

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Tax Code

10. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his views that the long-term global trend is undeniably toward the progressive elimination of the ability of large multinationals to avoid corporation tax through complex arrangements; his further views that Ireland's vital strategic interest lies in Government preparing a plan to ensure the retention of multinational employers as the favourable tax regime may be eroded by the actions of other states; his long-term strategy in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37071/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The ability of some multinationals to lower the amount of corporation tax they pay world-wide using international structures is an issue that has attracted a lot of public and media attention over the past 24 months.

The G20 have acknowledged that this is a global challenge that requires global action, and this is happening through the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting ('BEPS') project. Ireland is actively engaged in this process and it is anticipated that BEPS will result in changes being made to the international taxation rulebook which countries rely on for international trade.

At the same time, countries are increasingly competing for mobile foreign direct investment ('FDI'). The competitiveness of Ireland's overall corporate tax regime is important in that regard, and as I said in my Budget speech last October, Ireland will play fair, as we have always done, but play to win.

Last year I published a new International Tax Strategy statement in the Budget which sets out Ireland's objectives and commitments in relation to these issues. In it, I was clear that the best way to address the issue of aggressive tax planning across borders is for countries to work together at an international level. This is particularly important as we need to ensure a level playing field among countries, in order for Ireland to compete fairly.

As I said in the Dáil last week, I remain firmly of the view that the changes that are coming internationally present many opportunities for Ireland as a competitive location for FDI.

For example, one of the key concepts of BEPS is the better alignment of substance with taxing rights. The alignment of substance with a competitive rate of tax has been the cornerstone of our corporation tax policy since the 1950s so I believe that any change that may result from this process will lead to additional opportunities for Ireland. Ireland has not been and will never will be a brass-plate location. We only have and want real substantive FDI, the kind that brings

real jobs and investment into Ireland. This will not change in the post-BEPS environment.

At 12.5%, Ireland has the most competitive headline corporate tax rate in the OECD, which is applied to a broad base. Corporate tax rates are a matter of national sovereignty. This Government is committed to maintaining it.

Ireland's offering of a competitive corporate tax rate, the availability of skills, and a reputation for being business friendly is a huge advantage that other countries will struggle to match. As international tax loopholes progressively get closed down, our low general corporation tax rate will become even more attractive.

Indeed as we continue to improve our offering for knowledge based investment, R&D and intellectual property, I believe over the coming years we can continue to grow our share of FDI-related investment.

NAMA Social Housing Expenditure

11. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in view of the need for social housing and the changed property market, if he will change the mandate of the National Asset Management Agency strategy. [37048/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 10 of the NAMA Act outlines clearly the primary objective that the legislature set for NAMA, namely that it achieves the best financial return for the State from the assets entrusted to it. NAMA is making very significant progress by reference to this objective. In my recent section 227 Review of NAMA, which the Deputy should be aware of, the NAMA Board have announced renewed debt redemption targets. By the end of this year, NAMA will have redeemed 50% of its senior debt, two years ahead of schedule, and expects to have redeemed 80% of its senior debt by the end of 2016 assuming that market conditions remain strong. This progress is extremely important in ensuring that Irish taxpayers face no further losses from the banking and property market crash. It is also extremely important in terms of generating confidence at home and abroad in Ireland's economic recovery. In their recent decisions to upgrade Ireland's sovereign credit rating, both Standard and Poor's and Moody's highlighted the faster rate at which NAMA is paying down its debt and reducing Ireland's contingent liability. NAMA is clearly achieving the mandate set for it by the Oireachtas and I do not propose any course of action that could impact on its ability to complete this important work on behalf of Irish taxpayers.

It is not part of NAMA's statutory remit to supply social housing. Nonetheless, and consistent with its commercial objectives, NAMA is making a very significant contribution in facilitating the delivery of social housing through the Housing Agency to local authorities and approved housing bodies. It has made 5,455 houses and apartments available to local authorities and approved housing bodies for social housing. These 5,455 units constitute one third of the completed housing stock held in Ireland by NAMA's debtors and receivers and almost all of NAMA's unoccupied housing stock. NAMA has also invested over €20m to date in finishing, refurbishing and fitting out these homes for delivery as social housing where local authorities have confirmed demand.

NAMA has no role in determining the take-up of properties that it has made available for social housing as this is a matter for local authorities. However, NAMA has introduced a number of initiatives to streamline the delivery of homes for which demand has been confirmed. This includes the establishment of a special purpose vehicle, National Asset Residential Property Services Ltd. (NARPS), to expedite the delivery of housing. Through NARPS, NAMA ac-

quires houses and apartments from debtors and receivers and directly leases them to approved housing bodies under long-term leasing arrangements - reducing the initial capital outlay required from the approved housing bodies. In conjunction with the establishment of NARPS, NAMA worked with the housing bodies and introduced standardised leasing terms to further streamline the process. Both these initiatives are working extremely well.

Of the 5,455 properties made available by NAMA, local authorities have confirmed demand for just over 2,000 units. NAMA expects that it will exceed the target of delivering 1,000 of these homes for social housing by the end of 2014 with the remainder being delivered over the following 12-18 months.

NAMA has also signalled its intention to provide future Part V housing on NAMA-funded residential developments through its social housing SPV, National Asset Residential Property Services Ltd. (NARPS). This is a very important initiative, which will mean that NAMA will bear the upfront capital cost of delivering Part V housing on estates for which it funds development and that such housing will be delivered on-site fully in accordance with Government policy in this area.

As the Deputy is aware, NAMA has stated that it will fund the delivery of some 4,500 new homes in the Dublin area over the period to end-2016. Furthermore, sites held by its debtors and receivers could provide a further 18,000 new homes in the Dublin area and significant additional housing in the other main urban centres in the period beyond 2016. These numbers highlight the substantial contribution that NAMA could make, directly and indirectly, to the delivery of housing stock generally and as part of that, the delivery of social housing through Part V over the coming years.

I am satisfied therefore that, in the context of its overriding commercial mandate, NAMA is doing all that it can to facilitate the supply of social housing and I do not propose to make any changes to its mandate. The statutory clarity given to NAMA by the Oireachtas in 2009 has been very important in guiding the Agency's work and progress to date and I am satisfied that the clarity provided by the fact that its mandate is primarily a commercial mandate has been an important factor in its success.

Budget 2015

12. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the updated figures he is using for budget 2015, regarding changes since the April stability programme update, SPU, to include, projected general Government deficit for 2014, SPU at €8 billion, carry forward into 2015 from previous budgetary measures, net or gross changes to the 2015 general Government deficit if there were no changes brought in by budget 2015, that is SPU has approximately €1.5 billion net and the constituent parts of these changes, that is savings due to early IMF loan repayments, revenue take revised upwards, social welfare payments revised downwards and so on. [37068/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Stability Programme Update published in April forecast a deficit of 4.8% of GDP for this year and 2.9% for 2015 underpinned by a consolidation package of €2.0bn. However, the Deputy should be aware that there have been a number of important changes since April, most notably the performance of taxes and impact of the ESA2010 statistical changes introduced by Europe.

In relation to taxes, cumulative tax revenue was up some €971m or 4.1% on profile by the end of August. This coupled with continued expenditure restraint means that we will overper-

form the 4.8% of GDP forecast by a comfortable margin. The next official forecast of the 2014 deficit will be contained in the White Paper on Receipts and Expenditures which will be published on midnight, Friday 10 October. This will also incorporate the no-policy change scenario for 2015 as sought by the Deputy.

A considerable part of the overperformance of taxes in 2014 will have a positive base effect going into 2015. Furthermore, the introduction of the ESA 2010 European statistical standards has led to the upward revision to the level of GDP in Ireland going back over a number of years. These were first presented by the CSO in July 2014 and Budget 2015 will be the first publication to be based on the new standard.

Overall GDP in 2013 was revised up by €10.7bn or 6.5 per cent by the CSO, from €164.1bn to €174.8bn. The bulk of the upward revisions (€7.0bn) relates the inclusion of research and development (R&D) as capital formation. However, other revisions mainly relating to revised estimates of exports and the inclusion of illicit activity have added about €3.7 bn. These revisions have had a small positive impact on the growth rates in previous years.

In terms of carry forward to be contained in the forthcoming Budget, it is presently estimated that there will be a very limited negative revenue carryover into 2015 as a result of Budget 2014 measures. It should also be noted that the pension levy of 0.6% is not included in the budgetary arithmetic for 2015.

With regard to the proposed early repayment of IMF loans, the proposal is to make an early repayment of a portion of those loans and final agreement on this is subject to the necessary national approval procedures of EU Member States. Annual savings achieved on interest expenditure due to any early repayment will depend market conditions at the time of any such repayments, however the cash savings achieved over the maturity of the loans are expected to be in the region of €1.5 billion.

Mortgage Arrears Rate

13. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the very high level of arrears in the sub-prime mortgage sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37064/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has advised that there is no such regulated category as ‘sub-prime’ lender but that phrase is sometimes used to refer to some non-deposit taking ‘retail credit firms’. Retail credit firms are a regulated category of entities which are authorised to provide credit (in the form of cash loans) directly to individuals. Some firms authorised in this category are mortgage lenders. Retail credit firms have been subject to regulation by the Central Bank since 1 February 2008. A register of all Retail Credit Firms is available on the Central Bank website.

The latest published Central Bank mortgage arrears and restructures statistics are to end June 2014 and show overall arrears and arrears greater than 90 days fell for the fourth and third consecutive quarter respectively. At end-June 2014, there were 762,575 private residential mortgage accounts for principal dwellings held in the State, with some 90,343 principal dwelling houses in arrears of greater than 90 days, representing a decline in the greater than 90 days arrears category of 3 per cent over the quarter. I am informed by the Central Bank that, at end-June 2014, six of these retail credit firms had a total of 17,986 principal dwelling house mortgage accounts of which 5,047 were classified as restructured.

The Central Bank has informed me that the same consumer protection framework applies to retail credit lenders as to other regulated lenders including the Consumer Protection Code and

the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears. The CCMA sets out requirements for all mortgage lenders, including retail credit firms, dealing with borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears on a mortgage loan which is secured by their primary residence. It provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers struggling to keep up mortgage repayments are treated in a fair and transparent manner by their lender and that long term resolution is sought by lenders with each of their borrowers. The Central Bank has advised that retail credit firms were also included in the scope of the Central Bank's recent review of the 'Implementation of the Revised CCMA' by mortgage lenders, the purpose of which was to ensure that mortgage lenders achieved full implementation of the requirements of the revised CCMA by end December 2013.

The Central Bank continues to engage with all mortgage lenders, including retail credit firms, in relation to lenders' mortgage arrears resolution strategies and approaches to dealing with borrowers in or facing arrears. Early and effective engagement between borrowers and lenders is key to resolving cases of mortgage difficulty. Where there is effective and meaningful engagement regarding a mortgage difficulty, an increasing number of durable long term mortgage restructures is being put in place.

Property Taxation Application

14. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the logic of a home owner with pyrite having to spend thousands of euro to have a test conducted to prove the presence of pyrite in a home to claim an exemption from the property tax, which would not even cover the cost of the test; and his views regarding the need to have the statutory instrument amended accordingly so that the spirit of the legislation may be properly accommodated and home owners with pyrite may be exempted from the local property tax as intended. [37016/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Pyrite Panel appointed by the Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government recommended that consideration be given to providing an exemption from LPT where damage from pyritic heave had been proven by testing in accordance with a National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) standard capable of determining if there was reactive pyrite in the sub-floor hard core materials, and if it had caused pyritic heave. I.S. 398 titled "Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol" was published on 29 January 2013 by the NSAI in response to the Panel's recommendation.

Accordingly, section 10A of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that an exemption from the charge to Local Property Tax (LPT) will apply for a temporary period of at least three consecutive years for residential properties that have been certified under the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Pyrite Exemption) Regulations 2013 made by the Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government as having "significant pyritic damage". The Regulations set out the methodology for the assessment of dwellings to establish significant pyritic damage. These Regulations require that homeowners demonstrate significant pyritic damage in accordance with the NSAI standard I.S. 398.

To be eligible for an exemption from LPT, a liable person must

- have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 or a Damage Condition Rating of 1 with progression, established on foot of a Building Condition Assessment ("BCA") carried out by a competent person in accordance with the NSAI standard, and
- have a sub-floor hard core material classified by the appropriate competent person(s), as susceptible to significant or limited expansion, established on foot of testing the sub-floor hard

core material.

The purpose of the Building Condition Assessment is to demonstrate damage and to inform whether sampling and testing of the sub-floor hardcore of the residential property should be undertaken in order to confirm that such damage arises from pyrite. The Building Condition Assessment does not involve any invasive internal or external inspections to a residential property and, on its own, cannot be used to state conclusively that reactive pyrite is present in the sub-floor hardcore of the property.

Officials of my Department, with officials of the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government, have been examining the alternatives other than testing that may be available in order to confirm entitlement to a Local Property Tax exemption. I expect to make a decision in the matter shortly that will be consistent with the original objectives of the legislation and the report of the Pyrite Panel and I will communicate my decision to the Deputy immediately it is made. I thank her for bringing this matter to attention.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council Issues

15. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance when the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council last met and the schedule of upcoming meetings. [35725/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council was established on a statutory basis on the 31 December 2012 under the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012.

The provisions of the Act took into account the common principles proposed by the European Commission concerning the role and independence of institutions responsible at national level for monitoring observance of the rules as set out in Article 3.1 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union or the Fiscal Compact, as it is more commonly known.

In light of these, Section 8(1) of the Act stipulates that the Fiscal Council shall be independent in the performance of its functions. Paragraph 16 of the Schedule to the Act provides that the Council may regulate its own procedures.

Accordingly, the Council does not inform me of when it has held meetings or its schedule for future meetings. I can inform the Deputy that the Council's website, www.fiscalcouncil.ie, does provide information regarding the dates of meetings it has held.

However, I have asked my officials to pass your request directly to the Council.

Insurance Industry Regulation

16. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the length of time customers at Setanta Insurance will have to wait to have their claims processed; and the legislative or regulatory measures he is proposing to prevent a repeat of the Setanta situation. [37044/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): With regard to Setanta, you will appreciate that a liquidation of an insurance company is a legally complex and time consuming process. In general terms, under the Statute of Limitations, claimants are given two years following an accident to make an initial claim. However, it could take several years for a particular case to be finalised. Setanta is a Maltese incorporated company and, therefore, the Setanta

liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law. The Setanta Liquidator is currently examining a range of factors in order to estimate the cost of claims and the extent to which claims can be met in the Setanta liquidation. The Liquidator has advised that settlements can only be paid out after all of the company's liabilities are quantified, including claims.

The Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF) provides for payments to meet the liabilities of insolvent insurers in certain cases where it is unlikely that claims can be met otherwise than from the ICF. Under the Insurance Act 1964 claims by bodies corporate or unincorporated bodies are not covered by the ICF, except where there is a liability to or by an individual. In addition, all ICF payments are subject to a limit of 65% of the amount due or €825,000, whichever is the lesser. Management and administration of the ICF is under the control of the President of the High Court acting through the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. The Accountant of the Courts of Justice is currently engaging with both the Setanta Liquidator and his legal advisors to put in place an appropriate mechanism to commence making applications to the High Court in accordance with the Insurance Act 1964. I understand that at the moment the Accountant is not in a position to put a timeline on when the first applications will be made. Procedures for processing claims and the timing of payments, including the question of advance payments from the ICF, is a matter for the President of the High Court.

The day to day responsibility for the supervision of Irish authorised financial institutions is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland which is statutorily independent in the exercise of its regulatory and supervisory functions. However, since Setanta is a Maltese incorporated company, under EU passporting rules, its financial position is not supervised by the Central Bank. However the Bank is responsible for supervising for conduct of business rules. Furthermore, EEA insurance regulators are members of the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority, EIOPA, and are required to comply with the general protocol relating to the collaboration of the insurance supervisory authorities of the member states of the European Union. This general protocol statement was issued in 2008 and is under review by EIOPA.

The current legal and regulatory framework for the provision of insurance in the European Economic Area, and the supervision of that activity, is prescribed by European Union Law in the Life and Non-Life Insurance Directives. Since the relevant legislation is EU determined, there may be limits as to what can be done in the short-term. The matter has, however, been raised with the European Commission and it has indicated that it will also review whether any issues raised relating to the regulatory and legislative framework require action. It is too early as yet to consider whether legislative measures.

Following negotiations that were completed at European level in November, 2013, a new regime known as Solvency II will commence on 1 January 2016. This will strengthen the EU regulatory framework. The Solvency II EU Directive sets out new, stronger EU-wide requirements on capital adequacy and risk management for insurers with the key aim of increasing policyholder protection. The new regime will also ensure greater cooperation between supervisors.

With regard to domestic legislation, my officials are taking note of how the ICF framework is responding to current requirements. My Department and the Central Bank will in due course be reviewing the overall circumstances relating to Setanta and report to me on what lessons can be learned and how the framework can be strengthened.

Fiscal Policy

17. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he

remains satisfied that the fiscal and economic strategy to date continues to meet budgetary and economic requirements and targets in line with best economic practice; if the progress to date indicates continued economic recovery for the future; the degree to which specific issues have been identified as being fundamental to continued economic and social progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37049/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Following successful implementation of the EU-IMF programme, the Irish economy is emerging from the crisis and there are clear signs that economic recovery is underway.

First estimates of economic activity for the second quarter of this year were very strong and were well ahead of consensus expectations with GDP growing by 1.5 per cent over the quarter and by 7.7 per cent year-on-year. Taken in conjunction with first quarter data, GDP grew by 5.8 per cent in the first half of this year. The increase in economic activity is broadly-based with both domestic sectors and exporting sectors performing strongly.

Recovery is perhaps most clearly evident in the labour market with employment increasing in each of the last seven quarters representing an increase of over 70,000 jobs since the low-point in mid-2012. In line with this, the standardised unemployment rate stood at 11.2 per cent in August, having fallen from a peak of 15.1 per cent in 2012.

Significant progress has been made in addressing the underlying problems of the public finances. The policy measures implemented by the Government have resulted in a decline in the deficit. This decline has been gradual and in a phased manner, consistent with the dual needs of supporting economic activity as well as repairing the public finances. All of the interim deficit ceilings that were set have been met and Ireland is firmly on track to achieve a deficit of below 3 per cent in 2015. This has been important in restoring Ireland's credibility. Thereafter, fiscal policy will be set in line with the requirement to move towards Ireland's medium-term budgetary objective, which is for a balanced budget in structural terms. In addition, the debt-to-GDP ratio is estimated to have peaked and is now on a firm downward trajectory.

The Government remains focused on maintaining the reform momentum to achieve the goals of creating more jobs to enhance living standards and ultimately to achieve full employment. The Government will work to ensure that any obstacles to achieving this are removed. While the Government recognises that further improvements in competitiveness are needed, all the recent data show that we are moving in the right direction.

