0	25,000	50,000	47,100	20,724
Active Retirement Network Ireland	80,352	71,739	80,000	75,360	33,158
AkiDwA (Akina Dada wa Africa - The African Women's Network (Ireland))	45,792	18,088	0	0	0
Age Action Ireland	45,792	43,088	50,000	47,100	20,724
Alzheimer Society of Ireland	91,584	73,676	58,882	70,650	31,086
Arthritis Ireland	80,352	64,239	65,000	61,230	26,941
Aspire	0	25,000	34,052	47,100	20,724
Barnardos	81,840	50,477	60,000	56,520	24,869

Questions - Written Answers

National Organisation	Total Paid in 2010	Total paid in 2011	Total Paid in 2012	Total Paid in 2013	Total Paid in 2014 to date
Breaking Through	63,072	59,913	68,049	65,940	29,014
Brí - The Acquired Brain Injury Advocacy Association	80,352	69,239	75,000	70,650	31,086
Business in the Community Ireland	68,688	52,132	50,000	47,100	20,724
Camphill Communities of Ireland Ltd	39,011	18,088	0	0	0
Care Alliance Ireland	80,352	54,239	45,000	42,390	18,652
Caring for Carers Ireland Ltd	80,352	69,239	75,000	70,650	31,086
Carmichael Centre for Vol Groups	60,480	58,890	70,000	65,940	29,014
Centre for Independent Living	0	25,000	50,000	47,100	20,724
Cheshire Ireland	80,352	31,739	0	0	0
Children in Hospital Ireland	114,912	95,390	100,000	94,200	41,448
Children's Rights Alliance	160,704	113,478	100,000	94,200	41,448
Chronic Pain Ireland	34,560	36,151	45,000	42,390	18,652
Community Workers' Co-operative	51,840	23,889	0	0	0
Disability Federation of Ireland	45,792	45,588	55,000	51,810	22,796
Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI)	80,352	69,239	75,000	70,650	31,086
European Anti-Poverty Network	114,912	75,390	60,000	56,520	24,869
Football Association of Ireland	0	22,500	45,000	42,390	18,652

National Organisation	Total Paid in 2010	Total paid in 2011	Total Paid in 2012	Total Paid in 2013	Total Paid in 2014 to date
Foróige (NFTE)	0	20,000	40,000	37,680	16,579
Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)	137,376	104,264	100,000	94,200	41,448
Genetic and Rare Disorders Organisation	0	10,000	18,407	18,840	8,290
GROW in Ireland	0	10,000	20,000	18,840	8,290
Huntington's Disease Association of Ireland Ltd	21,600	20,032	23,000	21,666	9,533
IASE (Irish Association for Supported Employment)	126,144	94,827	90,000	84,780	37,303
INCADDS Irish National Council of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder Support Groups	45,792	38,088	40,000	37,680	16,579
Inclusion Ireland -	45,792	38,088	40,000	37,680	16,579
INOUI	171,936	117,914	100,000	94,200	41,448
Irish Autism Action	114,912	90,390	90,000	84,780	37,303
Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)	45,792	30,588	25,000	23,550	10,362
Irish Countrywomen's Association	91,584	36,176	0	0	0
Irish Deaf Society	91,584	73,676	75,000	70,650	31,086
Irish Heart Foundation	0	25,000	50,000	47,100	20,724
Irish Motor Neurone Disease Assoc (IMNDA)	0	15,000	30,000	28,260	12,434
Irish Mountain Rescue	64,800	60,596	70,000	65,940	29,014

Questions - Written Answers

National Organisation	Total Paid in 2010	Total paid in 2011	Total Paid in 2012	Total Paid in 2013	Total Paid in 2014 to date
Irish National Community & Voluntary Forum (NCVF)	0	27,500	0	0	0
Irish Rural Link	177,120	81,623	0	0	0
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament	86,400	34,128	0	0	0
Irish Stammering Association	45,792	33,088	30,000	28,260	12,434
Medical Research Charities Group	45,792	18,088	0	0	0
Migraine Association of Ireland	45,792	35,588	35,000	32,970	14,507
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)	63,072	24,913	0	0	0
MOVE Ireland	45,792	32,828	50,000	47,100	20,724
Muintir na Tire	164,000	104,120	85,000	80,070	35,231
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland	51,840	50,477	60,000	56,520	24,869
Muscular Dystrophy Ireland	0	22,500	45,000	42,390	18,652
National Association for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Irl	0	22,500	31,538	42,390	18,652
National Association for Youth Drama	0	17,500	35,000	32,970	14,507
National Association of Building Co-operatives (Nabco)	45,792	38,088	40,000	37,680	16,579
National Association of Traveller Centres	45,792	18,088	0	0	0

National Organisation	Total Paid in 2010	Total paid in 2011	Total Paid in 2012	Total Paid in 2013	Total Paid in 2014 to date
National Collective of Community-based Womens Networks	45,792	38,088	40,000	37,680	16,579
National Federation of Voluntary Bodies Providing Services to People with Intellectual Disability	45,792	18,088	0	0	0
The National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services (NNRWSS)	91,584	36,175	0	0	0
National Traveller Womens' Forum	45,792	38,088	40,000	37,680	16,579
National Voluntary Drug Sector	34,560	13,621	0	0	0
National Women's Council of Ireland	60,480	23,890	0	0	0
National Youth Council of Ireland	0	25,000	50,000	47,100	20,724
Neurological Alliance of Ireland	63,072	54,913	60,000	56,520	24,869
New Communities Partnership	97,632	83,565	90,000	84,780	37,303
One Family	96,768	85,723	95,000	89,490	39,376
OPEN	160,704	113,478	100,000	94,200	41,448
Open Heart House	0	22,500	45,000	42,390	0
Post Polio Support Group	45,792	33,088	30,000	28,260	12,434
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)	91,584	81,176	90,000	84,780	37,303
Safe Ireland	0	45,000	90,000	84,780	37,303

Questions - Written Answers

National Organisation	Total Paid in 2010	Total paid in 2011	Total Paid in 2012	Total Paid in 2013	Total Paid in 2014 to date
Show Racism the Red Card	0	17,500	35,000	32,970	14,507
Simon Communities of Ireland	171,936	112,915	90,000	84,780	37,303
Special Olympics Ireland Ltd	91,584	36,176	0	0	0
Suas	45,792	40,588	45,000	42,390	18,652
The Asthma Society of Ireland	0	25,000	50,000	47,100	20,724
The Carers Association	0	37,500	75,000	70,650	31,086
The Irish Traveller Movement	132,192	102,216	100,000	94,200	41,448
The Older Women's Network (OWN Ireland)	129,600	51,192	0	0	0
Unmarried and Separated Fathers of Ireland	45,792	18,088	0	0	0
The Wheel	120,960	97,779	102,000	94,200	41,448
Voluntary Drug Treatment Network	23,400	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	€5,037,355	€3,904,466	€3,760,927	€3,587,136	€1,559,690

Planning Issues

134. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the current investigation into planning which was set up following the publication of the review in June 2013. [27609/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 356 and 362 of 24 June 2014.

I appointed MacCabe Durney Barnes Consultants in February 2014 to carry out an independent planning review on the performance of planning functions in six selected planning authorities (Carlow, Cork, Galway and Meath County Councils and Cork and Dublin City Councils) in accordance with section 255 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 following an open public tendering process and subsequent tender evaluation assessment conducted by my Department on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender. I expect to receive the final report from the consultants in July 2014 and I intend to publish it having considered its contents.

Local Authority Staff Numbers

135. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of seasonal staff employed by each local authority to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27630/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The most recent quarterly data on the numbers of temporary/seasonal staff, collected at the end of March 2014, are set out in the following table on a whole time equivalent basis (WTE).

LOCAL AUTHORITY	Temporary / Seasonal Staff 31 March 2014 (Total WTE)
Cork City	1
Dublin City	24
Galway City	14
Carlow	0
Cavan	1
Clare	9.68
Cork	2.15
Donegal	9
Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown (DLR)	2
Fingal	1.8
Galway	0
Kerry	24.25
Kildare	5
Kilkenny	11
Laois	0
Leitrim	2
Limerick	0
Longford	6.81
Louth	4.4
Mayo	2.5
Meath	6.32
Monaghan	1
Offaly	3
Roscommon	0
Sligo	0.56
South Dublin	9
Tipperary	36
Waterford	1.44
Westmeath	6.49
Wexford	7.65
Wicklow	33
OVERALL TOTAL	225.05

136. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the heads of the climate action and low-carbon development Bill; when the Bill is expected to come before Dáil Éireann; if there are plans for the Bill to strengthen further the independence of the expert advisory body; if the Bill will include a long-term objective for low-carbon development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27648/14]

149. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the climate action and low-carbon development Bill; if the Bill will be in line with the recommendations in the report by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht, published in November 2013; if it will reflect the principles of climate justice; if the Bill will include a long-term objective for low-carbon development; the measures there will be to ensure the independence of the expert advisory body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27709/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 149 together.

I refer to the replies to Question No. 81 of 17 June 2014 and Questions No. 347 and 388 of 24 June 2014.

The General Scheme of the Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development Bill has been referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and the Bill will be published as soon as drafting has been completed. My objective is to introduce the Bill and progress its passage through the Oireachtas as quickly as possible.

Both the Heads of the Bill and the National Policy Position which the legislation will underpin were finalised, having regard to the substantial public consultation which my Department facilitated in 2012, and the second round of consultation facilitated by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht last year. A very broad range of issues was raised in both consultations and I am satisfied that the National Policy Position and the planned legislation reflect where the balance lies at this time in terms of the views across the spectrum of stakeholders and society generally. Both the National Policy Position and Head 4 of the General Scheme of the Bill address the fundamental objective on transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in the period to 2050.

The General Scheme of the Bill is primarily focused on Ireland's domestic transition to low-carbon development. In tandem with our commitment to the developing world, a progressive approach to mitigation at a national level is the most effective contribution we can make to the global-scale actions necessary to combat climate change.

Community Development Initiatives

137. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is total confusion, chaos and competition among local community development companies, small independent community groups, Traveller organisations and the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks as a consequence of the tendering process being implemented by his Department for the delivery of the social inclusion community activation programme; and if he will instruct his Department to withdraw immediately the demand that there be only one lead delivery agent in each county, to ensure existing organisations are able in their own right to tender for their geographical area or community of interest. [27652/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) currently being established in all local authority areas will develop, co-ordinate and implement a more coherent and integrated approach to local and community development than heretofore, with the aim of reducing duplication and overlap and optimising the use of available resources for the benefit of citizens and communities. My Department's Local and Community Development Programme is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State.

The current Programme having officially ended at the end of 2013 is being implemented on a transitional basis for 2014 pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in January 2015. SICAP is one of my key priorities and in accordance with the Public Spending Code, best practice internationally, legal advice and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of the services to clients, the Programme will be subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway.

The public procurement process is a competitive process that is open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme. Joint applications are encouraged and organisations of varying sizes (for example smaller organisations working in consortia with larger organisations) are invited to submit joint applications. Applicants at stage one of the tendering process must demonstrate that they meet the criteria for the delivery of services in the Lot(s) applied for. If a joint expression of interest is submitted, candidates are required to select a Lead Candidate which will act as the principal contact in respect of this competitive process and any subsequent contract.

I am satisfied that the procurement process underway is in line with best practice and that the procurement documentation on e-Tenders contains all the relevant information on the process. I look forward to the outcome of the process and the roll out of SICAP in January 2015.

Community Development Initiatives

138. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the social inclusion community activation programme, for which local community development companies are currently preparing to tender, has no mechanism to protect the work done over the years with the Traveller community and women; if he agrees that this work is essential to promote justice, equality and community cohesion; and if he will meet with his staff dealing with this programme and ask that they ring-fence the combined budget for the National Traveller Partnership and the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks and continue to work directly with these two structures to administer the budget through Pobal. [27653/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The proposals outlined in Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government seek to position local government "as the primary vehicle of governance and public service at local level – leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably". As part of the programme of reform of local government, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are being established in all local authority areas. These Committees, comprising public-private socio-economic interests, will have responsibility for local and community development programmes on an area basis, including the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. They will develop, co-ordinate and implement a more coherent and integrated approach to local and community development than heretofore, with

the aim of reducing duplication and overlap and optimising the use of available resources for the benefit of citizens and communities.