Tax Agreements

18. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the double taxation agreement with the USA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35666/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The double taxation agreement between Ireland and the United States was signed in 1997 and entered into force in 1998. The treaty is working well and currently there are no plans to amend it.

Financial Services Sector

19. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the significant fall in Dublin's standing as a financial services centre in the recent Global Financial Centres Index; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37062/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the Global Financial Centres Index 15. It is the case that Dublin has decreased in its ranking compared to the 2014 survey.

The change in the ratings is not an issue unique to Dublin, 23 of the 27 centres in Europe declined in the rankings including Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Madrid, Lisbon and Rome. However, in the survey Dublin continues to be ranked in the top 20 European centres.

Of course this is not the only evaluation of Ireland's ability to attract and retain business activity. Forbes named Ireland "the best place in the world to do business"; the IMD competitiveness yearbook ranked Ireland 1st in the world for the availability of skilled people and the flexibility of the workforce.

The financial services industry continues to attract projects and create employment in Ireland. Between 2009 and 2012 6,000 net new jobs were created within the industry with strong growth in fund administration, insurance, aircraft leasing and other linked technology based companies. According to a FSI survey in April this year, the International Financial Services sector currently employs approximately 35,700 people including some 10,000 people outside Dublin.

The Government had already recognised the need to re-consider the existing strategy for international financial services. Minister Simon Harris has been tasked with promoting and developing international financial services and is the first time a Minister has been given such responsibility in twenty years. Minister Harris recently announced that he intends to revise the strategy for the international financial services sector with the aim of completing the new strategy in early 2015.

Banks Recapitalisation

20. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when he will apply for a retroactive recapitalisation of the Irish banking sector through the European Stability Mechanism, ESM. [37046/14]

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, the ESM, could recapitalize banks directly.

On 10 June 2014 the euro area Member States reached a preliminary agreement on the operational framework for the ESM's Direct Recapitalisation Instrument (DRI). This includes a specific provision in relation to the retroactive application of the instrument. 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.

What is now required is 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. The aim is to have this process completed by early November this year, subject to completion of national approval procedures. For Ireland the European Stability Mechanism (Amendment) Bill 2014 which was published last week will fulfil this purpose. The Board of Governors' decision would allow the ESM DRI to come into effect once the Single Supervisory Mechanism is in place and operational which is expected to be on 4 November this year.

In relation to retrospective recapitalisation, the draft guideline states that the potential retroactive application of the instrument should be decided on a case-by-case basis and by mutual agreement. As I have stated previously, it will not be possible to make a formal application to the ESM for retrospective recapitalisation before the Instrument is in place as expected in November. It would therefore be premature to make any submission in advance of that.

IBRC Loans

21. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the treatment of businesses which had loans at the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation during the liquidation process regarding their right to know who has bought their loan and the unregulated nature of some of the purchasers of loan books. [37215/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Special Liquidators that it is policy to notify all commercial borrowers whose loans are sold as part of the liquidation of IBRC of the sale of their loan and the identity of the purchaser of that loan.

In addition, the Special Liquidators also require purchasers to send separate written notifications to borrowers, such notifications to include the identity of the purchaser and contact details should borrowers have any queries in relation to the transfer. This process ensures the borrowers know who has purchased their loans and who to contact should borrowers have any additional questions in relation to either their loan(s) or the purchaser.

The relevant code of conduct that can apply to certain business borrower lender relationships is the Code of Conduct for Business Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises (SME Code). The application of the SME Code varies depending on whether the relevant purchasing entity of the commercial loans is a regulated entity or an unregulated entity. If the purchasing entity is a regulated entity, it is required to comply with the SME Code. If the purchasing entity is not a regulated entity, it is not required to comply with the SME Code.

In terms of context, unlike consumer lending, business lending is not an activity which, in and of itself, must be undertaken by a regulated entity i.e. an unregulated entity could be established for the sole purpose of lending to SMEs and this would not require authorisation, and would not be subject to any legislation or codes.

It is also important to note that the sale of these loans does not change the terms and conditions of the loan agreement in any way. Irrespective of who acquires the loan(s) they will be required to honour the legal terms and conditions of the existing loan agreement(s).

Pensions Levy

22. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Finance the consideration given to removing the pension levy in the upcoming budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37054/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The original 0.6% stamp duty levy on pension fund assets will end this year while the additional 0.15% levy is legislated to apply for this year and 2015.

Preparations for Budget 2015 and the consequent Finance Bill are ongoing. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on what changes, if any, are being considered in the pension

fund levy or any other tax measure.

Financial Services Regulation

23. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his views in relation to the input into Europe-wide standards of financial regulation in order to ensure that there is no repeat of the economic crisis of 2007-2008 and the subsequent bailouts. [37017/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A comprehensive overhaul of the regulatory framework in the financial sector has been pursued at EU level since the financial crisis. Through the introduction of various initiatives, the stability and resilience of the financial sector has been strengthened and restored to a position where it better serves the economies and people of Europe. We have played a crucial role in driving that reform agenda, none more so than during our Presidency in 2013.

A series of measures have been introduced to reduce the risks across the financial system and to minimise the adverse effects of future financial crises. The Deposit Guarantee Scheme Directive (DGSD) significantly enhances depositors' confidence by introducing faster pay-out and more credible funding of the various Deposit Guarantee Schemes. Agreement was reached during our presidency on the Capital Requirements Directive and Regulation which increases the level and quality of bank capital thereby improving banks' capacity to absorb losses. The package requires banks to build additional capital buffers in good times that can be used in periods of stress. The Directive for Bank Recovery and Resolution (BRRD) is geared at reducing the impact of bank failures on the economy and to help insure that the costs of future failures are not borne by taxpayers. It provides for a more orderly resolution of EU banks thereby minimising the risk of future state interventions to maintain financial stability.

Measures have also been introduced to address weaknesses in the institutional structures. In this regard, three new European Supervisory Authorities and the European Systemic Risk Board were established in 2011 to improve cross-border cooperation and to ensure consistent enforcement of rules and systemic oversight. The creation of the European System of Financial Supervisors (ESFS) and in particular the three European supervisory authorities, the European Banking Authority (EBA), the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), and the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA), ensure a single regulatory framework and its uniform application across the EU. The Single Rulebook for all EU member states will mean a common set of rules on supervision, deposit insurance and resolution. Building on the single rulebook, the first pillar of banking union is the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) which transfers key supervisory tasks for significant banks in the euro area to the European Central Bank. The second pillar of banking union, the Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM), provides for an integrated and effective resolution process for all banks in participating member states including Ireland.

Measures have also been brought forward aimed at improving the stability and efficiency of the single market in financial services. The Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID) and the Markets in Financial Instruments Regulation (MiFIR) aim to strengthen the protection of investors by making financial markets more efficient, resilient and transparent. The new framework will also increase the supervisory powers of regulators and provide clear operating rules for all trading activities. The European Markets Infrastructure Regulation (EMIR) provides for more stability, transparency and efficiency in derivatives markets regulation. The funds sector is being overhauled by the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive (AIFMD) and the Money Market Funds Regulation (MMF). The AIFMD provides Europe-wide regulation for the management of collective investment schemes aimed at professional or qualified inves-

tors while the MMF proposal provides for greater regulation of shadow banking thereby safeguarding the integrity of the internal market by addressing the liquidity and stability of money market funds.

In relation to insurance regulation, the Solvency II proposal, coupled with Omnibus II, sets out stronger EU-wide requirements on capital adequacy and risk management for insurers with the key aim of increasing policyholder protection. This new risk-based system for the regulation and supervision of European insurance and reinsurance undertakings is necessary in order to ensure a safe and solid insurance sector that can provide sustainable insurance products and support the real economy through long-term investments and additional stability.

The reform of our statutory code for the financial services sector has been and continues to be driven by the comprehensive set of reforms that have been brought forward at EU level. However, a number of significant domestic legislative reforms have been undertaken towards building a strengthened regulatory framework for the financial services sector which complements the strategically important reforms at EU level.

The Central Bank Reform Act 2010 created a single fully-integrated Central Bank of Ireland with a unitary board, the Central Bank Commission, chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank. The unitary Central Bank structure gives the Commission members a more complete remit over prudential regulation and financial stability issues. In 2011 the new Fitness and Probity regime was rolled out by the Central Bank in accordance with the provisions of the Central Bank Reform Act 2010. The regime provides for new powers to be exercised by the Central Bank to ensure the fitness and probity of nominees to key positions within financial service providers and of key office-holders within those providers.

The Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) Act was also introduced in 2011. It provides the necessary mechanisms to enable the Central Bank to intervene where a credit institution gets into serious difficulty and is in danger of becoming destabilised or otherwise failing.

The Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 enhances the Central Bank's regulatory powers, drawing on the lessons of the recent past. It strengthens the ability of the Central Bank to impose and supervise compliance with regulatory requirements and to undertake timely prudential interventions. The Act also provides the Central Bank with greater access to information and analysis and underpins the credible enforcement of Irish financial services legislation in line with international best practice.

The EU financial regulation reform agenda is continuing to strengthen regulation and supervision to improve the stability and functioning of the financial system for the benefit of the economies and people of the EU. The financial system has changed significantly since the financial crisis and improved in areas of key importance. I and my Department will continue to work with our EU colleagues towards providing for a balanced regulatory framework that is consistent with both long-term growth and job creation and a more focused and proactive financial services sector.

Corporation Tax Regime

24. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the importance he attaches to stability in Ireland's corporation tax regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37063/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The importance of maintaining the standard 12.5% rate of corporation tax to Ireland's international competitive position is fully appre-

ciated by the Government. 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 ('FDI') to Ireland and thereby increasing employment here.

Further, it is clear that the certainty around the rate of Irish corporation tax is one of its biggest strengths, underlying the Government's commitment to the rate. This certainty is important for business here, both domestic and international as companies plan investment decisions over the medium to long-term.

With regard to international tax issues more generally, the ability of some multinationals to lower the amount of corporation tax they pay world-wide using international structures is an issue that has attracted a lot of public and media attention over the past 24 months.

The G20 have acknowledged that this is a global challenge that requires global action, and this is happening through the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting ('BEPS') project.

Ireland is actively engaged in this process and it is anticipated that BEPS will result in changes being made to the international taxation rulebook which countries rely on for international trade. Ireland has always played by these rules and played to win as is evidenced by our successful track record for attracting FDI.

This will not change in the post-BEPS environment, and I believe that the BEPS project will create opportunities for Ireland.

For example, one of the key concepts of BEPS is the better alignment of substance with taxing rights. The alignment of substance with a competitive rate of tax has been the cornerstone of our CT policy since the 1950s so I believe that any change that may result from this process will lead to additional opportunities for Ireland. Ireland has not been and will never will be a brass-plate location. We only have and want real substantive FDI, the kind that brings real jobs and investment into Ireland.

Ireland's offering of a competitive corporate tax rate, the availability of skills, and a reputation for being business friendly is a huge advantage that other countries will struggle to match. As international tax loopholes progressively get closed down, our low general corporation tax rate will become even more attractive.

Indeed as we continue to improve our offering for knowledge based investment, R&D and intellectual property, I believe over the coming years we can continue to grow our share of FDI-related investment.

Budget 2015

25. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a distributional analysis of budget 2015, by income decile, gender and age group, either on budget day, or within two weeks thereafter, in order that Dáil Éireann has that information available to debate the budget before voting on the relevant Bills. [37066/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department produces a large range of documentation to accompany the Budget. This documentation includes tables of distributional analysis at set income levels, of income tax, USC and PRSI changes. These tables also include changes to certain social welfare payments where appropriate. In addition, a number of illustrative cases are developed and published.

The Department of Social Protection usually publishes a social impact assessment (SIA) of the main welfare and tax measures, which estimates the likely distributive effects of welfare and tax policies on household income and social groups. This assessment is based on the tax and welfare micro-simulation model (Switch), developed by the ESRI, and is generally published approximately 4 to 5 months after the Budget. This combined social impact assessment takes time to finalise because of the many technical and policy issues involved. Therefore it is not possible to provide the information sought by the Deputy within the timeframe set out in his question.

Pensions Levy

26. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the additional funds raised from the increased pension fund levy in 2014 and 2015 which, in his Budget Statement, he said were required to make provision for potential State liabilities which may emerge from pre-existing or future pension fund difficulties; the circumstances in which such a call would arise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37060/14]

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 would be abolished from the 31st of December 2014. I did, however, introduce an additional levy on pension funds at 0.15% for 2014 and 2015. I did this to continue to help fund the Jobs Initiative and also to help make provision for potential State liabilities which may emerge from difficulties facing pension funds.

The reduced VAT rate of 9% on tourism and certain other services was one of the very significant and successful measures introduced by the Jobs Initiative. It was due to end in 2013. In my Budget 2014 speech I announced the continuation of the reduced 9% VAT rate. I also announced that the Air Travel Tax is being reduced to zero with effect from 1 April 2014. The 9% VAT rate has helped to create thousands of new jobs as well as protecting existing jobs. Since the Budget announcement about the reduction in the Air Travel Tax, airlines have announced the opening up of new routes resulting in significant increases in passenger numbers with the associated increase in tourism activity and employment.

I also said in my Budget 2014 speech that the additional 0.15% levy for 2014 and 2015 would be used to help make provision for potential State liabilities which may emerge from pre-existing or future pension fund difficulties, although funds from the levy would not be hypothecated or specifically set aside for this purpose. The Government decided that such liabilities will be met by the Exchequer as they arise.

I am advised by the Minister for Social Protection that the drawdown of funds to meet existing or future pension fund difficulties will only arise in the event of the wind up of a defined benefit pension scheme, where the employer is insolvent and there are not sufficient funds in the scheme to meet 50% of the liabilities of the scheme in respect of all scheme members or up to €12,000 of pensioner liabilities.

Credit Unions Restructuring

27. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the liquidation process at a credit union (detail supplied) in County Kildare; and on the future of the building that housed the credit union. [37216/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): On 16 December 2013, Mr Jim Luby of McStay Luby Chartered Accountants was appointed by the High Court as liquidator of Newbridge Credit Union Limited (in liquidation).

I have been informed by the Central Bank that the liquidator is engaging with a potential purchaser of the Newbridge Credit Union Limited premises. All matters in relation to the sale of the premises will be dealt with by the liquidator.

Tax Code

28. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of initiatives he has announced which have not commenced as they are awaiting EU state aid approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37056/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Living City Initiative

The Living City Initiative, announced in Finance Bill 2013, is a pilot project which provides certain tax incentives to make it more attractive for people to live in historic and culturally significant city centre houses. The initiative also offers incentives for retailers and small businesses in those areas. This Initiative is subject to EU State Aid approval and a commencement order. An ex ante cost benefit analysis was conducted in the summer of 2013 and published alongside Budget 2014. An application for EU State Aid approval was submitted in March 2013. It is hoped that this issue will be concluded in the very near future. An independent cost-benefit analysis concluded that the Initiative would create more than 1,000 jobs for each of the 5 years it will be in place. The analysis also concluded that the annual cost would be in the order of €3m per year.

Film Relief

The Film relief scheme has been in place since 1987. Finance Act 2013 introduced new provisions to ensure that Film tax reliefs will accrue to the producers rather than investors and result in tax savings for the Exchequer. Budget 2014 extended the definition of 'eligible individual' to include non-EU talent, in conjunction with the introduction of a withholding tax. It is intended to commence these provisions once EU State Aid approval has been given. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht are progressing this State Aid approval with the EU Commission. Statistics are not available to show the actual number of persons employed in the film industry. However, it is estimated that in 2013 just over 27,000 individual employments (both part-time and full-time) were generated on film productions supported by Section 481 relief.

Tax scheme for the construction or refurbishment of certain aviation services facilities

A scheme of accelerated capital allowances for the construction and refurbishment of certain buildings and structures for use in the maintenance, repair or overhaul of commercial aircraft, and the dismantling of such aircraft for the purposes of salvaging or recycling of parts or materials was announced in Budget 2013 and an application was made to the EU Commission on 18 June 2013.

The Commission formed the view that the scheme in its current form is not compatible with State Aid guidelines. Following on from meetings and discussions with EU officials, a revised application was recently submitted to the Commission, which I hope will lead to a positive result in the near future.

Exemption from Stamp Duty

Exemption from Stamp Duty on the transfer of shares of companies listed on the Enterprise Securities Market of the Irish Stock Exchange, is subject to State Aid approval. The proposed measure aims to encourage entrepreneurs and growing businesses to use public equity markets as a source of funding for growth and the creation of jobs.

CGT Entrepreneur Relief

A capital gains tax relief for entrepreneurs who reinvest the proceeds from the disposal of assets made on or after 1 January 2010 in certain chargeable business assets was announced in Budget 2014 and provided for in Section 45 of Finance (No 2) Act of 2013. Commencement of the legislative provisions is subject to EU state-aid approval. Discussions with the EU Commission about State Aid clearance are ongoing. I hope that these will result in a positive outcome in the near future.

Tax Code

29. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the way capital taxes may be reformed to distinguish between passive and active investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37061/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume from the Deputy's references to capital taxes and investment that his question relates to capital gains tax (CGT).

The rate of CGT is currently 33% and has been increased four times since 2008 when it stood at 20%. These rate increases were necessary to protect the yield from CGT in the context of the rebalancing of the public finances. An increase in the taxation of capital is preferable from the point of view of its impact on the economy as compared to an increase in employment taxes such as income tax.

In common with all taxes, CGT is subject to on-going review and all reliefs and exemptions are carefully considered. In the circumstances in which we have found ourselves in recent years, and as opposed to embedding major long-term changes to the tax system which might prove controversial, divisive or unworkable, the approach (particularly in CGT) has increasingly been to introduce changes which are targeted and which apply for short-term periods to achieve focused outcomes.

For example, a CGT relief was introduced in Budget and Finance Act 2012 to incentivise the purchase of property between 7 December 2011 and the end of 2013 with the intention of stimulating activity in the property market. The incentive was subsequently extended to property purchased to the end of 2014. I stated recently that this relief will not be extended further as it has served its purpose.

The incentive applies to industrial, farmland, commercial and residential (buy-to-let) property (land and buildings) purchased to the end of this year. If the property is held for more than 7 years, the capital gains attributable to those 7 years will be exempt from CGT on a proportionate basis relative to the period of ownership. Property sold within the 7 year period subsequent to purchase will not qualify for relief.

Relief for farm restructuring was introduced in Finance Act 2013 on disposals of farm land for the purpose of farm restructuring or consolidation. The relief applies to a sale, purchase or exchange of agricultural land in the period from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2015 where

Teagasc has certified that a sale and purchase or an exchange of agricultural land was made for farm restructuring purposes.

Section 45 of Finance (No 2) Act of 2013 provides for a CGT relief for entrepreneurs who reinvest the proceeds from the disposal of assets made on or after 1 January 2010 in certain chargeable business assets. Commencement of the legislative provisions is subject to EU state-aid approval. Discussions with the EU Commission about State Aid clearance are ongoing. I hope that these will result in a positive outcome in the near future. Notwithstanding that the legislative provisions have yet to be commenced, the CGT relief will only apply, among other conditions, where new chargeable business assets acquired after 1 January 2014 and up to end- December 2018 are disposed of having been held for a minimum period of 3 years after acquisition in that period.

Over the years other reliefs that had been in place for a number of years were reviewed and abolished or restricted. These included roll-over relief and indexation relief. The relevance of these reliefs had to be weighed against what they were achieving, the cost of the reliefs and the opportunities for providing other more relevant relieving measures.

In the context of this year's Budget and Finance Bill process, I will again consider what changes can be made to the CGT regime in order to encourage and facilitate investment in our improving economic environment.

Tax Code

30. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to implement the recent OECD BEPS report, including through legislation. [37047/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is no doubt aware we are almost at the halfway point in the OECD BEPS project. Following on from the seven reports released two weeks ago, another batch of deliverables are due for completion in September 2015, with the remaining BEPS reports expected to be finalised in December 2015. We have welcomed the first set of reports as they are the first milestones in this project. However it is important to recognise that the timetable provides reporting timelines and not implementation deadlines. The BEPS actions will be implemented through a mixture of updates to OECD guidelines/recommendations which countries would have to strongly consider implementing in their domestic law, and updates to bilateral tax treaties, which the OECD plans to amend on a multilateral basis by means of an OECD Multilateral Convention. Of the seven recent deliverables, there are: two final reports (Action 1 Digital Economy and Action 15 - Feasibility of a Multilateral Instrument), one interim report (Action 5 Harmful tax practices) and four reports containing draft recommendations (Actions 2 Hybrid mismatches, 6 Treaty abuse, 8 Transfer pricing intangibles and 13 Transfer pricing documentation). The OECD has acknowledged that the recommendations remain draft in order to fully assess the interaction between all the different BEPS workstreams. Therefore the BEPS project is best seen as an overall package which is still in progress. While there is still significant work to be done in finalising the recommendations, the reports are a big step towards addressing problems in the international tax environment.

Property Taxation Application

31. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the communication he has had with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in relation to simplify-

ing the criteria regarding the way someone can claim an exemption from the local property tax where their home has had a building condition assessment indicating significant damage relating to pyrite, but where no actual test has been conducted. [37015/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Pyrite Panel appointed by the Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government recommended that consideration be given to providing an exemption from LPT where damage from pyritic heave had been proven by testing in accordance with a National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) standard capable of determining if there was reactive pyrite in the sub-floor hard core materials, and if it had caused pyritic heave. I.S. 398 titled “Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol” was published on 29 January 2013 by the NSAI in response to the Panel’s recommendation.

Accordingly, section 10A of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that an exemption from the charge to Local Property Tax (LPT) will apply for a temporary period of at least three consecutive years for residential properties that have been certified under the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Pyrite Exemption) Regulations 2013 made by the Minister for the EC&LG as having “significant pyritic damage”. The Regulations set out the methodology for the assessment of dwellings to establish significant pyritic damage. These Regulations require that homeowners demonstrate significant pyritic damage in accordance with the NSAI standard I.S. 398.

To be eligible for an exemption from LPT, a liable person must

1. have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 or a Damage Condition Rating of 1 with progression, established on foot of a Building Condition Assessment (“BCA”) carried out by a competent person in accordance with the NSAI standard, and
2. have a sub-floor hard core material classified by the appropriate competent person(s), as susceptible to significant or limited expansion, established on foot of testing the sub-floor hard core material.

The purpose of the Building Condition Assessment is to demonstrate damage and to inform whether sampling and testing of the sub-floor hardcore of the residential property should be undertaken in order to confirm that such damage arises from pyrite. The Building Condition Assessment does not involve any invasive internal or external inspections to a residential property and, on its own, cannot be used to state conclusively that reactive pyrite is present in the sub-floor hardcore of the property.

Officials of my Department, with officials of the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government, have been examining the alternatives other than testing that may be available in order to confirm entitlement to a Local Property Tax exemption. I expect to make a decision in the matter shortly that will be consistent with the original objectives of the legislation and the report of the Pyrite Panel and I will communicate my decision to the Deputy immediately it is made. I thank her for bringing this matter to attention.

IBRC Mortgage Loan Book

32. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an update on the Irish Nationwide Building Society mortgages that were not sold in the initial tranche, and which it was suggested may be bought by the National Asset Management Agency, including if these mortgages have now been sold; if so, to whom; and if not, the current status of the sales process. [37067/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Special Liquidators continue to implement the orderly and efficient wind down of IBRC in accordance with the provisions of the IBRC Act and the instructions issued by the Minister for Finance under the IBRC Act 2013.

As the Deputy is aware, for operational reasons, the loan assets of IBRC were divided into six portfolios: Evergreen, Sand, Rock, Salt, Stone and Pebble.

The Sand portfolio comprised 12,702 Irish originated residential mortgages with a par value of €1.8bn, most of which had transferred from Irish Nationwide Building Society. 64% of the Sand portfolio were sold to two buyers, namely Lone Star and Oaktree Capital Management, L.P.

Under initial instructions from the Minister for Finance, NAMA were obliged to purchase the unsold loan assets at their independent valuations. The Special Liquidators have confirmed that the proceeds raised from the sale of IBRC assets will be sufficient to fully repay the IBRC debt to NAMA (previously the Central Bank of Ireland). Therefore I have instructed the Special Liquidators that NAMA will now not be obliged to purchase the unsold assets as previously outlined.

As a result, the Special Liquidators have devised a further sales process in respect of the unsold residential mortgages (which is referred to as Project Pearl) so as to maximise the return to all remaining creditors of IBRC, including the State. This new sales process is currently underway.

As part of this new sales process, the Special Liquidators corresponded with all remaining residential mortgage holders of IBRC providing them with an opportunity to make written representations on the method of disposal of their loans and the criteria for determining who may bid for loan assets. Consideration has been given to these Borrower representations and the Special Liquidators are in the process of responding to these Borrower representations. Having given due consideration to the representations and the professional advice received, the Special Liquidators have divided the remaining residential mortgages into two tranches and will therefore not be selling any mortgages on an individual basis. The Special Liquidators expect the sales process for Project Pearl to be completed before 31 December 2014.

Living City Initiative

33. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Finance the progress of the living city initiative; the response of the EU regarding the application under state aid rules; if there are figures on the number of properties and locations which have benefited from the scheme; if there are plans to increase the areas eligible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37052/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Officials from my Department have held preliminary discussions with the relevant local authorities to identify the areas of the six cities, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford, which might fall within the scope of the scheme. Each of the local authorities have submitted proposals on the areas which they believe should be included.

My officials have also been in contact with the EU Commission on the application for State Aid approval for the Initiative and this process is expected to be concluded shortly.

I will not be announcing the areas to be designated until this approval has been received and the initiative is to be commenced.

I would expect that I will be in a position to make an announcement in the near future.

It is important to note that I do not see this as a wide-spread Initiative, as it is targeted at those areas which are most in need of attention.

Personal Insolvency Act

34. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the research from a personal insolvency practitioner (details supplied) that shows that more than seven banks lost €5 million by vetoing insolvency deals; his views that banks are prepared to cost themselves millions of euro to PIAs. [37069/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 was a complex piece of legislation that significantly modernised Ireland's insolvency regime. However, as with any such major reform, I have been advised that the Department of Justice and Equality will keep the effectiveness of the legislation under review to ensure that it achieves the objective of providing an efficient way of resolving unsustainable personal debt positions in a way that is as fair as possible for both debtors and creditors. Indeed, there have already been some amendments to the legislation during 2013 which were of a minor nature and primarily operationally focused.

The recent Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) Quarterly Statistics were published in July (http://www.isi.gov.ie/en/ISI/ISI_Statistics_Quarter2.pdf/Files/ISI_Statistics_Quarter2.pdf). In summary, during Quarter 2, 67 Debt Relief Notices (DRN), 30 Debt Settlement Arrangements (DSA), and 27 Personal Insolvency Arrangements (PIA) were approved. The statistical report shows that three out of every four proposals for arrangements (for both DSAs and PIAs) result in acceptances.

In addition, there were 98 bankruptcy adjudications in the second quarter of 2014 following the reduction in the duration of bankruptcy to three years. In the year to the end of the second quarter there has been 164 bankruptcy adjudications compared to 58 in the whole of 2013. The Deputy will also be aware that at his appearance before the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, the Director of the Insolvency Service of Ireland said that monitoring creditor engagement will be a key focus of the ISI.

The ISI established a Debt Solutions Protocol Steering Group earlier this year to develop Protocols for both the Debt Settlement Arrangement (DSA) and Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA). These Protocols can be used by personal insolvency practitioners when making straightforward proposals to creditors for either a DSA or PIA. The DSA protocol was finalised in July 2014 and can be accessed at the following link - http://www.isi.gov.ie/en/ISI/Pages/Protocol_Team. The development of a protocol is in line with best practice in other jurisdictions and does not require amendments to existing legislation. A similar protocol was developed in the UK for their Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA) which is comparable to the Debt Settlement Arrangement here in Ireland. The UK protocol, once it was agreed and adopted apparently resulted in significant acceptance rates by creditors there - exceeding 90%. Work began on a PIA protocol in August with a target date for completion of the end of the year.

While the initial take up of insolvency solutions has been low, the fact that the ISI is now in place has acted as a catalyst to encourage debtors and creditors to reach bilateral deals to address their insolvency. In the absence of bilateral agreements, the new statutory frameworks are a mechanism requiring all relevant creditors to engage with and respond to an insolvency arrangement proposed by a debtor. Of course both debtors and creditors have rights in a finan-

cial contract and these must be respected, but in the event that either a DSA or PIA cannot be agreed, the ultimate resolution option is judicial bankruptcy.

National Debt

35. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated spend on interest on the national debt for the years 2014 to 2018; and if the estimations contained in the stability programme update published in April 2014 will be revised in view of the recent agreement to pay down the IMF portion of the EU-IMF programme of assistance. [36862/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department published the Stability Programme Update (SPU) in April this year which contained fiscal forecasts out to 2018. As general government debt expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product is the standard metric internationally for assessing debt levels, general government interest rather than national debt interest is the more appropriate metric to look at. The SPU general government interest costs are set out in the following table.

€m	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
General government interest	7,966	8,452	8,836	9,251	9,573

Budget 2015 on 14 October will contain updated fiscal forecasts, including interest expenditure. The forecast of interest expenditure will take into account any change in the Exchequer Borrowing Requirement (EBR), repayment profiles and the interest rate environment. It should also be noted that the SPU estimates of general government interest were calculated in accordance with the standards set in the 1995 European System of Accounts (ESA95) while the Budget estimates will be calculated on an ESA 2010 basis that entered into force with effect from the 1st of September this year.

In relation to the proposed early repayment of IMF loans, the proposal is to make an early repayment of a portion of those loans and final agreement on this is subject to the necessary national approval procedures. Annual savings achieved on interest expenditure due to any early repayment will depend market conditions at the time of any such repayments, however the cash savings achieved over the maturity of the loans are expected to be in the region of €1.5 billion.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

36. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to tackle the increasing number of mortgages in long-term arrears. [37045/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank has the power, from both a prudential and consumer protection perspective, to require banks to meaningfully and sustainably address mortgage arrears cases on their books. The Central Bank's Mortgage Arrears Resolution Targets (MART) process, as announced in March 2013, sets time bound and measurable targets for the main banks requiring them to systematically address their arrears book. Under this rolling process, quarterly performance targets have been set to require the banks to propose and put in place durable, long term solutions to address individual cases of mortgages in difficulty where the mortgage is more than 90 days in arrears. In that context, the Deputy will be aware that the Central Bank has now indicated that it expects that 'proposed' solutions be made in respect of 85% of principal dwelling houses (PDH) and buy-to-let (BTL) arrears cases and that 'concluded' solutions be made with 45% of arrears cases

by the end of 2014.

The Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) sets out requirements for mortgage lenders dealing with those borrowers facing or in mortgage arrears. The CCMA provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers struggling to keep up mortgage repayments are treated in a fair and transparent manner by their lender and that long term resolution is sought by lenders with each of their borrowers in genuine mortgage difficulty.

The Central Bank's latest 'Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions Statistics' publication for the end of Quarter 2 2014 (http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/mortgagearrears/Documents/2014q2_ie_mortgage_arrears_statistics.pdf), shows that the number of mortgage accounts for principal dwelling houses (PDH) in arrears, fell for the fourth consecutive quarter and at the end of June 2014, 90,343 (11.8 per cent) primary dwelling mortgage accounts were more than 90 days in arrears, representing a decline of 3% over the quarter.

Separately from Central Bank quarterly reports, a monthly reporting regime on mortgage restructures and arrears for the six main banks covered by the Central Bank's Mortgage Arrears Resolution Targets (MART) has been put in place by my Department. The latest publication, with data to the end of July, shows that the number of PDH mortgage accounts in arrears of greater than 90 days has fallen by over 7,000 accounts when compared to the end of Q1 2014 while the total number of PDH mortgage arrears has fallen by 8,800 accounts in the same period.

The data published by my Department, as well as the Central Bank data, would appear to demonstrate some success by the lenders in addressing the accounts in mortgage arrears as well as measures to prevent borrowers from going into arrears. However, increased engagement in this area by the financial institutions will be necessary to address the situation of those remaining householders facing difficulties in meeting their mortgage commitments.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

37. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the National Asset Management Agency has not made greater progress in supplying social housing to date; the way this can be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37059/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy's premise is incorrect as NAMA has made significant numbers of housing units available through the Housing Agency to local authorities and approved housing bodies. As the Deputy is aware, NAMA was established firstly to acquire property and related loans from five financial institutions so as to remove this systemic risk to the Irish banking system and secondly, to obtain the best achievable financial return to the State from these acquired loans. It is not part of NAMA's statutory remit to supply housing. However, consistent with its overall commercial objectives, NAMA is making a very significant contribution in facilitating the delivery of social housing. It has made 5,455 houses and apartments, one third of the completed housing stock held by its debtors and receivers in Ireland, available to local authorities and approved housing bodies for social housing and has invested over €20m to date in delivering homes for social housing where local authorities have confirmed demand.

The Deputy may not appreciate that NAMA has no role in terms of determining the take-up of properties that it has made available for social housing as this is a matter for local authorities. Of the 5,455 properties made available by NAMA, local authorities have confirmed demand for

just over 2,000. NAMA expects that it will exceed the target of delivering 1,000 of these homes for social housing by the end of the year with the remainder being delivered over the following 12-18 months.

Once demand is confirmed by local authorities through the Housing Agency and contracts have been entered into by local authorities or approved housing bodies, NAMA immediately makes the properties available. This often involves significant investment by NAMA to complete building works and significant work to resolve often complex compliance issues in relation to, amongst other things, planning conditions, regulatory standards and Multi-unit Development requirements. There are no shortcuts in this process. NAMA is facilitating the delivery of homes for individuals and families through this very welcome initiative.

The Deputy may also be aware that NAMA has established a special purpose vehicle, National Asset Residential Property Services Ltd. (NARPS), to expedite the delivery of housing. Through NARPS, NAMA acquires houses and apartments from debtors and receivers and directly leases them to approved housing bodies under long-term leasing arrangements. In conjunction with the establishment of NARPS, NAMA has introduced standardised leasing terms to further streamline the process.

NARPS has proven to be an effective method of delivery and NAMA recently announced its intention to provide future Part V housing on NAMA-funded residential developments through this mechanism. This is a very important initiative, which will mean that NAMA will bear the upfront capital cost of delivering Part V housing on estates that it funds and that such housing will be delivered on site in line with Government policy aimed at ensuring greater integration in housing.

I am confident that NAMA, within the context of its overriding commercial objective, has done everything it can do to facilitate the delivery of social housing to Local Authorities and approved housing bodies through the existing residential stock securing its loans and it has clearly signalled its commitment to doing likewise through its funding for new residential development.

National Debt

38. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the current status of plans to repay Ireland's IMF loans early; when the formal process of repaying loans is likely to begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37058/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, I am proposing to make an early repayment of a portion of Ireland's IMF programme loan. Specifically the proposal is to make an early repayment of up to €18.3 billion of our €22.5 billion IMF loan, which is the portion subject to the highest rate of charge, and to replace it, in a measured way, with less expensive market funding subject to prevailing market conditions.

For this to succeed, a waiver is required of the mandatory proportional early repayment clauses which are included in each of our loan agreements with the EFSF and the EFSM, and with our bilateral lenders, the U.K., Denmark and Sweden.

This proposal was discussed at the meetings of the Eurogroup and ECOFIN Ministers last month. There was broad political support among the Ministers for the proposal. However, this support is subject to necessary national approval procedures including parliamentary approval in some Member States. This includes Sweden, where parliamentary elections have recently taken place.

On 19 September I wrote to the 5 EU lenders, i.e. the Commission for the EFSM, the EFSF,

and the U.K., Sweden and Denmark, to formally request the waiver of the mandatory proportional repayment clauses.

It will not be possible to give a definitive timeline until all the necessary approvals are in place. However, I expect that they will be received in sufficient time to allow the NTMA to start early repayments before the end of this year.

Tax Code

39. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has had any discussions with the Department of Social Protection regarding the introduction of a favourable tax incentive targeted at landlords to take on persons in receipt of rent supplement, for a limited period of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37214/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have had no discussions with the Minister for Social Protection in relation to providing tax relief for landlords who accept tenants in receipt of rent supplement. I have no plans to introduce such a relief.

As you will appreciate, I receive numerous requests for the introduction of new tax reliefs and the extension of existing ones. You will also appreciate that I must be mindful of the public finances and the many demands on the Exchequer. Tax reliefs, no matter how worthwhile in themselves, reduce the tax base and make general reform of the tax system that much more difficult.

Mortgage Interest Rates

40. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the way he plans to address the growing disparity between tracker mortgage rates and the standard variable rate charged by the banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37065/14]

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.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council

41. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the fiscal council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36510/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council was established on a statutory basis on the 31 December 2012 under the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012. The Act sets out the Council's functions, which can only be amended through primary legislation.

In that context, Regulation (EU) 473/2013 introduced a requirement that draft budgets and the stability programme update must be based on macroeconomic forecasts that are produced or endorsed by an independent body. This endorsement function has been set out in an amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012 and has been assigned to the Fiscal Council.