My Department's Local and Community Development Programme is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The current Programme officially ended at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281m over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis for 2014 with a budget of €47m pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in January 2015. The SICAP's aim is to reduce poverty, promote social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration. SICAP is one of my key priorities and its budget for next year will be decided in the 2015 Estimates process.

I am confident that supports for the most disadvantaged in our society, such as Travellers and disadvantaged women, will continue under SICAP.

Voluntary Housing Sector

139. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has received a copy of the reports carried out on the defects in the Gallery Quay building managed by Túath Housing. [27658/14]

140. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the ongoing legal action being taken against insurers of the Gallery Quay development, if he will commit to underwriting the repair work as a matter of urgency. [27659/14]

141. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in the case of the Gallery Quay development, given that Túath Housing is a voluntary housing agency and the defective works and repairs required are not of Tuath's making, if he will underwrite the legal costs required to resolve the issues. [27660/14]

142. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has seen an estimate of the cost of repairs required to the defects in the Gallery Quay development. [27661/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 to 142, inclusive, together.

My Department is committed to working closely with Tuath Housing Association and Dublin City Council in resolving the structural and related issues affecting the 60 Tuath-owned properties at Gallery Quay. An updated report from Tuath on the progress to date in resolving water ingress and dampness at the Gallery Quay apartments was received by my Department on 20 June. The report is currently under examination and my Department will be in contact again with Tuath once this has been completed.

The report indicates that Tuath propose to undertake a detailed internal and external inspection of the windows and that the results of this inspection will build on the survey work carried out to date and inform the preparation of a schedule of works and tender documents, details of which are expected to be submitted to my Department in July. In advance of receiving this documentation, it is not possible to indicate the extent of necessary refurbishment works or the estimated cost of such works.

Private Rented Accommodation Costs and Controls

143. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans regarding rent controls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27669/14]

158. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce a rent cap; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27801/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 143 and 158 together.

The private rented sector is an increasingly important element of the housing market, with the proportion of households in the sector almost doubling in the period 2006-2011. I am conscious of the difficulties caused by rising rents and the problem of sourcing suitable accommodation, especially in Dublin and other urban centres. The most recent data from the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) Rent Index shows the extent of rising rents, particularly in Dublin and the major cities. In Dublin, rents for houses increased by 6.7% annually, and for apartments the figure was 10.3%.

The fundamental reason behind the rise in rents is a lack of supply. Increasing both public and private housing supply is a critical issue and just last month the Government published Construction 2020 - A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector. This publication is a blueprint for a properly functioning and sustainable construction sector. It provides for a strategic approach to the provision of housing based on real and measured demand and addresses the full range of relevant issues including the planning process, financing, access to mortgage finance and the construction workforce. As part of the Construction Strategy, the Government is committed to publishing a social housing strategy by the end of the third quarter 2014 which will set out a vision for social housing and identify ways to increase social housing supply over the next 5 years. Over half a billion euro in funding is being made available through my Department across a range of housing programmes in 2014 and it is expected that over 6,000 units will be provided for social housing this year.

Resolution of the housing supply situation is the key element in restoring stability to the market but I recognise that the provision of additional units of housing takes time. Consequently, I recently asked the PRTB to conduct a study to explore options to address the difficulties being experienced in segments of the private rented sector due to rising rents and to report back to me with policy recommendations before the end of June. My goal is to achieve stability and sustainability in the market for the benefit of tenants, landlords and society as a whole.

Irish Water Administration

144. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the development of protocols regarding the taking in charge of water services infrastructure in residential estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27671/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, sets out the process by which local authorities can take in charge housing estates. When taking an estate in charge under the terms of this provision, a planning authority must

take in charge any roads, open spaces, car parks, sewers, water mains, or drains within the attendant grounds of the development. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the transfer of responsibility for the provision of public water services from local authorities to Irish Water. In addition, it provides a mechanism whereby water services infrastructure may be transferred by Ministerial Order to Irish Water. Contrary to certain misunderstandings that may exist, there is no specific legal impediment to the taking in charge of water services infrastructure by local authorities.

In Circular Letter PL 21/13 issued by my Department to planning authorities on 30 December 2013 in the light of the transfer of certain statutory water services functions from local authorities to Irish Water with effect from 1 January 2014, it was stated that legislative amendments to further clarify the existing provisions on the taking in charge of housing estates would be made in 2014. My Department is currently considering, in consultation with Irish Water, what amendments to section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 will be required in this regard.

My Department, in consultation with Irish Water and the local authorities, is currently working on developing a protocol in relation to the taking in charge of estates. This protocol will be finalised shortly, following which further advice will be issued to local authorities in relation to this matter.

Irish Water Remit

145. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a specific grant for homeowners who wish to replace the dangerous lead piping in their homes with safer modern alternatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27688/14]

146. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide Irish Water with a grant to replace dangerous lead piping from the point of metering to the house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27689/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 and 146 together.

The Water Services Act 2013 provided for the establishment of Irish Water as an independent subsidiary within the Bord Gáis Éireann Group and assigned the necessary powers to allow Irish Water to undertake the water metering programme. Under the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, suppliers of drinking water are required to ensure that the water supplied complies with the chemical and microbiological parameters set out in the Regulations. The maximum allowable value for lead is 10 microgrammes per litre. There is no requirement to replace lead pipes as part of the metering programme. However, Irish Water will be identifying the location of any lead service connections during the installation programme.

The Water Services Act 2007 provides that the owner of a premises is responsible for the maintenance and renewal of the internal water distribution system and shall ensure that it is kept in good order and repair, so as to prevent a risk to human health or the environment and that the water meets prescribed quality standards. Irish Water is responsible for replacing lead distribution mains and lead service pipes up to the stopcock. Responsibility for replacing lead pipes from the main stopcock to the house, and within the house, rests with the homeowner.

The introduction of a grants scheme for any purpose must be managed within current budgetary constraints and, insofar as the funds administered by my Department are concerned, there are currently no plans to introduce a scheme for the replacement of lead piping within a household's internal distribution system.

Irish Water Administration

147. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm or deny that over half a million persons will have no out-of-hours services to deal with water and sewerage urgencies despite the fact that he is putting a charge on persons for such services from October; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27696/14]

148. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps which are being taken by Irish Water to establish an out-of-hours service in counties Leitrim and Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27700/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 148 together.

Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. This includes the provision of an out-of-hours service to deal with water and sewerage emergencies and contingencies. Irish Water is now responsible for customer operational calls, and deals with emergencies as they arise in any local authority area. Irish Water is working to develop consistent arrangements across the 31 local authorities with which it has service level agreements. I understand from Irish Water that twenty five local authorities have specific out-of-hours service arrangements, but arrangements are more informal in remaining authorities for dealing with out of hours matters. Irish Water is working with these authorities (Galway County, Laois, Tipperary, Westmeath, Wicklow and Leitrim) to put in place appropriate cover as it moves towards a national consistent service.

Any queries or issues in relation to water supply can be reported directly to Irish Water at all times. Members of the public can contact Irish Water by phone on 1890 278 278 (this service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or by email to customerservice@water.ie. Full contact details for Irish Water are available on its website at www.water.ie. Irish Water has confirmed to my Department that it has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via an email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 278 278.

Question No. 149 answered with Question No. 136.

Irish Water Staff

150. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the total number of whole time equivalent staff for each local authority on this date in 2009 to 2013, inclusive, and at present; if he will indicate in the same table the total number of staff from each local authority who have transferred to Irish Water, including the numbers on secondment and the numbers who are full employees of Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27774/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The number of staff employed by each local authority at the end of each year since 2009 is set out in the table below on a whole time equivalent basis (WTE). The most recent quarterly data collected at the end of March 2014 are also included. From 2013, staff numbers for the combined local authorities of Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council are returned by Limerick City Council. The 2008 and 2009 figures include Regional Authority.

Staffing arrangements within Irish Water are an operational matter for the company and one in which I have no function. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water may appoint staff on terms and conditions as it may from time to time determine. Accordingly, the numbers of staff will depend on the organisational needs of Irish Water and its available budget. I understand from data supplied by Irish Water to my Department that 478 staff have been recruited up to 6 June 2014; 147 have been recruited from local authorities, 80 from Bord Gáis, 5 from my Department, with the remaining 246 recruited externally.

LOCAL AUTHORITY	December 2009 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2010 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2011 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2012 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2013 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	March 2014 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)
Cork City	1,420.00	1,374.00	1,336.00	1,272.42	1,247.02	1,238.02
Dublin City	6,480.45	6,298.30	6,072.35	5,772.70	5,570.75	5,539.85
Galway City	487.50	442.80	438.34	435.33	419.86	411.73
Limerick City	528.30	485.41	465.14	443.54	1,035.89	1,013.60
Waterford City	410.32	379.93	367.09	344.18	335.58	333.37
Carlow	331.00	297.24	285.41	276.09	265.37	263.77
Cavan	446.35	434.09	416.30	380.90	370.10	370.20
Clare	828.36	810.19	785.50	750.98	749.88	735
Cork County	2,364.37	2,255.16	2,184.11	2,088.19	2,020.87	1,990.29
Donegal	1,007.86	999.11	959.14	911.00	873.31	856.17
Dún Laoghaire / Rathdown (DLR)	1,195.90	1,143.40	1,063.60	1,028.30	994.90	976.80
Fingal	1,490.39	1,441.90	1,391.90	1,330.70	1,296.33	1,284.22
Galway	934.27	846.87	811.61	770.28	746.02	742.78
Kerry	1,225.29	1,194.63	1,165.77	1,119.56	1,101.61	1,103.25
Kildare	946.50	925.40	880.90	843.62	815.40	800
Kilkenny	568.04	545.24	529.09	507.46	494.02	501.22
Laois	405.50	392.79	368.88	342.70	341.93	343.17
Leitrim	302.50	294.85	279.13	266.15	258.98	256.72

LOCAL AUTHORITY	December 2009 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2010 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2011 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2012 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	December 2013 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)	March 2014 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)
Limerick	738.60	686.38	656.65	619.33	0.00	0.00
Longford	330.20	306.01	299.94	289.75	289.80	283.95
Louth	691.90	674.64	652.64	652.51	634.98	632.78
Mayo	1,177.80	1,103.65	1,061.50	1,000.53	963.73	945.73
Meath	702.58	668.82	640.64	623.58	611.56	612.59
Monaghan	433.99	412.72	404.69	385.05	369.83	362.07
Offaly	478.00	418.50	399.00	388.60	379.70	376.20
Roscommon	550.50	487.12	461.07	434.80	414.59	415.34
Sligo	529.92	510.45	488.74	453.98	429.28	425.75
South Dublin	1,402.55	1,344.70	1,277.60	1,176.47	1,098.79	1,091.01
Tipperary North	504.22	515.57	468.83	450.36	447.85	467
Tipperary South	654.30	651.10	632.26	606.31	576.53	566.09
Waterford	565.50	503.61	476.00	447.06	446.06	438.06
Westmeath	487.92	480.43	462.79	447.26	431.59	428.32
Wexford	804.51	788.38	765.76	723.60	715.65	708.27
Wicklow	827.25	789.45	747.05	716.65	709.65	705.65
OVERALL TOTAL	32,252.64	30,902.84	29,695.42	28,299.94	27,457.41	27,218.97

151. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the total breakdown of general purpose grants allocated to each local authority in 2009 to 2013, inclusive, and in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27775/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): General purpose grants are paid from the Local Government Fund and are my Department's contribution towards meeting the cost to local authorities of providing a reasonable level of services to their customers.

The following table details the general purpose grant allocations from the Local Government Fund to all local authorities from 2009 to 2013.