Since its establishment, the Council has published six Fiscal Assessment Reports, all of which can be found on the Fiscal Council's website. I respond to these reports, usually in my next fiscal policy publication. However, given the gap between the last Fiscal Assessment Report in June 2014 and the publication of the Budget in October, I responded to the Council in writing on 22 July 2014. My response can be found on the websites of the Council and my own Department. The establishment of the Council has strengthened the fiscal governance of the country and its reports have widened and deepened the debate on fiscal policy.

The Fiscal Council have also published a number of other papers, including a Pre-Budget paper on 22 September. This laid out the Council's recommendation that, despite the Exchequer returns, the benefits flowing from the switch over to ESA 2010 and the improved economic environment, consolidation of the order of €2 billion should take place in Budget 2015.

The Council maintain their consolidation recommendation for a number of reasons:

- in order to break the boom and bust pattern and show commitment to a new fiscal policy stance;
- to return to sustainable medium-term economic growth and put debt on a strong downward path; and
- to comfortably secure compliance with the 3% general government deficit target.

The Council also recommends against any cuts in the Government's revenue-raising capacity, due to the considerable challenges it feels the Government faces in maintaining tight expenditure control.

I note the views expressed by the Fiscal Council in the update of their fiscal stance, and their suggestions with regard to consolidation in Budget 2015. I agree wholeheartedly with the Council's view that we need to break the pattern of boom and bust economics and said so on many occasions. The Government has implemented a number of measures as part of a new fiscal framework to prevent the cyclical pressures of the past from driving fiscal policy, including multi-annual ministerial expenditure ceilings and greater fiscal transparency.

We are required to deliver a deficit of no more than 2.9% of GDP in 2015, we will do what is needed to achieve this target. It looks likely that we can achieve our target without any further expenditure cuts or tax increases. This Government's track record is there for all to see.

Each year we have continued to either meet or exceeded our deficit targets. The economy has returned to growth and jobs are being created. The objective of the upcoming Budget is both to broaden, deepen and secure this recovery. We will continue to be prudent and take the necessary steps to deliver medium-term growth and put our debt levels on a downward path.

With regard to the longer term outlook, the forthcoming Budget will show a multi-annual path towards a more balanced budgetary position. This timeframe reflects the Government's desire to provide certainty to Irish people over the medium term.

Finally, I agree with the Fiscal Council that taking account of demographic and other challenges, maintaining tight expenditure control will be tough. However, taking tough decisions is the role of Government and something that we have shown a proven track record over recent years. The hard decisions of recent years have paid off and I am confident that we are best placed to drive the recovery forward into the future.

Social Insurance

42. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a matter (details supplied) relating to PRSI benefits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37457/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The dental benefit scheme continues to provide for free annual examinations to qualifying customers who fulfil the PRSI eligibility criteria. The free dental examination has been retained in order to encourage people to continue to attend for check-ups and to ensure that good oral health is maintained.

Any changes to the dental or other treatment benefit schemes would have to be considered in the context of the economic realities of available funding and competing priorities.

Question No. 43 withdrawn.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

44. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in determination of an application for rent allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if all requested documentation has been received; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37422/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client's Rent Supplement claim is awarded and all payments are up to date.

Question No. 45 withdrawn.

Personal Public Service Numbers

46. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the number of PPS numbers issued in each year from 2003 to 2014; the number cancelled in each year; the total number of active PPS numbers currently in issuance; her views on the robustness of the system for issuing PPS numbers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37429/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The PPS Number is the individual's unique reference number for all dealings with Government Departments and public bodies. This covers its use for DSP purposes as well as use by other agencies (in accordance with legislation - Section 262 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005 provides the basis for the allocation, use and sharing of the PPS Number).

Before a PPS Number can be allocated, the person making the application must provide evidence of identity, and demonstrate the reason why s/he requires the allocation of a PPS Number. PPS Numbers are issued by the Department following checks on an individual's identity. The checks vary depending on the type of individual concerned – the Department accepts notification via the General Register Office of births but insists on a face to face interview before issuing a PPS number to a resident of working age. In addition, acceptable evidence of address must be provided. The process of allocating a PPS Number has been expanded to include the capture of a photograph and signature. This is being rolled out to PPS Number allocation centres and will be in place in all PPS Number allocation centres by the end of this year. Photographs captured are compared with other photographs previously captured in order to detect any possible duplicates.

PPS Numbers may be used by persons in their dealings with public bodies that are specified in legislation. I would also like to make the point that possession of a PPS Number, in itself, does not convey any entitlement. While it can make identifying a person easier for both the individual and the agency, checks on identity and meeting the qualifying conditions for any service must be carried out.

It is not possible for me to describe all uses that other agencies have for the PPS Number, but it is worth remarking that my Department uses the number to identify an individual's PRSI contributions while they are working in the State. This means that, even after they have left the State, the number allocated to them remains valid. The PRSI contribution information will be relevant to calculating pension entitlements in other jurisdictions as well as in this one. While there is no current activity on such PPS Numbers, activity is expected in the future as people reach retirement age. Consequently it is not possible to determine the number of "Active PPS Numbers".

PPS Numbers, once allocated, are not cancelled. Should a PPS Number be compromised, that number is put beyond use, but is retained on the Department's records.

Details of the PPS Numbers allocated over the years have already been published and are available on the Department's Website at:

<http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Personal-Public-Service-Number-Statistics-on-Numbers-Issued.aspx>.

Disability Allowance Appeals

47. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a case for disability allowance will be reconsidered in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37430/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for disability allowance (DA) by the person concerned was refused on medical grounds and the person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 23 October 2013. He appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. An appeals officer, having considered all the evidence available in the case, disallowed the appeal and the person in question was notified of the outcome.

It is open to the person in question to make a new application for DA. I am informed that the Department has posted an application form to the person concerned. The new application, once received, will be dealt with as soon as possible.

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will consider introducing protections for deferred members of defined benefit pension schemes being wound up; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37438/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Section 48 of the Pensions Act sets out the manner in which the assets of a defined benefit pension scheme are distributed in the event of the wind up of a pension scheme. These rules prioritise the benefits of pensioner over the benefits of active and deferred scheme members. The priority given to the distribution of assets to deferred scheme members is the same as that given to active scheme members. The Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act 2013 amended the Pensions Act to change the wind up rules. This change deprioritised an element of pensioner benefits in favour of the benefits of active and deferred scheme members. There are no plans to make further changes to section 48 of the Pensions Act at this time.

The manner in which the assets of a pension scheme are distributed is not an issue when a pension scheme is fully funded. The Pensions Authority is working with the trustees of defined benefit pension schemes to ensure that all schemes can secure a sustainable funding position.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

49. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on an application for domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37439/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The only application for domiciliary care allowance on record in respect of the person concerned was received in April 2012. The application was not allowed as it was considered that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for the allowance. A decision letter issued to her on 15 June 2012 advising of this decision.

In the case of an application which is refused the applicant may submit additional information and/or ask for the decision to be reviewed or they may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days. No request for a review was received and there is no record of an appeal having been registered in this case.

Social Welfare Benefits

50. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 75 of 17 September 2014, if her Department is working on the development of guidelines for general practitioners and other medical professionals in relation to the preparation of medical reports which are provided in addition to and in support of applications for social protection payments, including disability allowance, invalidity pension and carer's allowance but where the reports required are supplementary to those required under the medical evidence section of the application forms for the social protection payments

in question. [37453/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): It is the policy of my Department to request medical reports from General Practitioners when customers are applying for social protection illness related schemes, including disability allowance, invalidity pension and carer's allowance. The design of the medical evidence report part of the application forms is undertaken in consultation with the Chief Medical Advisor and the Medical Research team and is designed to gather relevant quality information to assist the Department's medical assessors and decision makers. Medical Reports from General Practitioners are also requested when cases are being reviewed or are on appeal. These reports are also designed to gather relevant quality medical information.

All medical report forms and application forms for the individual illness related schemes are reviewed on a regular basis, including those parts of forms that relate to the provision of medical evidence.

Furthermore, customers, and General Practitioners are asked, if they wish, to include all or as much medical evidence as they may have in support of their case either in relation to an application or a review. This further medical evidence may be diverse and lengthy in nature depending on the individual. Assessment of any additional medical evidence, is made in accordance with the Department's evidence based medical guidelines and protocols.

State Bodies

51. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of her Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from to 2011 to date in 2014. [37495/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Ombudsman (which does not have a Board) and the Social Welfare Tribunal. The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

-	2011	2012	2013	2014
-	Percentage of vacant positions filled by panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service	Percentage of vacant positions filled by panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service	Percentage of vacant positions filled by panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service	Percentage of vacant positions filled by panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service
Citizens Information Board	50%*	0%	0%	0%
Pensions Board	0%	0%	0%	0%

-	2011	2012	2013	2014
Pensions Authority(formerly the Pensions Board - established 7 March 2014)	—	—	—	0%
Social Welfare Tribunal	0%	0%	0%	0%

a) Citizens Information Board

There were four appointments since March 2011, three of which did not require public advertisement. Two were the Department of Social Protection's representatives to the Board, the first appointed on 1 November 2011, and her replacement appointed on 14 March 2014. A Citizens Information Board staff representative was appointed on 5 November 2012. The fourth person was appointed through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) process. These appointments were made in accordance with the governing legislation: the Comhairle Act, 2000, as amended by the Citizens Information Act 2007.

b) Social Welfare Tribunal

Legislation provides that the four ordinary members of the Tribunal are appointed by the Minister on the recommendation of the two relevant bodies ICTU and IBEC. Therefore, none of these positions are publicly advertised.

The Chairperson of the Tribunal, who was re-appointed in 2012, is sourced by the Department of Social Protection by way of a recommendation from the Labour Court with regard to a particular candidate's suitability.

c) Pensions Board (now the Pensions Authority)

There were no new appointments to the Pensions Board in the period.

d) Pensions Authority

The Pensions Authority comprises three members – a chairperson and two ordinary members. There were four new appointments to the newly established Pensions Authority (March 2014). The outgoing chairperson of the Pensions Board was appointed as the first chairperson of the Pensions Authority.

A representative of the Department of Social Protection and a representative of the Department of Finance were also appointed as ordinary members in March 2014.

The representative of the Department of Social Protection resigned during May 2014 and was replaced by another representative of the Department.

These appointments do not require public advertisement.

Disability Allowance Applications

52. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork.

[37523/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Disability allowance (DA) is a weekly allowance paid to people with a specified disability which is expected to last at least one year; who are aged over 16 and under 66 and who are substantially restricted in carrying out employment otherwise suitable to their age, experience and qualifications. DA is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test.

I confirm that the Department received an application for DA from the above named person on 9 September 2014. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with the relative complexity in terms of the person's circumstances in relation to the three main qualifying criteria and the quality and completeness of the information they provide in support of their claim.

Any person who is awaiting a decision on their DA application and who has income needs may apply for means-tested supplementary welfare allowance from their local community welfare service.

Ombudsman's Reports

53. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of complaints received over the past three years that were referred to the Office of the Ombudsman; if any of these complaints escalated further to the courts; if she will provide a breakdown of these figures according to officer named complaints and non-officer named complaints; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37551/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Statistics on the number or nature of cases that are referred to the Office of the Ombudsman or to the Courts are not held by the Department.

The number of complaints recorded by the Department from January 2011 to date:

-	"Officer Named" Complaints	Non Officer Named Complaints	Total Received
Year 2011	103	1,631	1,734
Year 2012	102	1,465	1,567
Year 2013	171	1,044	1, 215
Year 2014	149	652	801

My Department's Customer Charter and Action Plan 2013-2015 sets out the level of service customers can expect to receive. The Department monitors its performance through the use of its management information systems and through consultation with customers using a variety of methods, including receiving feedback through the Comments and Complaints system.

If a customer is dissatisfied with the standard of service they receive, they can contact the staff member or section involved to have the matter dealt with. If this does not resolve the is-

sue to their satisfaction, they can make a complaint to the Quality Customer Service Team by telephone, in writing or on line at www.welfare.ie. Their complaint will be dealt with promptly, fairly and impartially. Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged, and it will be referred to a complaints officer for investigation. A response to the customer normally issues within 15 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the complaint remains unresolved, the customer is advised of their right of further appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Community Welfare Services

54. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form, the number of community welfare officers currently operating by county; the number at October in 2011, 2012 and 2013; if she will also estimate the population served by each CWO to date in 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37552/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A key objective of the transfer of the community welfare service (CWS) from the Health Service Executive to the Department on 1st October 2011 was to provide a streamlined and consistent service to the customer. When the CWS transferred to the Department in October 2011 there were approximately 760 full time equivalent community welfare officers delivering the full range of community welfare services.

The Department is continuing to examine the operation of all its services, including the CWS, in the context of the Pathways to Work commitments and the development of Intreo services nationally. The Pathways to Work Programme represents a significant reform in the social welfare system and highlighted the need for the Department to focus its resources on the provision of opportunities, supports and assistance to unemployed people. The new Intreo service offers practical, tailored employment services and supports for jobseekers, a model which is currently being rolled out across the country.

Overall, this has resulted in a rebalancing of resources across the Department's range of activities including the relocation of some staff to main centres, primarily Intreo offices, where a full range of services will be available in one location. As part of this programme of change approximately 430 satellite CWS clinics have been closed and approximately 300 posts have been redeployed to activation and case management support services, the majority coming from the former CWS cohort.

The Department currently has in the region of approximately 460 higher executive officer posts delivering the full range of CWS services. The number of officers serving per county or those as of October 2012 and 2013 are not available.

People claiming supports under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme generally only interact with the Department on an occasional basis, for example, when seeking an exceptional needs payment or in claiming additional supports such as rent supplement, which are usually reviewed once to twice yearly. Statistics are not maintained to allow the estimation of the population served per officer.

The staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department and that the services provided are reconstituted, where necessary, to meet the changing needs of Irish society.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

55. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reductions in the number of people in receipt of rent assistance between 2010 and to date in 2014; the reasons for the fall in numbers; if she will provide a demographic breakdown of the recipients in this category, if figures are available at county, locality or regional level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37553/14]

58. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will increase the rent supplement limits and introduce more flexibility in the limits for tenants who are at risk of homelessness. [37598/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 58 together.

The purpose of the rent supplement scheme 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. The overall aim is to provide short term assistance, and not to act as an alternative to the other social housing schemes operated by the Exchequer. There are currently approximately 73,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €344 million for 2014.

Maximum rent limits are generally reviewed every 18 months. The most recent review was completed in June 2013 with revised rent limits introduced on 17 June 2013. Despite pressures on the social protection budget, the last review saw rent limits increase in line with market rents in some areas, including Dublin and Galway, with Dublin limits increasing by a weighted average of 9%.

A review of the maximum rent limits is being undertaken within the Department. This review involves 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, websites advertising rental properties, relevant Departments and Agencies, landlord representative groups and non-Government organisations such as Threshold, Focus Ireland and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Any changes to social welfare supports can only be considered in a budgetary context.

The current difficulties in the rental market and the difficulties faced by prospective tenants, including those seeking access to rent supplement, is a shortage of supply of suitable properties in areas of high demand. The Government has recently launched its Construction Strategy with the aim of increasing housing supply generally.

I can assure the Deputies that officers administering rent supplement throughout the country have considerable experience in dealing with customers and make every effort to ensure that their accommodation needs are met. Discretionary powers are available to staff to award a supplement for rental purposes in exceptional cases where it appears that the circumstances of the case so warrant. A notice reminding staff of their statutory discretionary power to award a supplement for rental purposes in exceptional cases, for example, when dealing with applicants who are at risk of losing their tenancy was circulated in July 2014.

In view of the current supply difficulties, the Department has agreed a protocol with the Dublin local authorities and voluntary organisations so that families on rent supplement who are at risk of losing their accommodation can have more timely and appropriate interventions made on their behalf. Since the launch of this initiative in mid-June 2014, over 120 families have had their rent supplement claims revised by the Department.

The Department's strategic policy direction is to transfer responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with a long-term housing need to local authorities under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Officials are working closely with those in the lead Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, in introducing HAP on a phased basis, in the selected local authorities.

The number of recipients on the rent supplement scheme increased from 59,700 in 2007 to a maximum of 97,000 in 2010 and has since decreased to the current figure of approximately 73,500. This reduction is attributable to a number of factors including the rate of unemployment, transfer of recipients to social housing, changes in rent levels and increases to the minimum contribution payable by rent supplement tenants.

Rent supplement recipients by county from 2010 to date are provided in the following tabular statement. A demographic breakdown of these figures is not available.

Rent Supplement: Recipient Numbers by County 2010 to present.

2010	2011	County	2012	2013	End Sept. 2014
33,818	34,423	Dublin	32,584	29,541	27,352
10,988	10,732	Cork	9,878	9,020	8,464
4,409	4,447	Kildare	4,338	4,135	3,811
4,829	4,615	Galway	4,134	3,983	3,631
4,055	4,102	Wexford	3,700	3,179	2,726
3,896	3,833	Limerick	3,323	2,984	2,669
2,563	2,734	Louth	2,549	2,422	2,274
2,613	2,719	Wicklow	2,495	2,381	2,183
2,680	2,609	Tipperary	2,199	2,094	1,960
3,194	2,977	Donegal	2,411	2,047	1,871
2,552	2,723	Meath	2,143	1,941	1,777
2,339	2,278	Kerry	2,037	1,888	1,753
3,012	2,928	Mayo	2,435	1,900	1,664
1,623	1,671	Westmeath	1,592	1,588	1,540
2,332	2,098	Waterford	1,773	1,556	1,394
1,937	1,961	Clare	1,722	1,547	1,380
1,577	1,619	Kilkenny	1,365	1,210	1,140
1,484	1,440	Carlow	1,239	1,108	1,072
1,273	1,349	Offaly	1,240	1,124	1,064
1,151	1,178	Laois	1,097	1,085	1,020
1,276	1,275	Roscommon	997	802	682
715	623	Longford	511	507	479
787	698	Sligo	591	542	463
1,029	843	Cavan	519	455	417
598	488	Monaghan	438	395	365
530	440	Leitrim	374	354	335
97,260	96,803	Total	87,684	79,788	73,486

Mortgage Schemes

56. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the

reason for delay in determination of application for mortgage support in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37562/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As detailed to the Deputy in reply to Parliamentary Question No 118 of 23 January 2014, certain documents were outstanding in relation to the application for mortgage interest supplement from this client. Despite numerous written requests from the Department over a sustained period which were also followed up with phone calls to the client none of the requested documentation was submitted, the claim was closed following a final reminder. Subsequent to the closure of the claim, some correspondence but not all requested documents was received on 22 May 2014. As many of the necessary documentation remains outstanding the claim remains closed.