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
-	€	€	€	€	€	€
Local Authority						
Carlow County Council	11,910,119	11,331,276	10,128,725	8,532,829	8,560,762	50,463,711
Cavan County Council	18,832,045	18,245,262	16,549,414	14,200,854	14,123,740	81,951,315
Clare County Council	14,883,494	13,986,912	12,736,073	10,176,044	10,072,651	61,855,174

Questions - Written Answers

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
-	€	€	€	€	€	€
Local Authority						
Cork County Council	51,707,370	48,353,652	42,689,885	33,495,626	32,048,612	208,295,145
Donegal County Council	40,140,417	38,913,388	36,345,399	30,945,838	30,840,363	177,185,405
Fingal County Council	30,404,698	29,799,877	26,267,018	20,455,071	19,619,590	126,546,254
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	37,165,016	34,624,434	31,522,005	25,780,316	24,772,291	153,864,062
Galway County Council	36,888,227	36,092,172	32,835,625	28,105,841	27,400,744	161,322,609
Kerry County Council	26,457,145	25,572,631	23,238,216	19,005,401	18,374,432	112,647,825
Kildare County Council	25,754,427	25,532,785	23,924,053	20,127,482	20,634,229	115,972,976
Kilkenny County Council	20,020,063	19,334,743	17,527,581	15,113,016	15,105,892	87,101,295
Laois County Council	17,580,214	16,823,589	15,143,352	13,189,788	13,070,064	75,807,007
Leitrim County Council	14,820,652	14,489,435	13,479,217	11,809,261	11,952,743	66,551,308
Limerick County Council	24,864,456	23,724,090	21,355,645	17,683,768	17,668,930	105,296,889
Longford County Council	14,118,480	13,856,743	12,849,645	11,252,795	11,488,728	63,566,391
Louth County Council	12,725,378	12,118,470	10,914,165	9,130,490	9,044,372	53,932,875
Mayo County Council	36,586,871	35,180,309	32,135,562	27,800,750	27,650,043	159,353,535
Meath County Council	27,601,149	27,377,684	25,553,557	21,684,996	21,251,612	123,468,998
Monaghan County Council	15,094,413	14,737,177	13,648,138	11,902,168	11,968,784	67,350,680
Tipperary North County Council	18,630,156	18,005,785	16,373,536	14,267,841	14,504,742	81,782,060
Offaly County Council	15,704,327	15,388,672	14,139,586	12,164,815	12,095,491	69,492,891
Roscommon County Council	21,065,007	20,110,463	18,490,254	15,967,965	15,828,208	91,461,897
Sligo County Council	16,997,791	16,356,043	15,314,229	13,553,783	13,584,307	75,806,153
South Dublin County Council	24,676,357	24,289,702	21,709,971	16,963,904	16,285,348	103,925,282

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
-	€	€	€	€	€	€
Local Authority						
Tipperary South County Council	22,788,742	22,128,379	20,211,960	17,472,862	17,302,006	99,903,949
Waterford County Council	22,059,029	21,990,654	20,583,798	17,888,261	18,176,169	100,697,911
Westmeath County Council	20,625,403	20,003,602	18,494,866	16,016,846	16,055,537	91,196,254
Wexford County Council	21,282,429	20,755,993	19,259,881	16,229,752	15,912,433	93,440,488
Wicklow County Council	19,922,275	19,219,558	17,502,198	14,625,057	14,357,641	85,626,729
Cork City Council	25,764,998	25,014,462	22,940,522	17,265,785	16,612,544	107,598,311
Dublin City Council	94,709,663	88,769,969	78,722,867	54,805,761	52,613,531	369,621,791
Galway City Council	8,830,378	8,512,430	7,534,888	5,990,156	5,750,549	36,618,401
Limerick City Council	11,050,841	10,595,040	9,638,920	7,968,166	8,264,861	47,517,828
Waterford City Council	8,064,061	7,564,315	6,713,415	5,223,860	5,415,345	32,980,996
Clonmel Borough Council	3,295,919	3,115,507	2,785,896	2,353,114	2,235,458	13,785,894
Drogheda Borough Council	4,688,795	4,434,266	3,966,978	3,208,084	3,047,680	19,345,803
Kilkenny Borough Council	1,893,103	1,766,873	1,560,328	1,266,584	1,203,255	7,690,143
Sligo Borough Council	3,142,285	2,927,408	2,580,497	2,105,833	2,000,541	12,756,564
Wexford Borough Council	2,348,994	2,199,185	1,948,097	1,773,200	1,684,540	9,954,016
Arklow Town Council	1,634,797	1,587,276	1,455,760	1,264,178	1,200,969	7,142,980
Athlone Town Council	1,917,374	1,793,563	1,587,448	1,296,281	1,231,467	7,826,133
Athy Town Council	767,623	749,251	690,500	571,629	543,047	3,322,050
Ballina Town Council	1,632,670	1,580,583	1,445,712	1,273,025	1,209,373	7,141,363
Ballinasloe Town Council	920,181	878,744	793,526	679,194	645,234	3,916,879
Birr Town Council	817,077	780,485	704,969	621,693	590,609	3,514,833
Bray Town Council	4,531,181	4,284,234	3,831,912	3,303,940	3,138,743	19,090,010
Buncrana Town Council	980,244	913,089	804,777	701,776	666,687	4,066,573

Questions - Written Answers

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
-	€	€	€	€	€	€
Local Authority						
Bundoran Town Council	601,052	559,962	493,613	425,621	404,340	2,484,588
Carlow Town Council	1,831,382	1,721,237	1,530,546	1,332,619	1,265,988	7,681,772
Carrickmacross Town Council	605,674	586,800	535,346	466,229	442,918	2,636,967
Carrick-on-Suir Town Council	1,164,428	1,139,383	1,047,814	905,503	860,228	5,117,356
Cashel Town Council	684,703	655,338	593,045	516,446	490,624	2,940,156
Castlebar Town Council	1,037,375	966,468	851,964	730,023	693,522	4,279,352
Castleblayney Town Council	496,043	469,170	419,775	361,631	343,549	2,090,168
Cavan Town Council	867,812	811,835	718,591	654,077	621,373	3,673,688
Clonakilty Town Council	626,151	588,921	521,171	474,381	450,662	2,661,286
Clones Town Council	583,122	570,359	524,434	464,307	441,092	2,583,314
Cobh Town Council	1,254,730	1,177,961	1,046,319	952,382	904,763	5,336,155
Dundalk Town Council	5,289,816	4,961,900	4,403,659	3,589,814	3,410,323	21,655,512
Dungarvan Town Council	1,037,498	966,575	852,052	708,731	673,294	4,238,150
Ennis Town Council	2,461,593	2,305,693	2,043,399	1,710,714	1,625,178	10,146,577
Enniscorthy Town Council	1,235,578	1,151,903	1,016,035	924,817	878,576	5,206,909
Fermoy Town Council	874,009	818,970	726,081	660,894	627,850	3,707,804
Kells Town Council	502,483	473,188	421,572	361,427	343,356	2,102,026
Killarney Town Council	1,865,408	1,778,486	1,603,506	1,317,649	1,251,767	7,816,816
Kilrush Town Council	647,720	620,402	559,419	485,747	461,460	2,774,748
Kinsale Town Council	419,623	391,048	344,812	313,856	298,163	1,767,502
Letterkenny Town Council	1,176,732	1,096,274	966,369	796,266	756,453	4,792,094

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
-	€	€	€	€	€	€
Local Authority						
Listowel Town Council	795,421	748,119	665,706	562,011	533,911	3,305,168
Longford Town Council	1,232,768	1,148,502	1,012,428	873,855	830,162	5,097,715
Macroom Town Council	629,483	591,359	525,612	478,423	454,502	2,679,379
Mallow Town Council	1,132,311	1,068,192	951,776	866,327	823,011	4,841,617
Midleton Town Council	572,789	546,739	486,711	443,015	420,864	2,470,118
Monaghan Town Council	1,184,794	1,105,999	976,889	828,489	787,065	4,883,236
Naas Town Council	1,484,461	1,459,370	1,336,377	1,123,654	1,067,472	6,471,334
Navan Town Council	582,061	545,635	483,948	392,283	472,669	2,476,596
Nenagh Town Council	1,140,538	1,074,375	957,471	847,980	805,581	4,825,945
New Ross Town Council	987,575	953,252	857,575	780,583	741,554	4,320,539
Skibbereen Town Council	450,894	420,067	370,292	337,047	320,195	1,898,495
Templemore Town Council	658,712	633,782	576,386	505,123	479,867	2,853,870
Thurles Town Council	1,014,871	963,441	865,088	729,707	693,222	4,266,329
Tipperary Town Council	871,488	829,034	745,880	630,993	599,444	3,676,839
Tralee Town Council	3,280,851	3,056,595	2,694,458	2,188,225	2,078,813	13,298,942
Trim Town Council	582,432	549,878	491,118	426,006	404,706	2,454,140
Tullamore Town Council	1,324,142	1,235,028	1,089,931	924,856	878,613	5,452,570
Westport Town Council	859,045	800,324	705,501	611,929	581,332	3,558,131
Wicklow Town Council	1,648,281	1,557,309	1,391,457	1,202,037	1,141,936	6,941,020
Youghal Town Council	1,163,499	1,090,968	965,305	878,642	834,709	4,933,123
Total	905,155,682	870,000,001	789,999,997	650,999,998	640,000,004	

Questions - Written Answers

The amount allocated to local authorities from the Local Government Fund for general purpose grants in 2014 is €282 m; this figure recognises the removal of water related costs from local authorities to Irish Water in 2014 and the individual authority allocations are, therefore, not directly comparable to previous years. The following table details the proposed general purpose grant allocations from the Local Government Fund to local authorities in 2014 (the allocations to County Councils are “county at large” allocations in respect of the County Council and any Town Councils within the county).

-	2014
Local Authority	€
Carlow County Council	5,352,469
Cavan County Council	8,458,415
Clare County Council	2,646,284
Cork County Council	2,951,435
Donegal County Council	22,720,760
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	5,724,579
Fingal County Council	454,714
Galway County Council	12,506,381
Kerry County Council	11,043,837
Kildare County Council	9,686,924
Kilkenny County Council	9,356,019
Laois County Council	7,631,324
Leitrim County Council	8,282,319
Limerick County Council	6,175,333
Longford County Council	8,119,493
Louth County Council	8,243,835
Mayo County Council	17,492,594
Meath County Council	8,799,199
Monaghan County Council	10,247,882
North Tipperary County Council	9,832,046
Offaly County Council	6,663,642
Roscommon County Council	9,107,439
Sligo County Council	9,993,352
South Dublin County Council	923,906
South Tipperary County Council	12,923,064
Waterford County Council	12,125,219
Westmeath County Council	10,115,479
Wexford County Council	11,888,576
Wicklow County Council	6,846,310
Cork City Council	8,544,374
Dublin City Council	2,667,330
Galway City Council	1,626,429
Limerick City Council	8,449,826
Waterford City Council	4,399,212
Total	282,000,000

152. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown in tabular form of all staff employed at Irish Water indicating numbers at each grade, the numbers in each department, the previous employment in each department, that is, those originating from the private sector or from a specified Department or local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27789/14]

154. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will indicate the pension liability for all staff working at Irish Water lies, whether employed directly or on secondment; the amount that has been budgeted for pension liabilities in Irish Water's initial staffing costs; the amount that is expected to be paid from local authorities and/or Government Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27796/14]

160. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to detail the total sums paid out by Irish Water to date to external contractors, listing the individual contract in each case, including the name of the contractor, the total sum agreed and the purpose of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27805/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152, 154 and 160 together.

Staffing arrangements within Irish Water is an operational matter for the company and one in which I have no function. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water may appoint staff on terms and conditions as it may from time to time determine. Accordingly, the numbers of staff will depend on the organisational needs of Irish Water and its available budget. I understand from data supplied by the utility to my Department that 485 staff have been recruited up to 25 June 2014; 146 have been recruited from local authorities, 82 from Bord Gáis, 5 from my Department with the remaining 252 recruited externally.

Section 18A of the Water Services Act 2013, as inserted by section 47 of the Gas Regulation Act 2013, governs the establishment of Irish Water pension schemes. The details of the pension schemes are currently being finalised by the utility in conjunction with my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The intention is that pension liabilities of former public sector staff recruited by Irish Water in relation to prior service with the Department and local authorities will not be crystallised liabilities on the balance sheet of the utility; the existing pension liabilities for such service will only become a cost as the employees concerned actually retire.

In terms of external contractors, I understand from Irish Water that some €64.6 million has been expended on external service providers. Decisions on specific operational expenditure are a matter for the company and I have no role in that regard. However, costs incurred by Irish Water will be examined by the Commission for Energy Regulation as an integral element of the independent economic regulation of Irish Water.

Irish Water has confirmed to my Department that it has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via an email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 278 278.

153. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on a decision to engage expert assistance to review and report on international developments since 2007 on any potential health effects of electro-magnetic fields emanating from transmission grid infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27792/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The issue of the potential health effects of electromagnetic fields was the subject of an Expert Group Report commissioned by the Government and published in March 2007. This Report, entitled Health Effects of Electromagnetic Fields, is available for download on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Environment/Environmental-Radiation/>.

My Department is currently commissioning a study on international developments in non-ionising radiation (NIR) and electromagnetic fields (EMF) research since the publication of the 2007 Report. The study will also examine how the issue of NIR/EMF is dealt with in other jurisdictions. A number of national and international experts were invited to submit proposals to undertake this work and I expect that a contract will be awarded in the coming weeks, with a view to completing the study later this year.

The results of this study will be used by a Steering Committee, convened and chaired by my Department, to make specific proposals relating to the future management of these matters including, *inter alia*, any consequent legislative amendments and provision of appropriate technical expertise and associated resources.

Question No. 154 answered with Question No. 152.

155. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to explain the reason for the delay in the transfer of units earmarked for social housing from the National Asset Management Agency to local authorities; his plans is to speed up the process; the targets for the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27798/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department continues to work closely with NAMA, the Housing Agency, local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies in relation to the delivery of social housing.

To date, NAMA has identified over 4,653 residential properties controlled by its debtors and receivers under this initiative as being potentially available for social housing. Of this figure, 1,607 units were in areas where the local authority had no demand or where properties were not considered suitable for social housing by the local authority for sustainable communities' reasons, such as unsuitable tenure mix. A further 1,095 units originally identified as available were subsequently discovered by NAMA to be unavailable as the units had already been sold or leased by their debtor in accordance with their strategy for repaying their debt, or became unavailable when the loans associated with these properties were sold and NAMA no longer held an interest. Of the total properties originally identified, 1,951 properties are available, have a confirmed demand and are considered suitable for social housing.

Of the 1,951 available and confirmed demand properties, 684 have been delivered for Social Housing use at the end of Q1 2014. This figure includes 518 complete and operational units and 166 units where contracts have been signed and final completion works were under way at that point. A further 451 properties are considered as being active transactions whereby terms are agreed or active negotiation is on-going by all parties concerned or where a detailed appraisal

(i.e. determining the most likely delivery mechanism) is being carried out. An additional 702 properties are to be further appraised - signalling likely delivery in 2015 and 2016.

While it is noted and accepted that delivery was slow within the early stages of collaboration, it is important to note that the process engaged in was novel to all parties concerned and with this came the added complexity of getting agreement from multiple parties operating within an environment subject to a range of legal and financial constraints. Within this context significant progress has been made in respect of delivery and in particular with the introduction of the National Asset Residential Property Services Limited (NARPSL) special purpose vehicle (SPV) of NAMA. The pace of delivery has increased and the process is now operating well as evidenced by the units delivered to date.

The process of reviewing units previously deemed unsuitable is on-going. NAMA have been requested to identify the units that are still available and Local Authorities, particularly those in high demand areas, are reviewing the list of NAMA properties to see if innovative solutions can be found in order to bring units into use that were previously not considered suitable for sustainable communities reasons. My Department and NAMA are also working together to find ways to retain, contractually or otherwise, the units currently identified as having a confirmed demand to avoid their potential loss through portfolio sale. Along with the on-going review of existing properties by local authorities, a greater focus on building out of incomplete units will be required in order to maximise delivery through this process.

My Department and NAMA have set a delivery target of 500 units in 2014, an ambitious target which we are confident will be met and which will bring overall delivery of units from this initiative to 1,100 by year end.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

156. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to set out his plans to tackle social housing lists; his views on the size of these lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27799/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The results of the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments carried out in 2013 showed that there were 89,872 households on local authority waiting lists as at 7 May 2013 and these results are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

The 2013 figure represents a decrease of 9% on the 98,318 households recorded under the previous summary assessment carried out as at 31 March 2011. The 2013 figures are the most up-to-date figures available on waiting list numbers, which are subject to on-going fluctuation due to households being allocated housing and new households applying for housing support. However, the 2013 results cannot be directly compared to previous results given that this latest summary employed different methodologies and was the first to be carried out under the 2011 Social Housing Assessment Regulations.

The Government is committed to responding more quickly and on a larger scale to social housing needs through a variety of mechanisms. In terms of the delivery of social housing, the main focus in terms of supports provided by Government will be on meeting the most acute needs – the housing support needs of those unable to provide for their accommodation from own resources.

On 14 May 2014, the Government published Construction 2020 – A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector. The Strategy contains 75 Actions in total and my Department, together with the Housing Agency, will be involved in the delivery of over 30 of those. Under Action 8 of Construction 2020, a Social Housing Strategy is to be published by Q3 2014; to assist in its development, the Housing Agency has invited submissions by 31 July 2014. Further information is available at the following weblink: <http://www.housing.ie/News/Current-News/Invitation-for-Submissions-Preparation-of-a-Social.aspx>.

It is clear that the present and foreseeable economic context in which we must address social housing need is such that innovative, and indeed challenging, solutions must be found which will harness new funding streams. While the local authorities will continue to have the lead role in addressing social housing need, in their capacity as statutory housing authorities, the growing role of the not-for-profit sector, as represented by the Approved Housing Bodies, and other potential investors must also be further developed.

My intention is that the Strategy will be both challenging and innovative, and will provide the basis for an enhanced approach to social housing provision in Ireland. It will contain clear measurable actions that are to be taken to increase the supply of social housing and, most importantly, reduce the number of people on waiting lists over the next five years.

With the benefit of the recent injection of €50m for social housing from the Government's May 2014 stimulus announcement, on top of the original housing budget of some €587m, I now expect the final output across all social housing programmes for 2014 to be in the region of 6,000 new housing units. The number and method of delivery of social housing units in future years will be determined in the course of the annual Estimates process and will be informed by the Social Housing Strategy now in preparation.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

157. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to outline his plans to tackle homelessness; his views on the size of the list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27800/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities and the purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988.

In February 2013, I published the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement in which the aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 was outlined. The statement emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. The availability and supply of secure, affordable and adequate housing is essential in ensuring sustainable tenancies and ending long-term homelessness.

On 20 May 2014, I published the Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness in which the Government's approach to delivery on its objective of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 was outlined. A copy of this plan is available on my Department's website,

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

This plan sets out a range of measures to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation to house homeless households within the next three years and mobilise the necessary supports. Progress in implementing the plan will be reported quarterly through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy.

Question No. 158 answered with Question No. 143.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

159. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way he is making housing affordable; his plans to introduce another affordable housing scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27804/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Government’s 2011 Housing Policy Statement announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes in the context of a full review of Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2013. Details regarding the review are available on my Department’s website: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/PublicConsultations/>. The Government’s recently published Construction 2020 – A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector aims to build a competitive, innovative, and sustainable construction sector. Action 9 of the strategy provides that the review of Part V will be completed in Q2 of 2014. It is anticipated that any legislative changes required on foot of the review will be incorporated into the General Scheme of a Planning Bill, which is currently in preparation.

Question No. 160 answered with Question No. 152.

Milk Quota Cessation

161. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps his Department is taking in preparation for the abolition of milk quotas next year; the position for farmers who were unable to buy or lease quota this year and who will be over quota due to the fact that they are building up their herd in anticipation of the abolition of quotas in 2015; if he will consider reducing the fines imposed on those over quota this year in view of the fact farmers need to prepare to increase their production for the lifting of quotas in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27606/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The milk quota regime will come to an end on the 31 March 2015 and under the Milk Quota Regulations all farmers who intend commencing milk deliveries before that date, including those who will commence after 1 January 2015, will require a milk quota. Up to 31 March 2015 milk purchasers cannot accept deliveries from milk suppliers, unless the milk supplier holds a milk quota with that milk purchaser.

Given that the rate of the super levy fine is set by EU Council Regulation it is not possible for me to change that rate without the agreement of both the Commission and all other Member States, and such an agreement is not forthcoming. While I have sought and continue to seek amendments at EU level to improve the ‘soft landing’ for Irish dairy producers in collaboration with like-minded other Member States, unfortunately there is no common position at the

Council of Agriculture Ministers and for the moment such an improvement looks unlikely to be achieved. However, I expect the matter to be on the agenda for discussion at July Council where I will once again seek to have the matter progressed in favour of Irish dairy farmers.

In preparation for quota abolition, I have announced a number of significant investments by my Department in the Irish dairy sector particularly at farm level. These include the Dairy Expansion Scheme and the TAMS funding for the dairy sector. The new RDP to commence from next year also contains a number of proposals for additional TAMS funding for dairy farms. These investments complement the excellent work being undertaken by Teagasc and ICBF in preparing dairy farmers to take advantage of the significant opportunity which quota abolition will present.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

162. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the transfer of entitlements will be completed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27634/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received a Transfer of Entitlements application from the person named on 15 May 2014 to transfer entitlements by way of sale. The transferee is in the process of obtaining a herd number and the Transfer of Entitlements application will be processed as soon as the transferee becomes a registered herd owner.

Departmental Investigations

163. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will outline the longest running case in the courts taken by the special investigations unit at his Department; and the total legal costs incurred by said case to date. [27636/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A number of linked cases arising from investigations by my Department's Special Investigation Unit in 1999 are still before the courts. The hearing of these cases commenced in 2002 but progress has been delayed as a result of the lodgement of several sets of proceedings by the defendants, including various challenges to the legislation under which the charges were brought. The Department has been successful to-date in defending these challenges. The cases are due before the courts shortly and are therefore *sub judice*. No legal costs have been incurred by my Department to-date in respect of these cases. Such costs are generally borne by the Chief State Solicitors Office and are a matter for that body.

Departmental Contracts

164. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has had the amount of work allocated to him reduced significantly in 2014, below the amount provided for in his contract; if he will be compensated for this shortfall in work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27667/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named carries out testing under the Bovine TB and Brucellosis Eradication Schemes. He is being allocated testing in excess of my Department's contractual commitments to him. As litiga-

tion is extant, it would not be appropriate to comment any further.

Rural Development Plan

165. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will commence detailed discussions on the Common Agricultural Policy Rural Development Plan 2014-2020 which is of critical importance to farm incomes for the next six years (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27693/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) will be a key support in enhancing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, achieving more sustainable management of natural resources and ensuring a more balanced development of rural areas. The process of developing the draft RDP has been a lengthy and complex one. A central element of this process has been ongoing and substantive stakeholder and public consultation. The approach to this consultation has centred on:

- An open call for submissions launched in December, 2012,
- Stakeholder workshops facilitated by the National Rural Network in July, 2013,
- A further open call for submissions and a stakeholder event building on the announcement of proposed RDP measures in January, 2014,
- An open call for submissions based around the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the RDP in May, 2013, and
- Ongoing meetings between officials in my Department and stakeholders as the design of the RDP has progressed.

Having taking into account the results of this extensive consultation, the draft RDP is currently being finalised. The detailed elements referred to by the Deputy will be included in this draft to be submitted to the EU Commission. This draft will then form the basis for detailed negotiations over a number of months with the European Commission. As these detailed negotiations progress, I expect that there will also be further discussion with stakeholders in relation to the finalisation of the RDP.

Bovine Disease Controls

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding new compensation measure for the removal of BVD persistently infected animals. [27694/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While good progress is being made by farmers in removing persistently infected (PI) animals under the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme, I am concerned with a number of PI animals being retained on a relatively small number of farms. Therefore to further assist and encourage farmers in removing PI animals, I have introduced new funding measures providing for a payment of €120 in respect of the first and subsequent PI calves born in beef herds in 2014. I have also introduced for the first time a support of €75 towards the removal of the second and subsequent PI calves born in dairy herds in 2014. Payment is contingent on disposal of the PI animals in a timely fashion and provided disposal is done through the knackery system.