One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason one-parent family allowance has been terminated in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37570/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was in receipt of one parent family payment from 13 August 2009 to 23 July 2014. Her claim was reviewed by a Social Welfare Inspector in August 2014 when it was brought to the Department's attention that a person other than the person concerned had attempted to collect her payment from the Post Office. During the review it was established that she had been absent from the State since July 2014. It was also established that the person concerned was cohabiting with her partner and she signed a statement to that effect. Consequently her claim for one parent family payment was disallowed and formal notification of this decision was sent to her on 10 September 2014. It is open to the person concerned to appeal the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 55.

Central Bank of Ireland

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the book value and market value of bonds currently held by the Central Bank of Ireland as a result of the promissory note transaction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37444/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Subsequent to the liquidation of IBRC the Central Bank of Ireland acquired €25bn of Floating Rate Notes (FRNs) and €3.46bn of Government Fixed Coupon 2025 Government bonds.

According to the Central Bank's 2013 Annual Report the FRNs were valued at €27.8 billion at the end of December 2013 giving rise to an unrealised gain of €2.8 billion. According to the same report the Fixed Coupon 2025 Government bonds was valued at €3.5 billion giving rise to an unrealised gain of €292.7 million at that date.

Further details in relation to the bonds can be found at notes 16 and 34 of the Annual Report which can be accessed at <http://www.centralbank.ie/publications/Documents/Central%20Bank%20of%20Ireland%20Annual%20Report%202013.pdf>.

Questions - Written Answers
Civil Registration Legislation

60. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Finance if dowries are legal here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37448/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is no Irish law prohibiting the giving of a gift to or making a settlement in favour of a bride, a groom or a couple who are to be married, whether or not that gift or settlement is termed a ‘dowry’.

The term ‘dowry’ is not defined under Irish law and can have different roles in relation to marriage in different cultures. I, as Minister for Finance, do not have the primary role in relation to the law concerning the institution of marriage.

I understand that the Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2014 has recently been initiated in the Seanad on behalf of the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection. That proposed legislation deals in part with the complex issue of marriages of convenience. It provides factors for a Superintendent Registrar to consider in forming the opinion that a marriage or civil partnership would constitute a marriage or civil partnership of convenience. It provides that a dowry will not be considered evidence of a marriage or civil partnership of convenience where it is part of the culture of one of the parties to the union.

Excise Duties

61. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a capacity in law to develop a separate excise duty for vintners as opposed to wholesale and multinational alcohol retailers. [37470/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that EU Directive 92/ 83, which governs the structure of alcohol taxation in Member States, requires alcohol taxes to be applied by reference to the nature and alcoholic strength of the product and does not allow for different tax treatment of alcohol products depending on where the product is sold. Therefore any such proposal would not be permitted under the Directive.

Tax Reliefs Availability

62. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Finance if there is any tax relief available for coastal protection work to be carried out for persons to protect a private dwelling home; or his plans for it to be put in place. [37471/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): While there are no existing “direct” tax incentive schemes specifically relating to expenditure by property-owners on coastal protection works, there are a number of provisions in the Tax Acts which might, depending on the owner’s circumstances and the nature of the work on which the expenditure is incurred, provide a measure of relief in respect of such expenditure.

The Home Renovation Incentive, was introduced in Finance Act (No 2) 2013. The Incentive came into operation on 25 October 2013 and will run until 31 December 2015. It provides for tax relief for homeowners by way of a tax credit at 13.5% of qualifying expenditure incurred on repair, renovation or improvement work, carried out by tax compliant contractors, on a homeowner’s only or main residence. The tax credit is granted over the two years following the year the work is carried out and paid for.

Expenditure of a revenue nature and interest on borrowings incurred for the purposes of a trade may be deductible in computing taxable trading profits.

In relation to rental property, section 97(2)(e) of the TCA 1997 provides for a deduction in computing taxable rent in respect of interest incurred on borrowed money used to improve the property. (In the case of residential property, the deduction is restricted to 75% of the interest).

Wear and tear allowances (generally 12.5% over 8 years) may be due in respect of capital expenditure incurred on the provision of machinery or plant for the purposes of a trade or in relation to the letting of furnished residential property.

I have no plans to introduce any specific measures in respect of coastal protection works.

Tax Reliefs Availability

63. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a system of tax relief for homes that purchase house protection barriers to protect from flooding. [37477/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): While there are no existing “direct” tax incentive schemes specifically relating to expenditure by property-owners on flood protection barriers, there are a number of provisions in the Tax Acts which might, depending on the owner’s circumstances and the nature of the work on which the expenditure is incurred, provide a measure of relief in respect of flood prevention works.

The Home Renovation Incentive, was introduced in Finance Act (No 2) 2013. The Incentive came into operation on 25 October 2013 and will run until 31 December 2015. It provides for tax relief for homeowners by way of a tax credit at 13.5% of qualifying expenditure incurred on repair, renovation or improvement work, carried out by tax compliant contractors, on a homeowner’s only or main residence. The tax credit is granted over the two years following the year the work is carried out and paid for.

In relation to rental property, section 97(2)(e) of the TCA 1997 provides for a deduction in computing taxable rent in respect of interest incurred on borrowed money used to improve the property. (In the case of residential property, the deduction is restricted to 75% of the interest).

Wear and tear allowances (generally 12.5% over 8 years) may be due in respect of capital expenditure incurred on the provision of machinery or plant for the purposes of a trade or in relation to the letting of furnished residential property.

I have no plans to introduce any specific measures in respect of flood protection barriers.

Appointments to State Boards

64. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37489/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In relation to the Deputy’s question, the following table provides details of vacant positions on State Boards which I make appointment to or on which I make recommendations in respect of appointments.

Questions - Written Answers

Board Name	2011	2012	2013	To date 2014	Comment
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	0	0	0	0	All five members of the Fiscal Council were directly appointed with effect from 7th July 2011. I appointed the members having regard to a number of criteria including the desirability of having a mix of appropriate backgrounds (academia, the financial sector/financial markets and public finance), macroeconomic/microeconomic expertise and a strong international dimension. as well as the need to take gender considerations into account. I am satisfied that the appointed members have the mix of skills and experience, including in relation to fiscal affairs, to ensure that the Council will be highly effective in fulfilling its mandate.
National Asset Management Agency	0	0	0	0	To date no appointments have been filled from panels created through open application, although I did seek expressions of interest in positions on the NAMA board in 2012.

Board Name	2011	2012	2013	To date 2014	Comment
Credit Union Restructuring Board (REBO)	0	46	0	0	ReBo was set up on 1 January 2013 and 13 appointments were made to the Board of ReBo from this date. Six of these appointments were made as a result of applications made through the Publicjobs.ie website and all 13 posts were advertised on publicjobs.ie
Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal (IFSAT)	0	0	43	0	IFSAT members are appointed by the President on the nomination of the Government. Seven vacancies arose in 2013 as a result of all Tribunal members coming to the end of their term of appointment as set out in legislation. The vacancies were advertised on the Publicjobs.ie website. Three members were re-made through the publically advertised process.
Central Bank Commission	0	0	0	33	In 2014 two members of the Commission were re-appointed. One further member was appointed as a result of a publically advertised process
National Treasury Management Agency	0	0	0	0	

Questions - Written Answers

Board Name	2011	2012	2013	To date 2014	Comment
National Pensions Reserve Fund Commission	0	0	0	0	
State Claims Agency Policy Committee	0	0	0	0	
National Development Finance Agency Board	0	0	0	0	
Financial Services Ombudsman Council (FSOC)	0	0	0	0	The FSOC was appointed on 29th October 2008 for a five year period. The Council was reappointed for a 2 year term up to 28th October 2015 or until the merger of the Financial Services Ombudsman with the Pension Ombudsman has been completed, whichever is the sooner. Due to the merger of the two bodies it was considered prudent to retain expertise of the existing Council.
Strategic Banking Corporation Ireland (SBCI)	0	0	0	0	The SBCI has been established with an interim Board for reasons of expedience. It is envisaged that longer term appointments will be made in the coming months and the interim non-executive Board members will cease to hold their positions on the SBCI Board at that time.

Following the announcement earlier this week relating to the Government agreement of

the revised model for Ministerial appointments to State Boards the Public Appointments Service will design and implement a transparent assessment system to support such appointments which will help to ensure that vacancies will be filled by personnel that can perform the role effectively. As I have always endeavoured to appoint those with the requisite levels of expertise to fulfil their roles, this new model will greatly support me in this process.

Tax Code

65. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Finance his views that a company (details supplied) may have breached state aid rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37510/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In June this year, the European Commission announced their intention to open formal state aid investigations into a number of companies in Member States of the European Union. This included Ireland's case in respect of the company in question.

As is usual procedure, at the same time as this announcement, the European Commission sent a letter to Ireland in which they outlined what they see as the basis for opening such an investigation and asking for Ireland's response and clarification. A non-confidential version of this letter, known as an "Opening Decision", was published by the European Commission this week. This is simply the next normal procedural step in the State aid investigation process and the purpose of this publication is to give other interested parties the opportunity to submit comments directly to the European Commission.

This whole process is part of a much wider investigation by the European Commission, which is looking at tax rulings and patent boxes in different Member States and which has been on-going for some time.

The Commission have a responsibility to ensure the smooth operation of the single market within the EU and to investigate potential breaches of the comprehensive rules on state aid i.e. the use of state resources in a way that would grant an unfair advantage to a particular undertaking or group of undertakings in a manner that distorts competition within the single market.

In respect of this case, it is important to emphasise that the Commission have only opened a formal investigation at this stage, they have not made a final determination on state aid in respect of Ireland.

For state aid to exist in this case, less tax must have been charged to the company than should have been applied under the normal rules of taxation, and this must have distorted competition within the single market.

Ireland is firmly of the view that there is no state aid in this case and we will continue to defend all aspects of this vigorously.

Ireland has already issued a formal and confidential response to the Commission, addressing in detail the concerns and some misunderstandings contained in the Opening Decision. Ireland welcomed that opportunity to clarify important issues about the applicable tax law in this case and to explain that the company concerned did not receive selective treatment and was taxed fully in accordance with the law.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Establishment

66. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the setting up and operation of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [37512/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) has been established by the Government as a means of ensuring that SMEs in Ireland are provided with sufficient finance for growth. As the Deputy will be aware, the legislation enabling the establishment of the SBCI was passed by the Oireachtas prior to the Summer recess and the SBCI was incorporated as a company in September. The company is already operational with the immediate priorities being the finalisation of the funding arrangements for the company and establishing mechanisms to enable credit to flow quickly to the small business sector. This work is well advanced. Loan agreements with the international funders, KfW and the European Investment Bank, will be signed in the coming weeks. Following that, the SBCI will agree lending terms with traditional bank lenders and new credit providers from beyond the traditional bank sector allowing for the distribution of SBCI funding to the SME sector in Ireland on a prudent basis. I anticipate that the first SBCI funded loans to SMEs should be available for disbursement before the end of this year.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Remit

67. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding funding being provided by a bank (details supplied) to Irish businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37513/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) has been established by the Government as a means of ensuring that SMEs in Ireland are provided with sufficient finance for growth. As the Deputy will be aware, the legislation enabling the establishment of the SBCI was passed by the Oireachtas prior to the Summer recess and the SBCI was incorporated as a company in September. The company is already operational with the immediate priorities being the finalisation of the funding arrangements for the company and establishing mechanisms to enable credit to flow quickly to the small business sector. This work is well advanced. Loan agreements with the international funders, KfW and the European Investment Bank, will be signed in the coming weeks. Following that, the SBCI will agree lending terms with traditional bank lenders and new credit providers from beyond the traditional bank sector allowing for the distribution of SBCI funding to the SME sector in Ireland on a prudent basis. I anticipate that the first SBCI funded loans to SMEs should be available for disbursement before the end of this year.

Financial Services Regulation

68. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his oversight on vulture funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37514/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Primary responsibility for the supervisory oversight and regulation of financial institutions, funds and insurance companies rests with the Central Bank of Ireland. If I understand the Deputy's use of the term "vulture funds" to be a reference to the funds which have purchased loan books from banks operating in Ireland in the recent past, there has been some commentary on the need for the protection of consumers especially where the new owners of the loan books are not subject to regulation by the Central Bank.

Of course, where the new owners of the loan books are regulated entities, or become regulated entities, they are subject to regulation and oversight by the Central Bank of Ireland. They

must comply with the various Central Bank Codes including the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears.

Where the purchaser of a loan book has not been a regulated entity in Ireland, those companies have committed to voluntarily apply the codes when managing the loan books. Of course, voluntary compliance is not enforceable and ultimately it is the aim of this Government to ensure the same protections are available for all consumers whose loans have been sold.

Therefore, as Minister for Finance, I am committed to bringing forward legislation that protects consumers whose mortgages are sold to unregulated entities. The Government has reiterated this commitment on several occasions. In July and August of this year, my Department ran a public consultation seeking views on its proposed legislation to protect consumers whose loans are sold to unregulated entities.

The Department of Finance received 18 submissions from a range of respondents from the financial services industry, consumer groups, public representatives and individuals and other stakeholders. Officials in my Department are carefully considering the submissions and it is anticipated that legislation will be published by the end of this year.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

69. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new complaints of petrol stretching in County Mayo that Customs and Excise is investigating in each of the past four months; the position regarding these investigations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37528/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they have received a number of reports of problems relating to petrol quality from around the country in recent weeks. Approximately 12 complaints have been received since June 2014 in relation to suspect petrol quality in Co. Mayo. In general, such reports are followed up as a matter of course and samples sent to the State Laboratory for analysis where officers have reason to suspect Excise Duty fraud.

The recent reports of suspected petrol “stretching” are being investigated by the Revenue Commissioners who have been in contact with the Oil and Motor trade in this regard.

Any illegal activity, such as petrol stretching, would be a matter of serious concern because of the risks to the Exchequer, the threat to legitimate businesses and the damage that can be caused to the vehicles of unsuspecting purchasers of adulterated fuel. Section 102(1A) of the Finance Act 1999 makes it an offence to sell, deliver or use oil on which Mineral Oil Tax at the appropriate rate has not been paid. In the normal course of work, Revenue’s enforcement staff take samples of fuel from mineral oil suppliers, including filling stations, to ensure compliance with mineral oil regulations. These samples are sent to the State Laboratory for scientific analysis. I am advised that the scientific analysis process is time consuming and that reports from the State Laboratory in respect of these samples are still awaited by Revenue. If the results of the analysis reveals the presence of any illegal stretching agents, I can assure the Deputy that the Revenue Commissioners will take action and pursue prosecutions against offenders where possible.

Revenue and the oil sector have cooperated very successfully to tackle diesel laundering and I am confident that with this cooperation, and with the supply chain information available to Revenue, the problem of petrol stretching can also be tackled successfully. In this regard it is essential that petrol distributors report on any reduction in the pattern of legitimate supplies

of fuel to the retail trade which may indicate that specific retailers are shifting some of their sourcing to laundered or ‘stretched’ fuel.

Motorists themselves should take care about where they source their petrol from, and report any suspicions concerning the source of adulterated petrol that may have damaged their engines to Revenue. Revenue will investigate such reports and pursue prosecutions against offenders where possible. In that regard, Revenue has recently launched a dedicated section of its website specifically on the shadow economy and this includes an electronic reporting facility for anyone who has information about shadow economy practices such as petrol stretching.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

70. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of housing associations that have taken advantage of the National Asset Management Agency facility to set up a greater supply of housing; the number properties that have been transferred, broken down by local authority area; the costs incurred in the set up and operation of the special-purpose vehicle to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37543/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): NAMA has, to date, made 5,455 houses and apartments, one third of the completed housing stock held by its debtors and receivers in Ireland, available through the Housing Agency to local authorities and approved housing bodies for social housing. This is almost all of the unoccupied housing stock under NAMA’s control. Of the 5,455 properties made available by NAMA, local authorities have confirmed demand for just over 2,000. At end Q2 2014, 736 of the 2,000 properties for which demand has been confirmed by local authorities had been delivered. Once demand is confirmed by local authorities and contracts have been entered into by either local authorities or approved housing bodies, the properties are made immediately available by NAMA, which often involves significant investment by the NAMA to complete outstanding construction work and to address compliance issues. NAMA has, to date, invested €20 million in this way to facilitate the delivery of social housing through this initiative. Details relating to these properties, including the details sought by the Deputy, are available through both the Housing Agency (www.housing.ie) and NAMA (<http://www.nama.ie/about-our-work/social-housing/>) websites. The figures for Quarter 3 2014 are currently being finalised and will be published within the coming weeks on both websites.

For the Deputy’s convenience a breakdown of the delivered units by local authority area and local authority/approved housing body is included in the following table.

Delivery of social housing through NAMA

Carlow	Respond! Housing Association	55
Clare	Banner Housing Association	3
Cork	NABCO (NARPS)	13
Cork	Cork City Council	53
Cork	Clúid Housing Association (NARPS)	23
Cork	Clúid Housing Association	1
Cork	Túath Housing (NARPS)	12
Dublin	Clúid Housing Association	58
Dublin	Circle Voluntary Housing Association	7
Dublin	Clúid Housing Association	28

Carlow	Respond! Housing Association	55
Dublin	Clúid Housing Association	40
Dublin	HAIL Housing Association	5
Dublin	Fingal County Council	10
Dublin	HAIL Housing Association	3
Dublin	Fingal County Council	6
Dublin	Túath Housing	20
Dublin	Túath Housing (NARPS)	20
Galway	Clúid Housing Association	13
Galway	Túath Housing	13
Galway	Galway City Council	7
Galway	Galway City Council	15
Galway	Brothers of Charity	1
Kerry	Clúid Housing Association	15
Kildare	Túath Housing	10
Kildare	Clúid Housing Association	35
Kildare	Kildare County Council	8
Kildare	Túath Housing	4
Kildare	Túath Housing	7
Limerick	Focus Ireland	4
Limerick	Clúid Housing Association	5
Louth	Túath Housing	15
Louth	Drogheda Borough Council	12
Westmeath	Túath Housing	4
Westmeath	Túath Housing (NARPS)	4
Wexford	Wexford County Council	2
Clare	Banner Housing Association	4
Cork	NABCO (NARPS)	24
Cork	Túath Housing	6
Cork	NABCO (NARPS)	8
Dublin	Clanmil Housing (NARPS)	8
Dublin	Circle Voluntary Housing Association (NARPS)	60
Dublin	Túath Housing (NARPS)	48
Dublin	HAIL Housing Association (NARPS)	19
Galway	Túath Housing	12
Kilkenny	Kilkenny County Council	5
Meath	North & East Housing Association	11
Total		736

As the Deputy is aware, NAMA has established a special purpose vehicle, National Asset Residential Property Services Ltd. (NARPS), to expedite the delivery of social housing through this initiative. Through NARPS, NAMA acquires houses and apartments from debtors and receivers and directly leases them to approved housing bodies under long-term leasing arrangements. NARPS has proven to be a very effective method of delivery. I am advised by NAMA that NARPS has incurred set up and ongoing operational costs, including costs incurred in the valuation of properties it has acquired and insurance costs, of €784,000 to 30 June 2014.