Question No. 167 withdrawn.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Eligibility

168. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there will be further consultation with farming organisations on the details of the qualifying criteria for the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, GLAS; if there is scope for elements of the scheme to be altered to benefit farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27719/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I announced details of the new GLAS (Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme) on 14 January 2014 as part of a suite of proposed measures under the new Rural Development Programme. GLAS will provide significant funding to farmers who undertake environmental actions in line with national and EU environmental objectives. It will contribute to the overall public good and will build on the success of previous agri-environment schemes.

Stakeholder consultation has been a central element in the development of the new RDP, and has been ongoing for almost a year. In that time, a number of different formal and informal consultation processes involving the farming organisations have taken place. The most recently completed stakeholder consultation centred on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). As part of this process I published a consultation document on the new Rural Development Programme, which sets out the range of proposed measures in considerable detail. Once the inputs from the final round of public consultation have been assessed, I will move to finalise the detail of the scheme. At that stage I envisage further discussions with the various farm bodies.

Fishing Industry Development

169. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way he sees that the recently announced seafood sector support funding will assist Kerry seafood operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27724/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 14 May I launched a package of national measures aimed at supporting and developing Ireland's inshore fisheries. Inshore fisheries are particularly important to small-scale coastal communities and a significant proportion of Ireland's inshore fleet operate off the Kerry coast. There are now 2 development schemes dedicated to supporting the inshore fisheries sector which, taken together, represent a package of €1m and provide opportunities to develop in a sustainable way into the future. This funding is in addition to the €600,000 in co-funding by the Government and the European Fisheries Fund available to the inshore sector through the FLAGS and represents a significant investment in the future of Ireland's rural, coastal communities, right around the coast.

The package includes an enhanced Shellfish Pot Replacement Scheme, building on the scheme I originally announced in February 2014. The Shellfish Pot Replacement Scheme administered by BIM is providing 40% of the cost of replacing these lost pots through fixed payments of €24 per lobster/crab pot and €12 per shrimp pot. Due to the limited uptake of the scheme, I have now more than doubled the pot limits from 50 to 200 for boats less than 12m length and from 100 to 250 for boats from 12 to 15m in length. Existing applicants to the current scheme will automatically be increased to the supplementary pot limits and a call for new

applications will be advertised.

In addition to replacing lost gear, our inshore sector needs to be encouraged to develop in a smart, sustainable way, to take advantage of the valuable asset that is Ireland's coastal waters. How seafood is caught today is an important part of ensuring that responsible inshore fishing is commercially attractive into the future. The new Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Scheme will provide funding for environmentally-friendly fishing gear and equipment, and support for improvements in the areas of quality, hygiene, and standards on board. In addition the scheme will increase the grant aid for voluntary v-notching lobsters from the existing maximum of 55% to a new maximum of 75% to entice more fishermen to participate in this worthwhile conservation activity.

In relation to co-funding from the European Union, Ireland must prepare an Operational Programme in order to avail of co-financing from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Following months of intense lobbying and negotiation, I announced on 12 June 2014 that I had secured €148 million from the new Fund for the period 2014 to 2020 for the development of the Irish seafood industry and the coastal communities that depend upon it. This funding is more than double the amount that was available to Ireland during the last Common Fisheries Policy and will ensure a strong seafood industry in Ireland that can grow and expand to meet its potential up to 2020.

Ireland's EMFF allocation is to be provided through 5 discrete funding envelopes, namely €71 million for investment in the seafood industry, €32 million for data collection, €37 million for control and enforcement, €5 million for implementation of the Integrated Maritime Policy, and €1.3 million for storage aid. I will be discussing with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in the near future Exchequer matching funding, having regard to the general budgetary situation for the coming years.

Many investment measures that may be included within the new Operational Programme have the potential to contribute to job creation in peripheral coastal communities in Kerry, including in particular capital grants to support growth and expansion of seafood processing and aquaculture enterprises and capital allocations to Fishery Local Action Groups for dispersal to projects within their coastal areas. Any allocation to these measures is subject to final decisions on overall priorities for the seafood sector and to ex-ante evaluation by independent consultants of the appropriateness of such measures.

Beef Industry

170. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the specific proposals he has made to the EU trade Commissioner to protect the Irish beef sector in the event of an EU-US trade deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27726/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I would start by saying that Ireland is very supportive of an EU/US trade deal. An agreement between the world's two major trading blocs has the potential to increase growth and grow jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. In the agri-food sector we have strong offensive interests, both in terms of market access and in eliminating some of the irritants that hinder trade. We are seeking substantial market access for our dairy products and in the prepared foods area. We also want to see action to action to address the question of Grade A equivalence for dairy and the licensing system that applies to dairy imports into the US.

Of course we have sensitivities as well. One of these is our beef sector. While we see

some opportunities for establishing a niche market in the US for Irish beef, we have concerns regarding the prospect of increased beef imports into the EU. I have raised these concerns on a number of occasions with the EU Commission. I have proposed that Ireland's sensitivities are reflected in the size and composition of any quota offered to the US. I have argued that the size of the quota should not exceed European market absorption capacity, which is substantially reduced according to the latest forecasts. I have also proposed that the quota should be designed – via end use conditions – to ensure that imports are not all concentrated on high value cuts and I have argued that an in-quota tariff rate should continue to apply to imports within the quota.

Beef Quality Assurance Scheme

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he is satisfied that all aspects of quality assurance in the beef sector are observed throughout the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27748/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Bord Bia Beef and Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme (BLQAS) is an integrated scheme involving the producer and the processing plant working in partnership to provide the customer with quality assured product. The scheme describes the essential quality assurance requirements from primary production through factory processing to final despatch which are necessary to meet customer requirements. In addition, the scheme lays down additional standards to be complied with at each step of the production chain.

Producers seeking membership can initially apply directly to Bord Bia or through their meat processor. A special application form will be provided and must be signed by the producer. A producer declaration form will be completed at the audit to establish the proper basis for the audit. The application will then be evaluated and, if appropriate, a full independent audit of the producer will be carried out to evaluate the capability of the applicant to meet all the requirements of the Standard. This audit will be conducted by an independent auditor from a Bord Bia appointed inspection body. When the producer is deemed to have complied with the requirements of the Standard, the herd will be considered for certification under the Scheme. When certified, the producer will be issued with a certificate for the herd which will be listed on the Bord Bia register/database. Before the certification expires, the producer will receive a reminder letter from Bord Bia advising that a further audit is required to maintain certification.

At processor level, the scheme sets out a number of essential requirements covering both product and process. There are procedures covering hygiene, chilling, and product traceability along the production chain. Processors must develop a food safety management plan based on the principles of HACCP. Processors are subject to independent audit during which their compliance with each of the scheme requirements will be assessed. When the processor is deemed to have complied with the requirements of the Standard, the processor will be considered for certification under the Scheme. When certified, the processor will be issued with a certificate for the scope of the process audited and will be listed on the Bord Bia database / register and on the member list.

Currently there are 44,590 producers in the BLQAS which is made up as follows;

- Beef only = 32,349
- Lamb only = 2,529
- Mixed = 9,712

Currently as per Bord Bia's website there are 53 processors on the members list, with 46 in the Republic and 7 in Northern Ireland. The system is accredited to internationally standard and compliance is independently verified. Where non compliances are detected, the system requires immediate remedial action to be taken. I am confident that the system, which is accredited to internationally accepted standards, is robust.

Beef Industry Irregularities

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if evidence of price fixing exists throughout the beef sector in view of the lower prices now being received by producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27749/14]

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has received suggestions of price fixing in the beef industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27751/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 and 174 together.

I am not aware of any evidence of price fixing in the beef industry. The Competition Authority is an independent statutory body that enforces Irish and European competition law in Ireland. Its mission is 'to ensure that markets work well for Irish consumers, business and the economy'. It does this by taking action against anti-competitive practices (e.g. price-fixing) and by blocking anti-competitive business mergers. It also has a role in promoting competition in the economy by identifying legislative restrictions on competition, advising the Government on the implications for competition of proposed legislation, and by providing general information about competition issues.

With regard to any suspected manipulation of the market I would ask the Deputy to bring forward any information or evidence he has in this regard to the Competition Authority of Ireland who have the power to investigate such matters.

Beef Industry

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of beef processors currently slaughtering animals throughout the country, where one or more such processors have an interest, controlling or otherwise, in more than one slaughtering or processing operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27750/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Currently there are 32 beef slaughtering plants approved to export from Ireland to local, EU and third country markets and over 195 local authority businesses approved plants that may export locally or to the EU. The details (names/addresses etc) of the all the approved plants are on the websites of my Department and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) in the case of local authority plants.

With regard to the ownership of beef processing plants this is a commercial matter for individuals or companies who wish to invest in the industry. As the deputy is aware there are companies that operate multiple plants in Ireland, and I as Minister do not have any legislative power to curtail this nor would I seek to do so as there is a free single market in place throughout the EU.

There are safeguards in place to ensure that there are no monopoly positions amongst the ownership of the plants and these are enforced by the Competition Authority. The Authority is an independent statutory body that enforces Irish and European competition law in Ireland. Its mission is ‘to ensure that markets work well for Irish consumers, business and the economy’. It does this by taking action against anti-competitive practices (e.g. price-fixing) and by blocking anti-competitive business mergers. It also has a role in promoting competition in the economy by identifying legislative restrictions on competition, advising the Government on the implications for competition of proposed legislation, and by providing general information about competition issues.

Question No. 174 answered with Question No. 172.

Grazing Rights

175. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number and percentage of farms in County Donegal that have grazing rights to commonage land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27776/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the 2013 Area-Based Schemes, 2,698 applicants from County Donegal declared eligible commonage land in their application forms. This number amounts to some 30% of all applicants under the 2013 Schemes in that County.

Grazing Rights

176. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farms with commonage grazing rights in County Donegal which are participating in the agri-environment options scheme; the number that have participated or are participating in REP schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27797/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The total number of farms with commonage grazing rights in County Donegal who are participating in the Agri Environment Options Schemes (AEOS) is 866. The number of farms with commonage grazing rights in County Donegal who are participating in the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS4) is 507.

Employment Rights

177. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is considering regulating the live-in au pair market as in other European countries to reduce the occurrence of abuse in the sector; if her attention has been drawn to the exploitation in the live-out au pair market where au-pairs regularly have no protection due to the fact that this type of employment tends to subsidise foreign students whose visas do not permit employment; if she will consider bringing this sector out of the black economy by way of legislation akin to JobBridge and make the necessary provisions in law by amending the visa scheme. [27611/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Regulation of working conditions is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. In this regard I understand that there is no legal definition of an “au pair” in Irish legislation but that the State’s body of employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally

employed on an employer-employee basis, regardless of what title is given to them.

I am informed that where the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA), which comes within the remit of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, receives a complaint involving somebody described as an au pair, NERA will investigate with a view to establishing the person's statutory entitlements under employment law (including whether the term "au pair" is being used to avoid statutory obligations). NERA has encountered individuals, described by their employers as au pairs, who have been found to be domestic employees. In such cases NERA will seek to vindicate the rights of all workers in accordance with its mandate and powers under employment legislation.

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation does not issue Employment Permits in respect of au pairs, child minders or domestic workers and therefore, from the perspective of my Department, there is no immigration permission specifically assigned to these categories of activity. Accordingly if a non-EEA national sought permission to come to Ireland to work as an au pair they should be refused permission. That does not prevent EU nationals exercising rights of free movement and engaging in this activity. I am aware that in some cases non-EEA students may be doing au pair work and this matter is currently being reviewed in my Department in the context of further reform in the area of non-EEA student immigration.

I would urge the Deputy, if he is aware of any case where an employee is being exploited in this context, to report the specifics to NERA for investigation.

Missing Persons Data

178. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details her Department has of persons who disappeared in Kerry during the troubles of 1919 to 1923; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27725/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department does not hold any lists or details of persons who may have disappeared in Kerry between 1919 to 1923.

Prisoner Complaints Procedures

179. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the file of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will be reviewed in its totality with a view to establishing if they were mistreated by the State. [27643/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Director General of the Irish Prison Service to review the files of the person referred to and report back to me as soon as possible. I will provide a more detailed reply to the Deputy as soon as I have received the Director General's report.

Immigration Controls

180. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the changes that have been made in immigration controls for persons seeking to reside here, that is, whether a person has to have a work permit, a certain bank balance and so on before he or she can reside here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27657/14]

181. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the financial requirements regarding money in a bank account that immigrants must meet if staying in Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27662/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

The terms and conditions for immigration in Ireland including financial requirements depend on the length and purpose of the person's intended residence and the category of immigration status. The general principle is that a person coming here should not be a burden on the State and should accordingly have sufficient funds to maintain themselves during their stay. For instance a non-EEA student applying for a visa must have €7000 in funds available to them over and above the cost of their course. A person coming on a work permit is expected to maintain themselves from their earnings while here rather than to have a particular level of savings. Where applications are being made for family reunification the financial checks are on the basis of the sponsors earnings as opposed to bank balances.

In the normal course a person coming to the State to work will require an Employment Permit from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation although some categories of migrants are exempt from this requirement. Further Information is available on the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service website www.inis.gov.ie. 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 Parliamentary Questions process.

Residency Permits

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current status or expected progress in the determination of long-term residency or eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27752/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status or entitlement to naturalisation does not arise at this time in the case of the person whose details were supplied. As the Deputy is aware, if the person has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection, the position is that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process.

Residency Permits

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status and/or eligibility for long-term residency or naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27753/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status or entitlement to naturalisation does not arise at this time in the case of the person whose details were supplied. As the Deputy is aware, if the person has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection, the position is that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process.

Residency Permits

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if written submissions have been received from a person (details supplied) in County Carlow in respect of their residency application/stamp 4 update; when such submissions will be considered, having particular regard to the length of time they have spent in this country (twelve years); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27754/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has submitted written representations. These representations, together with all other information on file, will be fully 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, 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.

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

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current status and expected entitlement to extended residency/stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27755/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), dated 3rd July, 2013, the person concerned has submitted written representations. These representations, together with all other information on file, will be fully 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, 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 might also wish to note that the person concerned has not, to date, provided the documentation requested in a letter to their legal representatives dated 16th January, 2014. The requested documentation should therefore be submitted to the INIS as soon as possible.

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

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which consideration has been given to the submission received from a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath who has been employed in regular insurable employment in this country for more than six years; if they are likely to be granted temporary or long-term residency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27756/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), dated 3rd July, 2013, the person concerned has submitted written representations. These representations, together with all other information on file, will be fully 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, 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 the person concerned has never held a right of residency in this State of a nature as would have allowed them to take up a position of paid employment.

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

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status and-or expected eligibility for long-term residency/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27757/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status or entitlement to naturalisation does not arise at this time in the case of the person whose details were supplied. As the Deputy is aware, if the person has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection, the position is that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process.

Residency Permits

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27759/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy entered the State on 26 July 2007 and was registered in their own right as a student from 20 August 2007 to 19 October 2013. This person's current residency status is that they

are without permission to be in the State. They have an application pending with INIS which is currently receiving attention.

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 Parliamentary Questions process.

Services for People with Disabilities

189. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a case (details supplied) in County Offaly, the tragic circumstances in this case and the hardship and distress being caused to the family at present stemming from the lack of support available for a person with an intellectual disability; if he will immediately intervene to ensure that funding is made available for a residential place in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27594/14]

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.

Tobacco Control Measures

190. **Deputy Eamonn Maloney** asked the Minister for Health his Department's total spend on smoking cessation services in 2010 to 2013, inclusive; the amount of this spend that went to hospital settings, primary care settings, community settings or other settings; the amount of this spend that went on staff, marketing, programmes, or other areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27598/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Smoking cessation services and the collation of data in relation to same is a matter for the Health Service Executive. As such, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Tobacco Control Measures

191. **Deputy Eamonn Maloney** asked the Minister for Health the number of smokers that have successfully completed the Health Service Executive cessation programmes in 2010 to 2013, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27599/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Smoking cessation services and the collation of data in relation to same is a matter for the Health Service Executive. As such, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointment Status

192. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite the waiting time for an operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27600/14]

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 2014*, 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 Health Service Executive, 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 HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

General Practitioner Services

193. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health in view of the precedent set by the agreement between the Irish Medical Organisation and the Competition Authority the procedures, if any, that have been put in place for engagement with the National Association of General Practitioners by his Department; the rationale behind the procedures or lack thereof; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27607/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, a universal GP service by 2016, as set out in the Programme for Government and the Future Health strategy framework. As announced in the Budget, it has been decided to commence the roll-out of a universal GP service by providing all children under 6 years with access to a GP service without fees. This will mean that almost half of the population will have access to GP services without fees.

In line with this policy, the Health (General Practitioner Service) Bill was published on 23 April 2014 and is currently progressing through the Oireachtas. The Bill was debated and approved at Committee Stage on 19 June 2014 and it is intended that the legislation will be passed by the Oireachtas before the summer break. This will provide for a GP service to be made available without fees to all children aged five years and younger.

As you are aware, the Department of Health and the HSE prepared a draft GP contract earlier this year to facilitate the introduction of this service. As part of the consultation process on the draft contract, I met with the National Association of General Practitioners (NAGP), the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) and the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) on January 31, 2014. At these meetings, the concerns of the organisations were acknowledged and they were invited to revert with any and all issues they may wish to raise on the draft contract.

Following the meeting with the NAGP on the 31 January, the NAGP did not make a submission to the HSE. They did, however, write to me on 20 February last in relation to the draft contract, stating *“Accordingly, the NAGP does not propose to waste any further time considering this document and respectfully suggests that a full re-write is undertaken with the proper and meaningful negotiations with all key stakeholders. Then, and only then, are we prepared to give your proposals further consideration “*.

Following the meetings on 31 January last, the IMO provided a written submission to the HSE on the draft under 6 contract and subsequently entered into talks with the Department of Health and the HSE. On 4 June 2014, a Framework Agreement with the IMO was signed. This sets out a process for engagement concerning the GMS/GP contract and other publicly funded contracts involving General Practitioners (GPs), starting with the provision of GP care free at the point of access for children under 6 years. This will enable collaboration on the full implementation of a universal GP service and will allow progress on a new GMS GP contract. The HSE, Department and IMO met yesterday to commence discussions on a new GP contract for

children under 6 years in accordance with the terms of the Framework Agreement and are using the draft under 6 contract as published on the HSE website on 31 January as the basis for these discussions.

Hospital Consultants Contract Issues

194. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 567 of 15 April 2014, when a response will issue. [27608/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I understand that the HSE have responded to the Deputy on the 23rd June 2014 in relation to this matter.

Patient Files

195. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the action that was taken to investigate the disappearance of 30 patient files while in transit between Mayo General Hospital and St. Michael's day hospital, Castlebar, in 2012; if he will clarify the correct procedure for transporting confidential patient files between institutions under the remit of the Health Service Executive. [27612/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Nurses Act

196. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if the Nurses Act 1985 gave An Bord Altranais the authority to change the quorum requirements for a fitness to practise hearing without prior approval from him. [27615/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Section 13(8) of the Nurses Act 1985 allows An Bord Altranais agus Cnáimhseachais na hÉireann, or An Bord Altranais as it was then known, regulate the procedures of all committees established under Section 13, including the Fitness to Practise Committee and also allows all such committees regulate their own procedures. This would include setting a quorum for each committee.

Medical Card Reviews

197. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare in view of the decision of 17 June regarding discretionary medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27619/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): In the context of the Government's decision to develop a policy framework for providing eligibility for health services on the basis of medical conditions, the Government recently announced that a medical card or GP visit card is to be issued to a person, with a serious illness, whose discretionary card was refused renewal since the centralisation of medical card assessments. If the medical card or GP visit card to which the Deputy refers was awarded by way of discretion and was refused renewal in the period from 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2014 following the completion of an eligibil-

ity review, a card will issue by the HSE.

The HSE has commenced the process of identifying and contacting persons to advise them that their medical cards and GP visit cards will issue. It is estimated that this process will take 3 weeks. No action is required on the part of those affected as the HSE will be in contact. If people do not hear from the HSE by mid July, they should contact the HSE on its Lo-Call contact number: 1890 25 29 19. These individuals will be able to access medical card and GP visit card services in the normal manner when they have been advised by the HSE that their medical card or GP visit card is active.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine the specific query raised 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 Aids and Appliances Provision

198. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health the reason a special belt which has to be worn with a stoma bag has been taken off the list of items covered by a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27620/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for the administration of the primary care schemes, therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Reviews

199. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare in view of the decision of 17 June regarding discretionary medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27622/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): In the context of the Government's decision to develop a policy framework for providing eligibility for health services on the basis of medical conditions, the Government recently announced that a medical card or GP visit card is to be issued to a person, with a serious illness, whose discretionary card was refused renewal since the centralisation of medical card assessments. If the medical card or GP visit card to which the Deputy refers was awarded by way of discretion and was refused renewal in the period from 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2014 following the completion of an eligibility review, a card will issue by the HSE.

The HSE has commenced the process of identifying and contacting persons to advise them that their medical cards and GP visit cards will issue. It is estimated that this process will take 3 weeks. No action is required on the part of those affected as the HSE will be in contact. If people do not hear from the HSE by mid July, they should contact the HSE on its Lo-Call contact number: 1890 25 29 19. These individuals will be able to access medical card and GP visit card services in the normal manner when they have been advised by the HSE that their medical card or GP visit card is active.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine the specific query raised and to re-

ply 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

200. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on an over-70 medical card application will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan. [27628/14]

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 Reviews

201. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on their application for an over-70 medical card review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27639/14]

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 Staff

202. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that a recent study (details supplied) into nurse staffing levels and hospital mortality found that an increase in nurses' workloads by one patient increases the likelihood of inpatient hospital mortality by 7%, if he will consider a review of nurse to patient staffing levels within the Health Service Executive and the establishment of clear nurse to patient ratios, relevant to the different areas of care, throughout the health service that reflect the finding of this study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27641/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): It has been necessary to reduce the numbers of staff employed in the public health service, including nursing, in order to contain health service costs. However, I recognise that there is a balance to be struck to meet both economic requirements and patient safety requirements. Notwithstanding the need to reduce public service numbers, the HSE has the capacity to recruit where it is necessary to do so in order to ensure

patient safety and quality care and to support service delivery.

It is imperative that patient safety continues to be maintained in the context of these reductions and achieving this requires that relevant expertise is applied to the decision making process. It is for this reason that I have approved the establishment of a taskforce to develop a framework that will determine the staffing and skill mix requirements for the nursing workforce in a range of major specialties. The focus will be on the development of staffing and skill mix ranges which take account of a number of influencing factors. The taskforce is being chaired by the Chief Nursing Officer.

It is important also to note the link between nursing qualifications and safety and to recognise that nurse education levels are also linked to patient outcomes. The Lancet study showed that a 10% increase in the proportion of nurses holding a nursing degree is associated with a 7% decrease in the risk of death. Ireland has invested significantly in nurse education since the Commission on Nursing in 1998. Approximately €55 million is spent annually on nurses education and around 1,570 nurses enter the undergraduate programme each year.

Medical Card Reviews

203. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health in view of his recent announcement, if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will now have their medical card returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27646/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): In the context of the Government's decision to develop a policy framework for providing eligibility for health services on the basis of medical conditions, the Government recently announced that a medical card or GP visit card is to be issued to a person, with a serious illness, whose discretionary card was refused renewal since the centralisation of medical card assessments. If the medical card or GP visit card to which the Deputy refers was awarded by way of discretion and was refused renewal in the period from 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2014 following the completion of an eligibility review, a card will issue by the HSE.

The HSE has commenced the process of identifying and contacting persons to advise them that their medical cards and GP visit cards will issue. It is estimated that this process will take 3 weeks. No action is required on the part of those affected as the HSE will be in contact. If people do not hear from the HSE by mid July, they should contact the HSE on its Lo-Call contact number: 1890 25 29 19. These individuals will be able to access medical card and GP visit card services in the normal manner when they have been advised by the HSE that their medical card or GP visit card is active.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine the specific query raised 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 Appointment Status

204. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive an outpatient appointment; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [27649/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A maximum waiting time target of 12 months has been set for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE Service Plan. The SDU and the NTPF are working 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 Waiting Lists

205. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting time for an orthopaedic appointment deemed to be an urgent referral at Roscommon county hospital; the number of orthopaedic clinics scheduled to take place at the hospital for the remainder of 2014; the number of consultants operating such clinics at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27650/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medical Card Eligibility

206. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27651/14]

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 Facilities

207. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if measures will be put in place to improve safety at a hospital (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27672/14]

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.