VAT Exemptions

71. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider increasing the taxes exemption threshold for small businesses from €75,000 to €150,000 in the forthcoming budget as this would be important to them in the context of the economic environment, in which they are trying to survive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37546/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the VAT registration threshold for goods, which is currently €75,000. On this basis, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that it is tentatively estimated that the full year cost to the Exchequer of raising the threshold from €75,000 to €150,000 is between €310 million and €430 million.

I would point out however, that any increase in the thresholds above the level of inflation would require a derogation from EU VAT law and agreement by all 28 Member States before it could be introduced.

With regard to increasing the thresholds, it is not the practice to comment on what measures may or may not be introduced in advance of the Budget.

Economic Growth

72. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the economic indicators are currently in a positive trajectory; the extent that this is likely to facilitate ongoing economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37573/14]

74. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the current economic indicators are poised to facilitate growth and ongoing economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37575/14]

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the economy remains competitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37577/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72, 74 and 76 together.

Following successful implementation of the EU-IMF programme, the Irish economy is emerging from the crisis and there are clear signs that economic recovery is under way.

First estimates of economic activity for the second quarter of this year were very strong and were well ahead of consensus expectations, with GDP growing by 1.5% over the quarter and by 7.7% year-on-year. Taken in conjunction with first quarter data, GDP grew by 5.8 per cent in the first half of this year. The increase in economic activity was broadly-based with both domestic sectors and exporting sectors performing strongly.

Exports rose by 13% in the year to the second quarter of 2014. This was the fastest rate of expansion since 2001 and there is growing evidence that the impact of the patent expiry issue in the pharmaceutical sector has passed.

Consumer spending on goods has been strong in the first eight months of this year. Retail sales in the period January to August were up 7% when compared with the same period in 2013. Core sales (excluding motor trades) were up 3.5% over the same period. Investment is also growing, with both building and construction and machinery and equipment activity rising.

Recovery in the construction sector continued in August with the Purchasing Managers' Index for the sector recording a 13th successive month of expansion.

Recovery is also evident in the labour market with employment increasing in each of the last seven quarters representing an increase of over 70,000 since the low point in mid-2012. In line with this, the standardised unemployment rate stood at 11.1 per cent at the end of September, having fallen from a peak of 15.1 per cent in early 2012. Ireland's competitiveness has significantly improved in recent years. Low consumer price inflation over the last five years has meant that Irish price levels have fallen considerably relative to the euro area. For instance, annual HICP inflation in Ireland has been below that of the euro area average for every year since 2008. This trend continued into the early part of this year, with inflation over the first six months of the year coming in below the comparable rate in the euro area.

The Government remains focused on maintaining the reform momentum to achieve the goals of creating more jobs, enhancing living standards and, ultimately, achieving full employment. As set out in its Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016, the Government is prioritising the actions needed to build on the economic recovery that is already under way to ensure that the benefits of the recovery are felt by everyone across the country.

Economic Growth

73. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which economic growth throughout the eurozone can be encouraged without creating inflation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37574/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The pace of economic growth in the euro area stalled in the second quarter of this year. The objective is now to boost the pace of economic growth and to increase the rate of inflation, which is currently excessively low.

There are a number of dimensions to this. Firstly, the European Central Bank has adopted a loose monetary policy stance, designed to raise economic activity and reduce fragmentation across euro area financial markets.

On the fiscal side, the pace of consolidation is slowing, in aggregate terms, across the euro area, and this is appropriate. In addition, a greater focus is needed on the implementation of structural reforms to foster growth and job creation in the euro area.

Finally, a number of initiatives are being examined to boost the level of investment in the EU including the use of EIB capital, how to better use public funding as well as a €300 billion investment package proposed by European Commission President-elect Jean-Claude Juncker. These issues will be discussed at the upcoming European Council meeting in October.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 72.

EU State Aid Negotiations

75. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance in view of recent efforts to prevent state aid that might be used to encourage foreign direct investment here and in other countries throughout the eurozone, if foreign direct investment in non-eurozone states is being equally discouraged with particular reference to such investment in Europe and Asia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37576/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The purpose of State Aid control is to ensure that State intervention does not interfere with the smooth functioning of the internal EU market or harm the competitiveness of EU undertakings. It does not seek to encourage or discourage foreign direct investment into the EU or Eurozone, but rather to remove distortions to competition between EU Member States.

State Aid policies are an intrinsic part of the overall competition policy of the EU. Competition policy is an instrument for the achievement of the EU's aims, which include achievement of economic growth, prosperity, social protection, employment and cohesion between Member States.

To ensure that competition in the internal market is not distorted, EU law provides for a number of fundamental Freedoms which remove obstacles to free movement of goods, persons, services and capital between Member States. It also seeks to prevent distortions to competition which may rise from collusive agreements between firms; abuses of dominant market positions; or unjustified state aids.

State Aid controls maintain a level playing field between Member States and ensure that State intervention is kept to a minimum, in order to ensure that markets and businesses can continue to operate effectively.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 72.

House Purchase Schemes

77. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which provision will be made to deal with the housing crisis which is growing rapidly; if a Government bond will be considered to deal with the issue, given that savings will accrue from a housing building or house purchasing programme on two levels, a reduction in the cost of rent support currently in the figure of €500 million per annum and a considerable increase in employment in the construction sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37578/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government recognises that recent price and rent developments in the housing market reflect the interaction of a recovery in the economy and in employment and a shortage of supply of new housing, particularly in Dublin and some other urban areas.

These issues are being addressed under the Construction 2020 Strategy: A Strategy for A Renewed Construction Sector. The Deputy should be aware that my Department is party to a range of actions as part of the Strategy. The Strategy 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. All of these actions are detailed in the Construction 2020 Strategy publication.

As regards the Deputy's reference to a bond, all monies raised through Government borrowing are paid into the Central Fund and used to fund Government spending as approved by the Oireachtas. It has never been the custom to link borrowing to specific projects as to do so would limit the flexibility of the Government in managing the State's finances.

The Government is committed to responding 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 Social Housing Strategy, committed to under Action 8 of Construction 2020 and now in preparation, will provide the basis for an enhanced approach to social housing provision in Ireland over the next 5 years. The optimum delivery and funding of social housing will be addressed in the Strategy. My colleague, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Alan Kelly TD, has indicated that the Strategy will be brought to Government in the coming weeks.

Budget 2015

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which it might be possible in the course of the forthcoming budget to ease the burden on consumers while at the same time maintaining good economic practice and adherence to EU guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37579/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is not my practice to comment on what measures may or may not be introduced in advance of the budget.

Debt Relief

79. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the total value of concessions achieved in alleviating debt repayments to the EU, IMF and others since taking up office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37580/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There have been a number of improvements to the terms our EU-IMF Programme loans since they were initially agreed in late 2010. These changes have included reductions of the interest rates and, in the case of the EU facilities, extension of maturities. We have also negotiated the replacement of the Promissory Notes issued to the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (IBRC) with a series of longer term, non-amortising floating rate Government bonds. In addition, I am proposing to make an early repayment of a portion of Ireland's IMF programme loan.

When the programme was initially agreed in late 2010, the average interest rate on the €67.5 billion available to drawdown from the external sources was estimated by the EU Commission to be 5.82% on the basis of market rates at that time. The average life of the borrowing was initially set at 7.5 years.

In July 2011, the Euro Area Heads of State or Government (HOSG) agreed to reduce the cost of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) loans, and similar reductions were subsequently agreed for the interest rates on the loans provided by the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM) and also by the three bilateral lenders (UK, Sweden and Denmark). It is estimated that the interest rate reductions on the EU funding mechanisms and the bilateral loans are worth of the order of €9 billion over the initially envisaged 7 ½ year term of these loans. As of July 2014 the all in euro equivalent cost of our EU-IMF programme loans was estimated at 3.4%.

Also in 2011, the average maturity of the EFSM and the EFSF loans was extended to 12.5 and 15 years respectively.

In April 2013, EU Finance Ministers agreed in principle to further extend the maximum weighted average maturities on our EFSF and EFSM loans by up to 7 years, over and above the extension agreed in 2011. This further maturity extension removes a refinancing requirement of

some €20 billion for the Irish State in the years 2015 to 2022. This extension of maturities has a number of significant benefits for Ireland, including smoothing our redemption profile, improving long term debt sustainability and it also has a positive impact on the cost of Exchequer borrowing through creating further downward pressure on our borrowing costs.

In February 2013, the Irish Government replaced the Promissory Notes issued to IBRC with a series of longer term, non-amortising floating rate Government bonds. This has resulted in significant benefits to the State, including increasing the weighted average life from c.7-8 years for the Promissory Notes to c.34-35 years for the floating rate notes.

Finally, as you will be aware, I am proposing to make an early repayment of a portion of Ireland's IMF programme loan. Specifically the proposal is to make an early repayment of up to €18.3 billion of our €22.5 billion IMF loan, which is the portion subject to the highest rate of charge, and to replace it with less expensive market funding subject to prevailing market conditions.

For this to succeed, a waiver of the mandatory proportional early repayment clauses which are included in each of our loan agreements with the EFSF and the EFSM, and with our bilateral lenders, the U.K., Denmark and Sweden is required.

There was broad political support among Ministers when the issue was discussed at the Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings last month. However, this support is subject to necessary national approval procedures including parliamentary approval in some Member States.

Estimates provided by the NTMA show that in a situation where the recent reduction in market yields is maintained it would be possible to achieve cash savings of the order of €1.5 billion. The actual savings that are generated from early repayment will depend on a number of factors such as the size of any repayments, general market conditions and the cost of the replacement market funding.

Banking Sector Regulation

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to monitor the activities of venture capital companies which purchased loan books from various lending institutions and are now forcing the borrowers to surrender their homes and which, voluntarily or otherwise, have shown a distinct unwillingness to restructure such loans and which would appear destined to make a considerable profit at the expense of borrowers who have made valiant efforts to try to discharge their indebtedness and who continue to do so; if a review might be undertaken to clarify the extent of such practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37581/14]

81. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which his Department has monitored the activities of purchasers of impaired loan books from various lending institutions with particular reference to clarification as to the number of instances wherein legal procedures have been initiated, loans have been restructured, where voluntary sale or surrender is deemed to have taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37582/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 and 81 together.

Some of the companies that purchased loan books from lending institutions in Ireland are regulated entities and are therefore regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. As statutory regulator of credit institutions, the Central Bank has the power, from both a prudential and consumer

protection perspective, to require banks to meaningfully and sustainably address mortgage arrears cases on their books. All borrowers whose loans have been purchased by regulated entities, and were previously protected under the consumer codes, remain so protected. As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank publishes statistics in relation to residential mortgage arrears and repossessions on a quarterly basis.

Where the purchaser of a loan book is not a regulated entity in Ireland, those companies have committed to voluntarily apply the codes when managing the loan books. Of course, voluntary compliance is not enforceable and ultimately it is the aim of this Government to ensure the same protections for all consumers whose loans have been sold.

Therefore, as Minister for Finance, I am committed to bringing forward legislation that protects consumers whose mortgages are sold to unregulated entities. The Government has reiterated this commitment on several occasions. In July and August of this year, my Department ran a public consultation seeking views on its proposed legislation to protect consumers whose loans are sold to unregulated entities.

The Department of Finance received 18 submissions from a range of respondents from the financial services industry, consumer groups, public representatives and individuals and other stakeholders. Officials in my Department are carefully considering the submissions and it is anticipated that legislation will be published by the end of this year.

Credit Availability

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the incentives currently available to encourage small business with particular reference to access to credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37583/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government recognises that small businesses play a central role in the sustainable recovery of the Irish economy. To facilitate this, Government policy is focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources. My Department has been involved in a range of initiatives to encourage access to credit for small business, and the establishment of the SME State Bodies Group has also provided a forum where this issue is discussed and policy options explored on a regular basis.

The following is an overview of the main policies introduced by this Government to encourage access to credit for small business:

- With over €2bn of Government supports available to small business in Ireland from over twenty Departments and Agencies, it is vital that SMEs can quickly access information on this range of supports available to them. With this in mind, the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, a cross-government initiative, was launched in May 2014. On answering 8 simple questions, the small business will receive a list of available Government supports. In the four months since its launch, this website has had over 17,000 unique visits. The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is available at www.localenterprise.ie/smeonlinetool.

- The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) has been established by the Government as a means of ensuring that SMEs in Ireland are provided with sufficient finance for growth. As the Deputy will be aware, the legislation enabling the establishment of the SBCI was passed by the Oireachtas prior to the Summer recess and the SBCI was incorporated as a company in September. The company is already operational with the immediate priorities being the finalisation of the funding arrangements for the company and establishing mechanisms

to enable credit to flow quickly to the small business sector. This work is well advanced. Loan agreements with the international funders, KfW and the European Investment Bank, will be signed in the coming weeks. Following that, the SBCI will agree lending terms with traditional bank lenders and new credit providers from beyond the traditional bank sector allowing for the distribution of SBCI funding to the SME sector in Ireland on a prudent basis. I anticipate that the first SBCI funded loans to SMEs should be available for disbursement before the end of this year.

- Another important initiative stemming from the work of the SME State Bodies Group is the “Finance4Growth” programme offered by Managementworks. This provides participants with access to an SME finance expert who will explain the different sources of finance available, guide them as to which would be most relevant to their business, and advise on how banks, investors and agencies make their decisions. This mentoring is free, and there is also an option to avail of a one-day finance workshop and a further two hours of mentoring for a small fee. It is important that businesses seeking finance are equipped with as much expertise as possible to ensure that they can provide lending institutions with strong evidence that they have strong repayment capacity and this programme provides them with exactly that.

- The Credit Guarantee Scheme encourages additional lending to small businesses by offering a partial Government guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. My colleague the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation will shortly bring legislation to the Oireachtas which should broaden the scope of the scheme to encourage higher utilisation.

- The Microenterprise Loan Fund, administered by Microfinance Ireland, provides loans of up to €25,000 to small businesses who have been refused credit by commercial banks. Microfinance Ireland works in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices nationally to administer this fund.

The Government remains committed to the SME sector and sees it as the key engine of ongoing economic growth. Consequently the Department of Finance, working with the other relevant Departments and Agencies, will continue to monitor the availability of both bank and non-bank credit with a view to taking appropriate actions as warranted to ensure that SMEs in Ireland have the opportunity to reach their full potential in terms of growth and employment generation.

House Prices

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which house price inflation continues to be monitored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37584/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The most recent Residential Property Price Index for August 2014 published by the Central Statistics Office indicates that national residential property prices increased by 2.3 per cent between July and August and by 14.9 per cent on an annual basis. Prices in Dublin increased 3.5 per cent over the month to August and were up 25.1 per cent in year-on-year terms. Outside of Dublin the rate of price growth stood at 0.8 per cent between July and August, up 5.6 per cent in year-on-year terms.

In relation to house prices specifically, in the year to August these increased by 14.6% nationally. In Dublin the price increase was 24.7% and outside Dublin house price inflation stood at 5.8% for the year.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department continues to monitor price and other devel-

opments in the house purchase and rental property markets. As set out in the Construction 2020 Strategy, the Government continues to work on addressing remaining challenges in the property and construction sectors.

Insurance Industry Regulation

84. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 155 of 6 May 2014, if he will provide an update in relation to the Setanta Insurance issue; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are numerous persons in County Waterford and indeed across the country who have been left in a terrible position (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37603/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware of the difficulties that the liquidation of Setanta Insurance Company Limited has caused for Setanta policyholders and those claiming compensation under Setanta insurance policies. My Department and the Central Bank will in due course be reviewing the overall circumstances relating to Setanta and will report to me on what lessons can be learned and how the framework can be strengthened.

With regard to the position of Setanta claimants, you will appreciate that a liquidation of an insurance company is a legally complex and time consuming process. In general terms, under the Statute of Limitations, claimants are given two years following an accident to make an initial claim. However, it could take several years for a particular case to be finalised. Setanta is a Maltese incorporated company and, therefore, the Setanta liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law. The Setanta Liquidator is currently examining a range of factors in order to estimate the cost of claims and the extent to which claims can be met in the Setanta liquidation. The Liquidator has advised that settlements can only be paid out after all of the company's liabilities are quantified, including claims.

The Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF) provides for payments to meet the liabilities of insolvent insurers in certain cases where it is unlikely that claims can be met otherwise than from the ICF. Under the Insurance Act 1964 claims by bodies corporate or unincorporated bodies are not covered by the ICF, except where there is a liability to or by an individual. In addition, all ICF payments are subject to a limit of 65% of the amount due or €825,000, whichever is the lesser. Management and administration of the ICF is under the control of the President of the High Court acting through the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. The Accountant of the Courts of Justice is currently engaging with both the Setanta Liquidator and his legal advisors to put in place an appropriate mechanism to commence making applications to the High Court in accordance with the Insurance Act 1964. I understand that at the moment the Accountant is not in a position to put a timeline on when the first applications will be made. Procedures for processing claims and the timing of payments, including the question of advance payments from the ICF, is a matter for the President of the High Court. I have asked that this information on procedures is made available publicly as soon as possible. While this process is still ongoing, the Setanta Liquidator has advised that policyholders and brokers should send correspondence in relation to individual claims or other claims matters as soon as is possible to Setanta Insurance Company Limited (in liquidation) at:

Deloitte & Touche

Earlsfort Terrace

Dublin 2

Tel: 0818 255 255

Email: iesetanta@deloitte.ie

Flood Prevention Measures

85. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for flooding alleviation projects to be carried out in the Kilmoyley area of County Kerry, in view of the flooding that has taken place over the past number of winters. [37473/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address. The Local Authority may carry out flood mitigation and coastal protection works using its own resources. It may also apply to the Office of Public Works for funding for flood mitigation works under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. If Kerry County Council submits an application for funding in respect of Kilmoyley it will be assessed under the eligibility criteria of the Scheme, which include a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, having regard to the OPW's overall availability of funding. Application forms and related guidelines are available on OPW's website www.opw.ie.

Flood Prevention Measures

86. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for flooding alleviation projects to be carried out in the Ballyduff area of County Kerry, in view of the flooding that has taken place over the past number of winters. [37474/14]

87. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for flooding alleviation projects to be carried out in the Cashen area of County Kerry, in view of the flooding that has taken place over the past number of winters. [37475/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 87 together.