Hospital Facilities

208. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a facil-

ity (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27673/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Management of the health care property estate is a service matter. Therefore your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Card Administration

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27677/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Government has decided to develop a policy framework for providing eligibility for health services to take account of medical conditions, including new legislation as appropriate and a HSE clinical expert group is to examine the range of conditions that should be considered as part of this process. The group has been asked to make an early report to the Minister for Health in the autumn.

The Government was very concerned about the potential impacts on the health of persons with serious illnesses whose discretionary medical cards and GP visit cards were refused renewals since the centralisation of medical card assessment in 2011. Therefore, in the context of the above eligibility policy development, the Government has decided to issue medical cards and GP visit cards to these people.

The Government recently approved the method by which medical cards and GP visit cards, awarded by way of discretion, can issue to persons with serious medical conditions where renewal was refused having completed an eligibility review. The cards will issue in the following circumstances:

- During the period, the person held a medical card or GP visit card issued on a discretionary basis, but the HSE made a decision to refuse its renewal on foot of a completed eligibility review. - The person completed the review process during that period, i.e. provided the information and documentation required to assess their eligibility.

- The person has a serious medical condition, i.e., which required that their case was referred to a Medical Officer as a part of the review process

It is anticipated that over 15,000 cards will issue to people with serious medical conditions as part of this process. However, until the HSE has completed its examination on a case by case basis, it is not possible to provide a definitive figure. Furthermore, it is also recognised that a small number of individuals may not have been able to complete their review during this period due to circumstances relating to their medical condition, e.g., hospitalisation during treatment, change of residence during treatment. Therefore, the Director General of the HSE may act, on his own initiative, to take account of an *ad misericordiam* appeal (an appeal “to pity”) on a case by case basis to issue a discretionary card to such a person that has a serious medical condition.

Hospital Procedures

210. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the number of orthopaedic procedures by type that have been carried out at Cappagh Hospital for the years 2011 to date in 2014; the amount of funding provided to the hospital for each of those periods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27678/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services

211. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a report in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Meath will be completed; if there are any further assessments scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27707/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Home Services

212. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered the request of Nursing Homes Ireland for the establishment of a Department of Health-led forum on long-term care to plan the ongoing and future residential care requirements of Ireland's ageing population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27710/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) has called for the development of a long term strategy for the sector through formal establishment of forum or expert group of industry stake-holders. There is already a very effective level of consultation with NHI and other stakeholders on relevant issues. NHI has clear channels of communication with both my Department and the HSE. NHI, with other relevant stake-holders, are routinely consulted in relation to development of policy and regulations in the residential care sphere. I met with a delegation from NHI as recently as Wednesday 11 June and these channels remain open. I would like to assure the Deputy that planning for future services will continue to be fully informed by the views and concerns of all stakeholders, and that all positions will be considered in a balanced and objective way so as to get the optimal outcome for service users and the taxpayer.

Health Services

213. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a report in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Meath will be completed; if there are any further assessments scheduled; if so, the date of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27713/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Reviews

214. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare in view of the decision of 17 June 2014 regarding discretionary medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27721/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): In the context of the Government's decision to develop a policy framework for providing eligibility for health services on the basis of medical conditions, the Government recently announced that a medical card or GP visit card is to be issued to a person, with a serious illness, whose discretionary card was refused renewal since the centralisation of medical card assessments. If the medical card or GP visit card to which the Deputy refers was awarded by way of discretion and was refused renewal in the period from 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2014 following the completion of an eligibility review, a card will issue by the HSE.

The HSE has commenced the process of identifying and contacting persons to advise them that their medical cards and GP visit cards will issue. It is estimated that this process will take 3 weeks. No action is required on the part of those affected as the HSE will be in contact. If people do not hear from the HSE by mid July, they should contact the HSE on its Lo-Call contact number: 1890 25 29 19. These individuals will be able to access medical card and GP visit card services in the normal manner when they have been advised by the HSE that their medical card or GP visit card is active.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine the specific query raised 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 Reviews

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card recently withdrawn in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare might be reissued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27743/14]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

216. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of applicants waiting for assessment for the fair deal scheme; the average waiting time between assessment and funding approval by geographical breakdown; the average amount paid by participants between assessment and funding; if such amounts are reimbursed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27773/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): At end April 2014, there were 1,517 applications for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme in progress.

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. As such, the average waiting time between assessment and approval is a national figure. As of the 19th June, there were 1,390 people on the national placement list. Currently the wait time for persons receiving funding approval is 10 weeks.

The provision of nursing home services is the subject of a contract between the approved nursing home and the person in receipt of those services, or his/her representative. The HSE is not party to such contracts which are concluded between each resident and their nursing home. Therefore, it is not possible to provide figures in relation to the amounts payable by nursing home residents before funding is released. The HSE does not reimburse any monies paid by nursing home residents for their cost of care while on the national placement list.

Hospital Waiting Lists

217. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Carlow will be scheduled for an operation in Wateford Regional Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27790/14]

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 2014*, 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 Health Service Executive, 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 HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Haulage Industry Regulation

218. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the work of the interdepartmental group set up under his Department to consider the establishment of a pay-as-you go road tax scheme for HGVs here, similar to that introduced in the UK, in view of the pressure facing road hauliers at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27705/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I established an Interdepartmental group in January 2014 to assess the implications of introducing a 'pay-as-you-go' road tax system for Heavy Goods Vehicles, in response to concerns raised by hauliers about the cost of running a haulage operation in Ireland. This group is examining the technical, regulatory and economic dimensions of introducing a pay-as-you-go charging system for HGVs in Ireland. The Group is made up of representatives from my Department; the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; the Department of Finance; the National Roads Authority; the Road Safety Authority; An Gardaí Síochána and Forfas. I hope to receive the final report from the Group by the end of July. I do not want to anticipate the findings of the Group at this stage, but the following is an update on their work to date:

The Group has carried out a review of the current motor tax arrangements for HGVs, including the administrative procedures and the tax raised. The Group has examined other charges levied on the domestic HGV operators, such as tolls and fuel costs, and other charges which hauliers face as business operators, including labour costs. The cost to haulage operators carry-

ing loads outside of Ireland has been considered and a full review carried out of the road charging regimes in other European states, including the system introduced in the UK this year. The relevant European Union legislation in this area has also been examined. I understand that the Group has identified various options for changes to the motor tax regime in Ireland to support the haulage industry and to ensure that transport costs do not negatively impact on Irish businesses, particularly Irish exporters who are driving our economic recovery.

I look forward to receiving this report later in the summer.

Public Transport

219. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the recent widespread opposition to proposals to privatise Bus Éireann, if the National Transport Authority has begun a consultation process with the trade unions, as the Minister previously indicated it would; his views that the current Government policy of tendering out 10% of Bus Éireann has disproportionately targeted Waterford where 100% of the city's services are being hived off to the private sector at the expense of the travelling public and staff; his views that by targeting Waterford city there is a real risk due to economies of scale of the entire Bus Éireann operation at Waterford being lost, resulting in yet more job losses which the city could not sustain and a depleted service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27417/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The direct award contracts for the provision of PSO bus market services held by Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann expire later this year. The awarding of subsequent contracts is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA). There are no plans to revisit the decision of the NTA to tender the PSO bus services in Waterford.

The purpose of public transport is not to provide employment to any particular group of people but to provide a good public transport service to the public. The principal concern when looking at the future of bus services in Waterford is to provide a better service to those people who currently use those services, and more importantly, getting those people who don't, to use those bus services. As at present, the fares, timetables and service standards will be set by the NTA. The tendering of these services will therefore not lead to a downgrading of services to bus users. The purpose of the tendering is to secure a better service for the same cost. It will be good for Waterford, its residents and may yet become an example for other places to follow. It is open to Bus Éireann to compete in this tender.

In the case of Bus Éireann not being successful in the competitive process, staff would be protected under the European Communities (Protection of Employees on Transfer of Undertakings) Regulations 2003 (the "Transfer Regulations" or "TUPE"). Minister of State Alan Kelly and I met with the unions representing Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann workers in November to discuss this matter. Arising from that we asked the NTA to put a structured engagement with unions in place and the NTA met with the NBRU and SIPTU unions in January and March this year.

Driver Licences

220. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the changes that have been made to drivers licence category D in recent years, including the retiring age from driving and the turnover of these licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27610/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Irish driver licensing legislation operates within the framework of EU legislation. The principal EU legislation in relation to driver licensing is Directive 126 of 2006. This sets definitions for the different vehicle categories, requirements of the format of licences, content of tests, and standards for vehicles used in test. That Directive sets a minimum age of 24 to hold a category D licence and provides that category D licences should have a period of validity of five years. These requirements are transposed into Irish law by the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 6 of 2013), which came into effect as of 19 January 2013.

The Directive allows Member States the option of limiting the validity period of licences due to age. Ireland has a long-standing policy of treating 70 years of age as the cut-off point in these terms. Therefore, an applicant for a category D licence who is 65 to 67 years of age will receive a licence valid until the day before they turn 70. An applicant over 67 will receive a three year licence. When applying for a licence over the age of 70 in any category, an applicant must provide a medical report indicating their continuing fitness to driver. There is no 'retirement age.'

National Roads Authority Projects

221. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a report on the previously agreed Adare bypass in County Limerick; if the project is feasible as previously agreed with all consultations, soil samples, route agreed and funding secured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27616/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Railway Stations Naming

222. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the renaming of Howth DART station as Asgard station Howth in view of the forthcoming centenary of the Asgard landing in Howth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27655/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is a matter for Irish Rail and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days. I have no strong views on the matter.

Public Transport

223. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he

will provide an update on a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry regarding a bus shelter. [27680/14]

224. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry regarding a bus stop and shelter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27681/14]

225. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry regarding a bus shelter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27682/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 to 225, inclusive, together.

In accordance with the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 (Public Service Contracts) (Commencement) Order 2013, which came into effect on 1st January 2014, the functions of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to public transport infrastructure have been extended to include securing or providing bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, stands and bus fleets in the State. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Wild Atlantic Way Project

226. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Cromane, County Kerry, is not on the Wild Atlantic Way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27683/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have no direct role in relation to individual tourism projects. The route of the Wild Atlantic Way is a matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Taxi Regulations

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the necessary appraisal and approval is forthcoming in respect of wheelchair taxi modification submitted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare whose licence may expire unless the case is approved before 24 June; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27702/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the setting of vehicle standards, and licensing of, wheelchair accessible vehicles is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2013. I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Tourism Industry

228. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans through Bord Fáilte or any other funding body to provide funding to develop tourism infrastructure at Ireland's most northerly point, Malin Head, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27723/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): While my Department provides capital funding for investment in tourism attractions through Fáilte Ireland, neither I nor my Department are involved in the development of specific tourist attractions and locations. The development of the Wild Atlantic Way is a matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland, while the development of tourism facilities associated with the route is a matter for local stakeholders with the support of Fáilte Ireland where appropriate. In this regard, I am aware that Fáilte Ireland has offered to meet with the local community group in the coming weeks to discuss the development of Malin Head.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Projects Expenditure

229. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the costs of developing service areas have been factored into overall motorway project costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27731/14]

230. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the costs associated with developing online service areas as proposed by the National Roads Authority in its draft policy NRA service areas on the national road network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27732/14]

241. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected costs of constructing an overbridge and ancillary roundabouts at the proposed service area on the M9 at Kilcullen between junctions 2 and 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27766/14]

242. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the costs associated with developing online rest areas as proposed by the National Roads Authority in its draft policy NRA service areas on the national road network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27767/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 229, 230, 241 and 242 together.

As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, including service areas, is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. In particular, Section 54 of the Roads Act 1993 specifically provides for the National Roads Authority or a local authority to provide and/or operate service areas.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sporting Events

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which any further discussions have taken place with national or international sporting organisations with a view to attracting events to this country which could have a beneficial effect on tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27733/14]

237. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which national and international sporting events can be co-ordinated to maximise the benefit to the economy, with particular reference to the need to avoid, where possible, events clashing, thereby providing for steady economic progress throughout the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27739/14]

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which this country continues to be marketed abroad as a venue for major sporting events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27740/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 231, 237 and 238 together.

The hosting of major sports events can deliver additional international visits and helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination. I am supportive of the ongoing efforts of the Tourism Agencies and the National Governing Bodies of Sport to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs/benefits involved in any State financial support. The agencies also pay due regard to the existing calendar of events in Ireland, to maximise overall visitor numbers, but clearly the State cannot control the decisions of non-governmental bodies that may host events.

The hosting of the Giro D'Italia earlier this year, and the Irish Open over the past week showed that the island of Ireland can successfully host large international events and ensure that participants and spectators alike have a great experience when they visit our shores. Later in the year, Croke Park will host the American Football match between the University of Central Florida and Penn State. This will build on the success of the Navy-Notre Dame game in 2012.

In relation to the potential hosting of the Rugby World Cup in 2023, Minister Varadkar and I met with our Ministerial colleagues from Northern Ireland responsible for tourism and sport last January. We established a working group to examine some key issues and to report back to us in the Summer. The working group, on which the IRFU and relevant Government Departments from both jurisdictions are represented, has held a number of meetings to date. I look forward to receiving their report later in the Summer.

The Government is also very supportive of the FAI and Dublin City Council's recent bid to host part of the European Soccer Championships in 2020 at the Aviva stadium.

Sporting Events

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which discussions continue to take place with a view to possible participation in the Rugby World Cup by way of offering a possible venue for events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27734/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Last November the Government considered a Memorandum on the discussions and analysis to date on a potential

bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. While the Memorandum identified a number of challenges, the great potential of the event is also clear and I believe that hosting the Rugby World Cup on a cross-border basis in 2023 would be a great opportunity for Northern Ireland and Ireland. In response to the Memorandum, the Government expressed strong support for the proposal and for the conduct of further work to get to the stage of making a formal decision to bid.

To progress the matter further, Minister Ring and I met with Minister Arlene Foster and Minister Carál Ní Chuilín, who are the Ministers respectively responsible for tourism and sport in the Northern Ireland Executive, in Armagh on 22 January. We established a working group to examine some key issues further and to report back to Ministers in the Summer. The working group, on which the IRFU and relevant Government Departments from both jurisdictions are represented, has held a number of meetings to date and indeed is meeting again tomorrow. I look forward to receiving their report later in the summer.

Public Transport

233. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which discussions have taken place with CIE unions in the context of future transport policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27735/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My contacts with the trade unions on transport policy have been about the direct award contracts for the provision of Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus market services held by Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann. These contracts expire later this year. The awarding of subsequent contracts is the statutory responsibility of the National Transport Authority (NTA). The NTA decided in December that all Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann routes will be included in the new five year direct award contracts which the NTA will enter into with the companies next December. However, the NTA announced that 10% of publicly subvented bus services will only remain within the direct award contracts until the end of 2016. After that they will be operated under separate contracts that will have been competitively tendered. It is open to the two incumbent companies to compete for any tendered routes.

In the case of Bus Éireann not being successful in the competitive process, staff would be protected under the European Communities (Protection of Employees on Transfer of Undertakings) Regulations 2003 (the “Transfer Regulations” or “TUPE”). Minister of State Alan Kelly and I meet with the unions representing Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann workers in November to discuss this matter. Arising from that we asked the NTA to put a structured engagement with unions in place and the NTA met with the NBRU and SIPTU unions in January and March this year.

Integrated Ticketing

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which any further extension of integrated ticketing is proposed throughout the public transport sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27736/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): Responsibility to develop, procure, implement, operate and maintain the integrated ticketing Leap Card system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) became a function of the National Transport Authority (NTA) with effect from 30th September 2010. In addition, section

63 of the DTA Act 2008 extends the Authority's remit in relation to integrated ticketing to the rest of the State. Noting the NTA's responsibility regarding the issues raised, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Industry

235. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which growth is expected in the tourism sector over the next three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27737/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 2013 was an excellent year for Irish tourism with the total number of overseas visits growing by 7.2%. All of our main markets grew compared to 2012 and we enjoyed our highest ever number of visits from North America. Figures recently published by the CSO show that for the 3 month period of February-April '14, overseas visit numbers grew by 7.5 % compared with the same period in 2013.

In terms of targets for 2014, the approved Tourism Ireland Business Plan for 2014 contains a target of growing visit numbers to Ireland by a further 4% this year and growing the associated revenue from these overseas visits by 7%. As part of its actions to reach this target, Tourism Ireland is undertaking extensive marketing campaigns in all of our main overseas markets. Furthermore, I am confident that measures such as the retention of the lower VAT rate for tourism services, the reduction of the air travel tax to zero from April and the increased air access to Ireland will also help to ensure that the targets are met.

In relation to the next three years, the approved Tourism Ireland Corporate Plan 2014-2016 includes a target of increasing overseas visits by 13% by 2016 compared to 2013. The Plan contains a range of actions to achieve this target, in areas such as destination branding, consumer engagement, and collaboration with other agencies and commercial partners.

Tourism Industry

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the hotel and catering industries are sufficient to meet the demands of the tourism sector now and for the foreseeable future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27738/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The most recent statistics for January to October 2013 show hotel capacity unchanged compared to the same period in 2012 but occupancy rates up one percentage point to 64%. Occupancy rates for other forms of accommodation were lower, with the next highest being guesthouses at 53% in the period January to October 2013.

Occupancy rates for hotels are higher in Dublin and have improved considerably over the last couple of years. Although hotels in Dublin remain good value compared to other West European city destinations, in order to maintain the competitiveness of the sector there would appear to be scope for investment in hotels and other tourist accommodation in Dublin, particularly in the city centre where demand is highest.

These statistics would indicate, therefore, that notwithstanding the potential issues with hotels in Dublin, the country as a whole has sufficient stock of tourist accommodation to meet the

needs of the industry.

I am not aware of any issues with regard to the availability of restaurants, however, I should point out that they are not required to register with Fáilte Ireland. Given that the level of investment required to enter the market is of an order of magnitude less than that for hotels, I am confident that the market can respond sufficiently quickly to any changes in demand.

Questions Nos. 237 and 238 answered with Question No. 231.

Sports Capital Programme Expenditure

239. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to encourage various local sporting organisations by way of grant aid through the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27741/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I was delighted to be able to launch the 2014 round of the Sports Capital Programme earlier this year. €40 million is available for allocation. The 2,036 applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Every application will be assessed by one official and reviewed by another. Given the number of applications received and the detail contained therein, this process takes a number of months to complete. I hope to announce allocations in the next number of weeks.

Tourism Promotion

240. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which this country is marketed abroad as a venue for business tourism with particular reference to the hosting of international conferences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27742/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Tourism Ireland is the agency responsible for the overseas marketing of the island of Ireland as a tourist destination. In co-operation with Fáilte Ireland, the agency actively promotes Ireland as a venue for business tourism through direct marketing, familiarisation visits for decision makers in the meetings, incentives and conferences sectors, network events and through dedicated business tourism exhibitions such as IMEX. Together with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the agencies also operate the website <http://www.meetinireland.com/Home> which promotes the island as a leading destination for conferences and meetings. It also sets out the supports available to those seeking to bring business tourism events to Ireland including the conference ambassador programme.

I have asked the agencies to provide the Deputy with additional information. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Questions Nos. 241 and 242 answered with Question No. 229.

Road Network

243. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans

to develop the road network over the next ten years; the projects that will receive priority funding in this time; the preparatory work being done to ensure projects will be ready when funding becomes available again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27420/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

The Government's Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2015-2017 and Capital Review 2015-2019 have commenced. The Current and Capital Reviews will consider new ways of achieving Government objectives in the current tight fiscal climate, including the extent to which funding will be available for the maintenance and development of the road network. I cannot say at this point what the outcome of the Comprehensive Review and of the Capital Review process will be.

Adoption Records Provision

244. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the procedure that adopted children have to go through to gain access to their adoption file; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27760/14]

245. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of information an adopted person is entitled to regarding their birth parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27761/14]

246. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the rights an adopted person has to gain access to the health history of their birth parents; his plans to make changes in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27762/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 to 246, inclusive, together.

Any person seeking information on an adoption should contact the Adoption Authority of Ireland or the Child and Family Agency Adoption Services who will assist in directing them to the personnel dealing with their particular records. Information and tracing enquiries are normally dealt with by the organisation that arranged the original adoption placement. If the adoption agency has closed, the Child and Family Agency Adoption Information and Tracing Service, or the agency that now holds the placement records, will deal with the enquiry.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Child and Family Agency and the relevant adoption agency hold records on each individual adoption order granted under the Adoption Act 1952. The records retained vary but may include basic legal documentation in relation to the adoption, such as application forms, birth certificates for children and adoptive parents, marriage certifi-

cates, and consent documentation. The agency records may contain additional information but this can vary considerably.

Non identifying information regarding the birth parent will generally be provided to an adopted person. This would include whatever background medical information is on file. However, the medical and social information on record may be very limited and it may be necessary to attempt to contact the birth parents should updated medical information be required. What information can or cannot be deemed to be identifying or non-identifying can only be determined on a case by case basis taking account of the individual circumstances involved.

My Department is continuing work on the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill and I hope to be in a position to seek Government approval to publish the Heads of the Bill as soon as possible. While I am anxious to improve the legal basis for access to adoption records, proposals to Government have to reflect the constraints on the Legislature in providing such access if they are not to fall foul of Constitutional challenge. The Office of the Attorney General has provided comprehensive legal advice to the Department that has assisted in identifying the Constitutional parameters within which the Heads of the Bill have to be drafted.

It is intended to proceed to finalise legislative proposals and I will bring proposals to the Government as soon as possible. Subsequent consideration by the Oireachtas Health and Children Committee will allow the issues to be carefully teased out and the views of different interested parties on these important and sensitive matters to be fully considered.

Adoption Data

247. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to ensure that the identities of adopted persons whose births were not registered are re-established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27764/14]

248. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he has concerns that adoptions were allowed to take place in the past without ensuring that a birth certificate was available to ensure that the child's birth had been registered; if any investigations have taken place or if there has been any prosecutions regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27765/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 247 and 248 together.

The Adoption Act 1952 provided a legal basis for adoption in Ireland and for the establishment of the Adoption Board. This brought order to what had been the system of ad-hoc arrangements in lieu of formal adoption procedures up to this point. All adoptions, which the Irish state has been involved in since 1952 have been carried out in line with this and subsequent adoption legislation.

I am also aware that some arrangements put in place in earlier decades were not within the provisions of the adoption legislation leaving people assuming they were adopted when they in fact were not. There were also births which were the subject of illegal registrations. The issue of illegal registrations of births are a matter for the General Registration Office which is the responsibility of the Department of Social Protection however the Adoption Authority of Ireland may also be able to provide assistance in this regard. However historic private arrangements for obvious reasons and due to social factors of the era, operated in conditions of great secrecy and there were rarely any contemporary written records of these events.

Records in relation to adoptions as well as illegal birth registrations are currently held by a number of agencies, including the HSE, the Adoption Authority of Ireland and also by private adoption agencies, maternity hospitals, private individuals and other sources. Information held by the Adoption Authority is primarily in relation to adoptions which took place since the Adoption Act 1952. If no adoption took place the Authority would not have an adoption file. Where no adoption took place, if records exist they may be held by a number of sources including hospitals, GPs, Mother and Baby Homes, religious orders and other sources.

The National Adoption Contact Register which is operated by the Adoption Authority was established in 2005 to assist adopted people and their natural families to make contact with each other, exchange information or state their contact preferences. When the former Adoption Board launched the National Adoption Contact Preference Register in 2005, provision was made for persons, who were party to the illegal registration of a child, to register an interest in the Register for possible future contact with another party sometime in the future. Fundamental to the success of the Register is that any persons with information in this regard contact the Information and Tracing Unit of the Adoption Authority.