Moneycashen, which consists of parts of the townlands of Kilmore, Cloghane & Knoppoge in the Cashen area, was identified through the national Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) as a location where coastal flood risk was potentially significant. A detailed assessment is being carried out under the Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Study. The Office of Public Works is currently undertaking this in partnership with the relevant local authorities including Kerry County Council. Draft flood maps have been produced for Moneycashen and were subject to a public consultation day that was held in Ballyduff on 24th September 2014. Feedback from that event and a forthcoming national consultation process will be taken account of before the flood maps are finalised. Subsequent phases of the Shannon CFRAM Study will involve an options assessment process followed by the preparation of Flood Risk Management Plans. Further information and updates on the Shannon CFRAM Study are available on www.shannoncframstudy.ie.

The Office of Public Works has recently completed the refurbishment of 2,000m of flood defences on the River Cashen at Derryco and other works are ongoing in the area. OPW has also recently extended flood defences at Ragoonagh on the Cashen for a length of 500m to provide protection to a number of houses in the area.

OPW has also carried out an examination of the feasibility of dredging the River Feale/Cashen estuary. This examination has concluded that while this dredging would provide some relief to the flooding problem in the area, it is likely to cost several million euro, and that there is little likelihood of funding for this being available in the foreseeable future. Further, because this area is a Special Area of Conservation and a Natural Heritage Area of European impor-

tance, significant constraints will apply to any work. In the short to medium term, the OPW will consider the installation of localised pumping facilities as funds and resources allow, in the polders worst affected by flooding.

Commercial Rates

88. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the unprecedented number of appeals lodged with the Valuation Tribunal arising from the revaluation of rateable properties in Dublin city and County Waterford; if additional staff will be deployed to the tribunal to supplement its current small cohort of staff to process appeals in an expeditious manner; if such extra staff will be deployed from the Office of the Commissioner of Valuation which is the respondent in all valuation appeals heard by the tribunal; and if so, if there will be measures put in place to ensure the knowledge of procedures, work practices and other confidential information pertinent to the tribunal and acquired by such staff will not be used by the office of the commissioner upon the return of the aforementioned temporarily redeployed staff. [37527/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In recognition of the increased volume of appeals to the Valuation Tribunal arising from the revaluation of Dublin City and Waterford rating authority areas my Department approved last August a proposal for the secondment/redeployment of seven staff, one Higher Executive Officer (Assistant Registrar), two Executive Officers and four Clerical Officers to the Valuation Tribunal on a temporary basis to cover the period when these appeals will be heard.

Given the importance of the national revaluation programme and the fact that there was no capacity in the Valuation Office at the time to assign staff to the Tribunal my Department's sanction allowed for the temporary filling of these vacancies either from the central redeployment panel or by secondment.

The Commissioner of Valuation and the Valuation Tribunal are independent in the exercise of their functions and it is a matter for them to make their own operational arrangements.

Departmental Records

89. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number and location of sites at which the Office of Public Works store public records which are ultimately intended to be forwarded to the National Archives in time; for which Departments of State and agencies are records stored at each site; the total cost in 2012 and 2013 for the storage of these records broken down by costs borne by the OPW and costs borne by another Department at each site; the number of staff employed at each site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37549/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy, as it relates to the Office of Public Works, is not readily available in the format requested. The Commissioners of Public Works are currently assembling the information. The Commissioners would point out that they would not be able to comment as to whether documents stored on behalf of client Departments and or Offices would be intended for the National Archives. When the required information is compiled, a comprehensive reply will issue directly to the Deputy.

Drainage Schemes Status

90. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when drainage of a river (details supplied) in County Mayo will take place; if he will confirm that the programme of works for 2014 is progressing as planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37426/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works has statutory responsibility for the maintenance of the Glone River, which forms part of the Moy Arterial Drainage Scheme.

Works are progressing at present on this river as part of the OPW arterial drainage maintenance programme for 2014. Due to low water some works may be delayed.

Liaison is continuing with the environmental stakeholders and, with continued agreement, it is intended to continue the current works through the Cave, Ballyhaunis area along the full length of the Scheduled Channel.

Appointments to State Boards

91. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year, from 2011 to date in 2014. [37494/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I have the authority to appoint Board members to An Post National Lottery and the Public Appointments Service.

The appointments process for the new board of the Public Appointments Service is currently underway. As part of this vacancies have been advertised on the *stateboards.ie* portal. I expect to make appointments to the board very shortly.

With regard to An Post National Lottery the following is the position. The positions to which Mr. Connell and the An Post nominees, (Mr. Dermot Griffin, Ms. Caroline Murphy and Mr. Peter Quinn) were re-appointed by me as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform were not advertised as under the National Lottery Act 1986, the majority shareholder of the National Lottery Company (i.e. An Post) nominates the persons to fill these positions.

The positions to which Mr. Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh and Mr. Oliver Wilkinson were re-appointed were to be filled by Ministerial nominees. In light of the imminent expiry of the existing licence and the new approach being taken by me with regard to the next licence it was considered prudent to allow for a level of continuity in the Board of the National Lottery Company at that time.

Consequently, I can confirm that no positions on State Boards under the aegis of my Department were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service since 2011 and to date in 2014.

Legislative Process

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Valuation (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2012 will be enacted including the provision which

makes changes to the liability of certain sports clubs to local authority rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37601/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Valuation (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2012 commenced Committee Stage in the Seanad yesterday. Further time for the Committee Stage in the Seanad is scheduled for early October.

This is a complex piece of legislation and there are a significant number of amendments to be debated. Among the amendments which we are bringing forward will be one that will ease the rates burden for many local community sports clubs. Community sports clubs will only be liable for rates on those parts of their buildings that are used for the generation of income such as the sale of alcohol.

Subject to the deliberations in the Oireachtas and the availability of time in the Seanad and in the Dáil, I would like to see this Bill enacted before the end of the year.

Consumer Prices Data

93. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to a promotional leaflet which was distributed as part of the “No” campaign prior to the referendum on the question of Scottish independence which quoted a significant price differential between a UK store (details supplied) and its equivalent here for the same basket of goods; his views on the prices charged by Irish based stores and large supermarkets compared to their equivalents in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37450/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the claim to which the Deputy refers was made in campaign literature during the recent Scottish referendum campaign where prices at a named retailer in Ireland were used as a basis to suggest that shopping in Scotland could cost more if the referendum succeeded.

I am aware, of course, of the concerns that have been expressed in relation to the differential in consumer prices between this country and certain other jurisdictions and particularly in the case of our nearest neighbour, the United Kingdom. Recent statistics published by the Central Statistics Office show that consumer prices on average were 0.4% higher in August 2014 when compared with prices prevailing in August 2013. The latest EU Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), which is accepted as the most appropriate measure for community wide comparisons (and is also published by the Central Statistics Office), show that price index levels increased in Ireland by 0.36% in the 12 month period between August 2013 and July 2014. Price index levels increased across the EU by 0.44% for the same period while in the UK, the Index shows that price index levels rose by 1.5% in the period between August 2013 and June 2014 (the latest UK figures at the time of publication).

The Government is fully committed to pursuing the competitiveness agenda, including in the area of prices so as to ensure that Irish consumers receive and can expect to receive a fair deal in the goods and services that they buy. Changes in patterns of consumer behaviour in recent years have also prompted grocery retailers to respond by offering keener prices, better value and more competition in terms of the options open to consumers when they purchase grocery goods.

Trade Agreements

94. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation whether,

if the EU and US agree on the transatlantic trade and investment partnership, it will be debated and approved by Dáil Éireann before being accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37469/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The EU and the US agree that a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership [TTIP] Agreement would be good for growth and jobs on both sides of the Atlantic, and this gave rise to the opening of negotiations, which began in July, 2013. This week sees the 7th formal round of negotiations taking place.

The TTIP will be an Agreement within the meaning of Article 29.5.2 of the Constitution. Ratification by Ireland will therefore be subject to prior approval of Dáil Éireann.

Local Enterprise Offices Expenditure

95. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide in tabular form a breakdown of the total funds distributed by the local enterprise offices by county per month in 2013 and to date in 2014. [37479/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Details of the funding distributed by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) by County in 2013 and in 2014 to date are set out in the following table. This information is not available on a monthly basis as there would be a significant administrative burden on the LEOs in reporting at such a frequency.

The Deputy should note that the information provided for 2013 relates to the County Enterprise Boards (CEBs), while the information provided for 2014 represents combined CEB and LEO expenditure, since the CEBs were dissolved on 15 April 2014. The Local Authorities for Counties Limerick, Tipperary and Waterford have recently merged resulting in the City and County Enterprise Boards in those areas being combined as a single LEO. Therefore the 2014 figures for the former CEBs in these Counties have been amalgamated, as have the figures for the CEBs in Cork North and Cork West, which now operate as a single LEO.

As in 2013 the expectation for 2014 is that the budget allocation available to the LEOs will be fully drawn down by year end.

County	TOTAL 2013	TOTAL (June 2014)
-	€	€
Carlow	398,283	246,108
Cavan	576,402	253,263
Clare	367,488	289,978
Cork City	511,530	185,235
Cork North West	875,333	262,517
Cork South	1,135,247	303,922
Donegal	772,564	45,142
Dublin City	1,136,326	354,195
Dublin South	753,468	183,409
Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown	815,919	261,458
Fingal	860,168	247,804
Galway	789,130	42,412
Kerry	501,033	151,808

County	TOTAL 2013	TOTAL (June 2014)
-	€	€
Kildare	538,470	178,437
Kilkenny	425,013	161,472
Laois	363,181	153,180
Leitrim	310,773	137,271
Limerick	982,316	114,387
Longford	369,373	124,012
Louth	418,606	239,332
Mayo	398,963	165,443
Meath	665,949	100,350
Monaghan	407,573	97,080
Offaly	392,299	266,362
Roscommon	366,498	7,600
Sligo	439,668	414,333
Tipperary North	900,655	305,658
Waterford	1,009,972	614,371
Westmeath	626,934	96,519
Wexford	749,145	242,509
Wicklow	660,273	239,791
Total	19,518,550	6,485,357

Local Enterprise Offices

96. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide in tabular form, by county, a monthly breakdown of the total number of applications for support formally received and acknowledged by the local enterprise offices in 2013 and to date in 2014. [37480/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) were established on 15 April 2014 on foot of the legal dissolution of the County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs). The LEOs are the First-Stop-Shop through which all information on State supports for small and micro business can be accessed.

Details of the number of applications for support formally received and acknowledged by the LEOs by county in 2013 and in 2014 to date are set out in tables 1 and 2. The data for LEO Meath for 2014 is currently unavailable.

Table 1 - 2013

County	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Carlow	0	9	2	0	0	17	6	0	24	3	4	1
Cavan	2	6	0	0	3	0	0	3	6	0	3	1
Clare	0	10	6	2	4	3	2	3	2	1	3	0
Cork	16	8	13	11	3	8	6	3	11	18	6	6
Donegal	2	0	3	0	7	9	1	1	4	0	6	0
Dublin	11	36	10	16	22	23	6	47	10	27	14	3
Galway	7	1	1	5	1	0	1	1	0	4	0	0

Questions - Written Answers

County	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Kerry	6	8	9	1	8	3	5	0	6	2	5	1
Kildare	4	4	1	4	6	1	5	5	2	6	3	1
Kilkenny	2	2	5	0	2	5	0	3	3	2	7	0
Laois	1	0	1	1	1	3	2	1	2	1	1	0
Leitrim	0	5	0	9	0	1	0	5	0	9	0	0
Limerick	12	11	0	3	7	5	2	10	4	5	3	0
Longford	3	7	2	10	6	5	0	2	8	2	5	2
Louth	6	7	3	4	3	4	5	5	3	1	6	0
Mayo	0	2	2	1	3	3	6	1	5	0	1	5
Meath	9	6	3	6	3	7	3	9	2	7	8	0
Monaghan	0	0	1	5	0	1	1	3	3	0	0	0
Offaly	4	2	3	4	1	3	2	2	2	4	5	1
Roscommon	2	4	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	5	1	1
Sligo	0	2	1	1	1	3	3	0	7	1	3	4
Tipperary	7	11	5	4	6	1	1	4	8	6	1	0
Waterford	2	16	4	11	3	10	3	6	8	10	5	2
Westmeath	5	2	8	1	1	4	0	0	3	5	3	0
Wexford	9	4	6	6	4	3	2	6	3	5	0	2
Wicklow	5	3	4	2	6	0	3	4	0	2	4	0
TOTAL	115	166	93	111	101	124	63	123	126	125	97	30

Table 2 - 2014

County	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept
Carlow	2	11	1	3	5	0	8	3	0
Cavan	1	6	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Clare	5	0	2	1	5	4	0	0	11
Cork	16	6	4	1	3	6	0	1	2
Donegal	2	3	0	0	3	3	2	2	0
Dublin	27	40	14	12	8	2	26	3	16
Galway	8	2	1	1	0	5	2	0	0
Kerry	6	10	2	2	6	2	2	4	2
Kildare	2	3	2	1	1	3	4	0	2
Kilkenny	7	0	2	0	7	0	1	0	4
Laois	0	1	1	0	2	5	1	5	0
Leitrim	0	0	11	0	0	1	0	2	0
Limerick	13	3	15	0	3	5	2	4	2
Longford	8	3	4	2	0	0	0	0	0
Louth	9	5	4	0	9	1	0	0	0
Mayo	4	5	3	0	2	5	0	0	0
Meath	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Monaghan	2	4	0	2	1	4	0	0	0
Offaly	6	7	5	1	1	2	2	2	2
Roscommon	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0

County	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept
Sligo	4	5	3	1	0	1	0	0	0
Tipperary	3	5	11	0	4	9	2	8	1
Waterford	13	6	5	2	7	0	7	1	2
Westmeath	6	1	2	1	8	2	3	0	0
Wexford	5	7	8	4	8	1	5	0	2
Wicklow	3	0	7	0	8	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	152	134	109	34	89	57	66	31	46

Appointments to State Boards

97. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37492/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Since coming to Office in March 2011, I have made 42 appointments to the Boards of Agencies under my Department's remit within my discretion. Appointments and reappointments were also allocated under legislation to Department Representatives, social partners, nominees of other Ministers, nominees of prescribed bodies and appointments on an Ex Officio basis and were not appropriate, therefore, for public advertisement.

In making appointments to State Boards, I am guided in the first instance by the requirement to ensure the appointment of appropriately skilled persons, and since coming to office, have actively sought the assistance of the Public Appointments Service (PAS) in this regard. Since my appointment, 30 appointments to State Boards (ie 71% of those within my discretion) have resulted from Expressions of Interest submitted to PAS.

I am satisfied that the involvement of the PAS in this process has assisted me in appointing appropriately skilled and experienced people for participation on State Boards, and I will continue to rely on PAS assistance in respect of future appointments.

The percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of my Department that were filled within my discretion in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service since my appointment in 2011 to date in 2014 is as follows:

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Forfás ⁽¹⁾	Nil	N/A	N/A	N/A
IDA	Nil	0%	Nil	0%
EI	Nil	66%	100%	50%
NSAI	Nil	100%	100%	66%
SFI	Nil	Nil	100%	Nil
HSA	Nil	Nil	Nil	100%
IAASA	Nil	100%	Nil	Nil
PIAB	Nil	100%	Nil	100%
InterTrade Ireland	25%	Nil	33%	Nil
NCA ⁽²⁾	Nil	100%	100%	Nil

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Shannon Development ⁽³⁾	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Labour Relations Commission ⁽⁴⁾	See footnote below			
Totals	1	11	10	8

1 In 2012, following the decision to integrate Forfás into my Department, I reduced the numbers serving on the Forfás Board from 13 to 6 - comprising the Board Chairman, DJEI Secretary General and 4 ex officio appointments, (CEOs of Forfás IDA and EI and the Director General of SFI). Forfás was dissolved on 1 August 2014.

2 The National Consumer Agency will no longer exist from the 31 October 2014, as it is being merged with the Competition Authority to create the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, which will not itself have a Board.

3 Shannon Development Board has been merged with the Shannon Airport Authority and no longer has its own Board.

4 The Board of the Labour Relations Commission is being renewed on a year by year basis, pending the creation of the Workplace Relations Commission.

IDA Staff

98. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will report on the new Government Winning Abroad programme; the number of persons recruited under this scheme; the location of each of the executives; the amount made available to fund this initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37557/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): In support of the Government's jobs strategy and in particular the 2014 Action Plan for Jobs, IDA Ireland has commenced an exciting and innovative new programme over a 3 year period from 2014 to 2017 entitled Winning Abroad under the Government's Action Plan for Jobs 2014.

Winning Abroad will market Ireland's value proposition and its range of advantages as a location for inward investment to international companies across high value manufacturing, RD&I and global business services. The initiative's target is to win an additional 10,000 jobs for Ireland.

In June, IDA Ireland advertised in the media for 35 Results Driven Global Business Development Executives. The newly recruited staff will be on contracts for a period of 3 years, to cover the lifetime of the programme. As with all job advertisements in IDA Ireland, there was a very strong response from the public. The intense process of screening and selecting the applicants with the visa requirements and the particular skills and competencies to represent Ireland in the overseas marketplace commenced thereafter. Roles are based in locations including Boston, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Austin, Mountain View, Irvine, London, Frankfurt, Paris, Tokyo, Shanghai, Sydney and Dublin. Funding for this initiative is provided through IDA Ireland's budget allocation from the exchequer.

IDA Ireland recruited a Programme Manager to manage the process and since then 16 competitions have been completed with 6 staff recruited to date for global locations. By early No-

vember there will be 16 people recruited. Interviews are ongoing globally for the remaining positions which should see the Winning Abroad recruitment process concluded by the end of December.

Work Permit Applications

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration will be given to the issue of a work permit in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37558/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The case of the person named in the Deputy's question has been the subject of considerable engagement over many months between my Department and the employer concerned. The employer has indicated this week that additional information pertaining to the individual concerned will be supplied to my Department, and as soon as we have received it, we will be in a position to decide on the case.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

100. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of the amount concerned as a percentage of the maximum amount payable and the further implications for payment through other departmental schemes, the reason that a visual on-site inspection was not carried out with respect to the 2013 disadvantaged area payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37433/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A review of the land parcels declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that one of the land parcels in question contained ineligible features. Following the review of my Department's decision, sought by the person named, a visit by a Department official to verify the position on the ground is necessary. The person named will be informed of the outcome of this inspection in due course.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

101. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the agri-environment options scheme application appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37434/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Agriculture Appeals Office is in receipt of an appeal in respect of the above-named person. As part of the appeal process the person named requested an oral hearing which was held on 17 September 2014. The appellant will be notified, in writing, of the decision in this case in due course.

Vacancies on State Boards

102. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Pub-

lic Appointments Service by year from to 2011 to date in 2014. [37482/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since May 2011, a notification has been placed on my Department's website inviting expressions of interest from persons interested in being appointed to the boards of State Bodies under the aegis of my Department. This notification is updated periodically with a list of board vacancies. Also I have placed advertisements in the national newspapers inviting expressions of interest. In making any board appointments, I am not necessarily confined to those who make such expressions of interest but ensure that all of those appointed have the relevant mix of knowledge and expertise to contribute to the relevant board.

In the case of The Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board, Bord Bia, Teagasc, National Milk Agency, Veterinary Council of Ireland and Horse Racing Ireland, board appointments, while made by me, are not at my sole discretion in that individuals are nominated for appointment by me, as provided for in the relevant statute.

In view of the arrangements outlined above I am satisfied that the most suitably qualified persons are selected for appointment to State Boards under the aegis of my Department.

As you will be aware, a new approach to State appointments has been agreed by Government and will be introduced as per Government guidelines for all future appointments.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

103. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding area based payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37498/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme began issuing, on target, on 24 September; as processing of the application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Departmental Schemes

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the planting of forestry in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37506/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is understood that the person named has yet to submit an application under the Afforestation Scheme. The reference quoted may refer to a Land Registry application. Where there are constraints on ownership, such as turbary rights, the Department cannot give approval to plant until such time as documentary evidence is submitted showing that all such rights have been extinguished. Once these rights have been extinguished, or released by the holders of such rights, an application under the Afforestation Scheme may be submitted. Alternatively, the areas the subject of turbary rights could be removed from any proposed application.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

105. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry did not receive a headage payment. [37525/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment in

respect of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 20 December 2013. Payments under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme began issuing, on target, on 24 September. Payment has not yet issued to the person named as, at this stage, the holding of the person named has not yet satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. Immediately the holding concerned is confirmed as having met these requirements, the case will be further processed with a view to payment at the earliest possible date thereafter, provided all other Scheme requirements have been satisfied.

Appointments to State Boards

106. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37486/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The State Boards under the aegis of the Department of Defence when the Government took office were the Civil Defence Board, the Board of Coiste an Asgard and the Army Pensions Board. The Civil Defence Board was identified in the Public Service Reform Plan as a body to be abolished. The then Minister for Defence appointed a 14 person interim Board as a temporary measure in 2011 and in this context none of the positions were advertised. Legislation to dissolve the Board was passed by the Oireachtas in December 2012. Its functions have now transferred back to the Department of Defence.

There were no appointments to the Board of Coiste an Asgard from 2009. In the context of settling the Estimates for the Department of Defence for 2010, the Government decided that the national sail training scheme operated by Coiste an Asgard would be discontinued as recommended in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure.

The formal wind up of the Company including voluntary strike off with the Companies Registration Office was completed in early 2013.

The only body currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. The Army Pensions Board is an independent statutory body established under the Army Pensions Act, 1927. The Act specifies that the Board shall consist of a chairman and two ordinary members. The two ordinary members must be qualified medical practitioners of whom one must be an officer of the Army Medical Corps. The chairman and the non military ordinary member are appointed by the Minister for Defence with the concurrence of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Army Medical Corps ordinary member is appointed by the Minister for Defence on the recommendation of the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces.

There have been two appointments to the Army Pensions Board since March 2011. A serving officer was appointed to the position of Army Medical Corps member of the Board in December 2011, and a civilian doctor was appointed as ordinary member in November 2013.

The position of Army Medical Corps ordinary member became vacant due to retirement in 2011. The then Minister for Defence appointed Commandant Adam Lagun to the Board on the recommendation of the Chief of Staff. As the Army Pensions Act, 1927 specifies that one of the ordinary members must be an officer of the Army Medical Corps, this position was not publicly advertised. Details of Commandant Lagun's appointment to the Army Pensions Board were published in the *Iris Oifigiúil* on 13 January 2012.

The civilian doctor vacancy was advertised on the Department of Defence website and the Public Appointments Service website. A number of expressions of interest in the position were received and Dr. Loretta Nolan was appointed to the Board on foot of this public advertisement

process. Details of Dr. Nolan's appointment to the Army Pensions Board were published in the *Iris Oifigiúil* on 10 December 2013.

Garda Vetting Applications

107. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications for vetting awaiting decision or clearance as from the 1 January 2014 to date; the month in respect of which such vetting applications were first received; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37416/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information sought by the Deputy is currently being collated by the Garda Central Vetting Unit and I will communicate further with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Alcohol Sales Legislation

108. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) in County Clare may change their existing six day licence to a seven day licence and the way this person may change this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37417/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position is that section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2000 made provision for the upgrading of restricted licences, including six-day licences, under certain conditions, including a specific condition that applications to the Revenue Commissioners for such upgrading be made within one year of the entry into force of that Act. Notwithstanding the upgrading scheme in 2000, I understand that a small number of restricted licences remain in existence and I intend to provide a further opportunity to upgrade these remaining licences in the Sale of Alcohol Bill which forms part of the Government's Legislation Programme published on 17 September 2014.

Prisoner Transfers

109. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the case of an imprisonment of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37460/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that an application has been received recently from the Spanish Authorities on behalf of the individual referred to in this question.

The application is receiving the necessary attention as is afforded to all such applications made under the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Act 1995 and 1997. The applicant will be notified directly of any developments in his case as they arise.

The Transfer of Sentenced Persons Acts, 1995 and 1997 provide a mechanism whereby non-nationals serving sentences in Ireland may apply to serve the remainder of their sentences in their own countries and, similarly, Irish persons who are imprisoned overseas may apply to serve the remainder of their sentences in Ireland. Such transfers may be facilitated where the other country has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons. Transfer requests under the Convention are normally made by a prisoner through the

governor of the prison in which he or she is detained. I decide on all such requests following the collation of a number of reports from various agencies setting out the consequences of such a transfer. The consent of the three parties in the process is required prior to any transfer, i.e. the sentencing state, the receiving state and the sentenced person.

However, the Deputy should be aware that the Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons does not confer an automatic right on any prisoner to be transferred nor does it confer an obligation on any state to comply with a transfer.

Appointments to State Boards

110. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of her Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37493/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is not feasible to provide the kind of percentage figures he has sought in relation to the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Board vacancies are not always advertised through the PAS as many are advertised on the Department's website or the websites of the organisations concerned. In addition, as the Deputy will be aware, there are many constraining factors which impact on the filling of vacancies to State Boards. I refer primarily to appointments where legislation requires that a vacancy must be filled by candidates holding certain qualifications or must be nominated by certain prescribed bodies thereby requiring no public advertisement of the vacancy. I am advised that in order to provide the information sought by the Deputy it would be necessary to disaggregate every appointments made since 2011 and that the resources are not available to undertake this task. However, to the extent possible I have provided below a narrative account of the vacancies filled since 2011 and the manner in which they were filled.

The Deputy may wish to note that the term 'State Boards' is somewhat imprecise as it includes bodies with a wide and diverse range of functions many of which would not fall into the more commonly understood definition of Board which is a body with a governance oversight of an organisation. To be of assistance to the Deputy I have interpreted his question as embracing all bodies called Boards, irrespective of their functions, as well as other bodies with a governance remit whose title does not include the term "Board".

Charities Regulatory Authority Board - Expressions of interest for appointment to the Board of the Charities Regulatory Authority were sought through the Public Appointments Service. Sixteen appointments were subsequently made to the Board of the Authority; thirteen of those appointed applied through the Public Appointments Service.

Children Detention Schools Board of Management - One appointment was made to the Children Detention Schools Board of Management. The position was not advertised as the appointment was made under Section 167(4)(a) of the Children Act 2001 as amended, which requires at least one officer of the Minister. The person appointed was a civil servant. The Deputy should note that responsibility for the Children Detention Schools Board of Management moved to the Department for Children and Youth Affairs on 1 January 2012.

Classification of Films Appeal Board - There are currently nine vacancies on the Classification of Films Appeal Board. Following an invitation to the public to submit expressions of interest, a total of forty-four applications were received. I expect to make appointments to these positions in the near future.

Courts Service Board - The Courts Service Board has seventeen members, it is chaired by the Chief Justice and includes eight other judges, the CEO of the Courts Service, persons nominated by the Law Society, Bar Council and ICTU, an elected staff representative and three persons nominated by the Minister for Justice. There have been 20 appointments, three of which were individuals nominated by my predecessor Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D. including a civil servant from my Department.

Garda Síochána Arbitration Board - The Garda Síochána Arbitration Board is appointed by the Government and consists of a Chairperson, a member nominated by the representatives associations and a member nominated by the Government. The Chairperson is appointed on the nomination of the Ministers for Justice & Equality and Public Expenditure & Reform in agreement with the representative associations. Four appointments were made to the board.

Garda Síochána Complaints Board - Nine appointments were made to board on 10 April 2012. These positions were not advertised. Eight of the outgoing members were re-appointed as the Board, which has been replaced by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, only had a few outstanding cases on hands at that time. The outstanding cases have now been finalised and the necessary steps to close the Board are now being put in place. The 9th appointee is a civil servant.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission - The Commission consists of three members, a Chairman and two members. These positions were advertised through the Public Appointments Service following which 40 applications were received. Three candidates were selected by my predecessor Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D. and approved by Government as having the appropriate experience, qualifications, training and expertise for the relevant roles.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission - On 8 September 2011, the Government decided to merge the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Authority to establish a new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) to promote human rights and equality issues in a more efficient, effective and coherent way. The 14 outgoing members of the Equality Authority accepted reappointment in September 2011 for a further term which concluded at the end of July 2012.

In the case of the Human Rights Commission three Commissioners were appointed by a Government Decision on the 20 December 2011 and their term expired on 31 May 2012. In November 2012, advertisements inviting expressions of interest for the position of Chief Commissioner and of “ordinary” members appeared in the media. The fourteen Members Designate of the new Commission were selected in April 2013 in a process independent of Government and appointed initially to the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission on an interim basis so that the two organisations could begin to operate as a cohesive whole. Following this experience, it was decided that the Public Appointments Service (PAS) should be responsible henceforth for selection of Commissioners, including Chief Commissioner post. The Government appointed the fourteen individuals as Members Designate of the Human Rights Commission in advance of the enactment and commencement of the required legislation. On 31 May 2013 the then Minister for Justice and Equality Mr Alan Shatter T.D. appointed twelve of their number to the Board of the Equality Authority, under the Employment Equality Act 1998, as amended. Emily Logan was recently nominated by the PAS as Chief Commissioner of the IHREC and at a Government meeting of the 23 July 2014 Ms Logan was appointed on an interim basis as President of the Human Rights Commission pursuant to section 5 of the Human Rights Commission Act 2000. She was also appointed as Chair of the Equality Authority pursuant to section 41 and 42 of the Employment Equality Act 1998. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 passed both Houses of the Oireachtas and was signed by the President on the 27 July 2014. It is expected that Ms. Logan’s formal appointment and the

formal appointment of the other fourteen members designate of the new IHREC will then be made by the President following the passing of motions in both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Judicial Appointments Advisory Board - Eleven appointments were made to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board. The Board consists of ten members, it is chaired by the Chief Justice and includes three other judges, the Attorney General, persons nominated by the Law Society and Bar Council and three persons nominated by the Minister for Justice and Equality. Five of the appointments were individuals nominated by myself or my predecessor Deputy Shatter.

Legal Aid Board - Fifteen appointments were made to this Board, nine of which were civil or public servants.

Mental Health (Criminal Law) Review Board - Five appointments were made to the Mental Health (Criminal Law) Review Board.

National Disability Authority (NDA) - Fourteen appointments were made to the National Disability Authority (NDA). Appointments to the Board were made from nominations of relevant Ministers, as prescribed in the National Disability Authority Act 1999 (the Act), an elected member of the staff of the NDA (also a requirement of the Act) and respondents to publicly advertised calls for expressions of interest (in line with Government Decision S180/20/10/1424 of April 2011). The Act also stipulates that in making appointments "*the Minister shall have regard to the objective that a majority of the Authority would be persons with disabilities, their representatives, families or carers, and, in the case of each member of the Authority, that he or she would have knowledge or experience, either directly or indirectly, of matters pertaining to disability or of any other subject which in the opinion of the Minister would be of assistance to the Authority in the performance of its functions*". The Act also makes reference to the objective that not less than 5 women and 5 men be appointed to the Board; and to the desirability that its members would include persons from both rural and urban areas.

Parole Board - Eleven appointments were made to the Parole Board. Individuals are appointed by the Minister on foot of their experience and expertise which is invaluable to the work of the Board.

Private Security Appeal Board - The Government appointed four people on 3 April 2012. The proposed Chairperson appeared before the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence. The Board may consist of as many members as are necessary for the expeditious discharge of its functions. The Chairman must be a practising barrister or solicitor of at least seven years' standing.

Private Security Authority (PSA) - Eleven appointments were made out of which seven positions were publically advertised, as the remaining four positions, in accordance with the relevant legislation, are to be nominated representatives from my own Department, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, An Garda Síochána and the PSA itself. Six members, including the Chairman, were appointed following the seeking of expressions of interest on the Public Appointments Service and Department of Justice websites. These members include representation from employer and employee organisations in the private security industry.

Four members are nominated representatives from Departments/Agencies, i.e Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Employment, Department of Justice and Equality, An Garda Síochána and the Private Security Authority in accordance with Section 7 of the Private Security Services Act 2004 (as amended). Section 7(2)(a) of the Act states that membership of the Board shall include a practising barrister or solicitor of not less than five years standing. One member was a discretionary appointment made by the Minister.

Property Registration Authority - Eight appointments were made to the Property Registration Authority. Following an invitation to the public to submit expressions of interest, a total of 84 applications were received. Four of the eight appointments were public applicants. Of the remaining four appointments made, in accordance with the relevant legislation, one is a nominee of the Law Society, one is a nominee of the Bar Council, one is the elected Property Registration Authority staff representative, and one is an Officer of the Minister.

Property Services Appeal Board - The Government made six appointments after seeking expressions of interest of which my Department received 41 applications. Those appointed were public applicants. The proposed Chairperson appeared before the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence.

Property Services Regulatory Authority - Eleven appointments were made to the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA). My Department received 114 applications after seeking expressions of interest from members of the public. Nine of those appointed were public applicants, one is a civil servant and the Chairperson, who was a member of the Property Services Regulatory Authority Implementation Team, was appointed in order to provide continuity to the Authority which had operated on a non-statutory basis for a number of years. The proposed Chairperson appeared before the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence.

Departmental Expenditure

111. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the photography costs incurred by her Department from May 2014 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37499/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The photography costs incurred by my Department from the date of my appointment on the 8th May to date are €398.52.

I can inform the Deputy that photographic services are only used by my Department to mark and provide a record of significant occasions. Consideration is given at all times to the costs involved and best value for money is always a priority when sourcing such services.

European Arrest Warrant

112. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of requests, on an annual basis, that have been received here for extraditions under a European arrest warrant; the number of persons that have been detained; and the number extradited. [37505/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 6(6) of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003 provides that the Central Authority for the European arrest warrant (EAW) shall prepare an annual report to the Oireachtas on the operation of Part 2 of the Act in the preceding year. Part 2 relates to EAWs received in the State and EAWs issued by the State. The annual report in respect of 2013 was laid before the Oireachtas on 10 April 2014. The report provides comprehensive statistics in respect of the operation of the Act since 1 January 2004.

In so far as the information sought by the Deputy is concerned, the position, in respect of 2013, is as follows:

- 223 EAWs were received from Member States by the Central Authority in 2013,

- 99 arrests were made in this jurisdiction in 2013 pursuant to EAWs received and endorsed in 2013, and

- 157 EAWs resulted in the surrender of persons to other Member States in 2013.

Crime Prevention

113. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reduce knife crime; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37511/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As I recently advised the Deputy, I can assure him that I am in ongoing contact with the Garda Commissioner in relation to a wide range of crime and policing concerns, including knife and other violent crime.

A comprehensive and robust legal framework is in place with respect to knife crime including heavy penalties for breaches of the laws concerned. In recent years the maximum penalty for possessing a knife in a public place without good reason or lawful authority has been increased from one to five years, and An Garda Síochána also now have an extended power of search without warrant in relation to knives and offensive weapons.

At an operational level, An Garda Síochána proactively target public disorder and anti-social behaviour, including knife related crime through the strategic deployment of Garda resources. In this regard, areas identified as public order hot-spots by local Garda management are the subject of additional foot and mobile patrols. In addition, Detective Units and Divisional Crime Task Forces may be utilised to provide a high visibility presence in areas such as late night bars, clubs etc, particularly when people are exiting, to deter and detect anti-social behaviour and possible altercations. However, it should be noted that many knife crimes occur in domestic settings and often with a degree of spontaneity, which increases the challenges for preventative policing and enforcement.

In relation to the investigation of specific knife-related crimes, I am assured that all appropriate resources, including any necessary technical and forensic facilities, are employed by An Garda Síochána to secure detections and identify perpetrators of these crimes.

In addition to these enforcement measures, An Garda Síochána is involved in a number of awareness measures relating to knife crime, and I understand that the Garda Schools Programme is utilised to include talks on knives and other weapons for secondary school pupils, emphasising the dangers involved and the need for care, vigilance and social responsibility.

Naturalisation Applications

114. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; the timeframe for this process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37526/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received on 19 August 2014 from the person referred to by the Deputy.

The application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and

lawful residence, and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. While processing requirements and time taken to carry out necessary checks vary from case to case, more than 70% of applications are being decided within 6 months.

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

Fuel Laundering

115. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints of petrol stretching the gardaí in Mayo divisions have received for each month for the past four months; the position regarding these complaints; the number that have been investigated resulting in an individual being charged or a file being forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37529/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been advised by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána's Mayo Division has received eighty six complaints of petrol stretching in the past four months. These complaints, details of the numbers of which are shown in the table below, have been received by the Garda Divisions in Claremorris and Ballina.

I am further informed that these complaints are currently under investigation and that no individuals have been charged nor files forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions to date. An Garda Síochána are continuing to investigate these complaints and are liaising with the injured parties. Contact has also been made with Revenue's Customs Service who take the enforcement lead nationally in relation to this issue and who have arranged to have fuel samples from these cases analysed for contaminants.

In terms of the overall national position, I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they have received a number of reports of problems relating to petrol quality from around the country in recent weeks and that such reports are followed up as a matter of course and samples sent to the State Laboratory for analysis where officers have reason to suspect excise duty fraud.

Petrol stretching is a matter of serious concern because of the risks to the Exchequer, the threat to legitimate businesses and the damage that can be caused to the vehicles of unsuspecting purchasers of adulterated fuel. Under Section 102 of the Finance Act 1999, it is an offence to sell and/or deliver oil on which Mineral Oil Tax at the appropriate rate has not been paid.

In the normal course of work, Revenue's enforcement staff take samples of fuel, which are sent to the State Laboratory for scientific analysis, from mineral oil suppliers, including filling stations, to ensure compliance with mineral oil regulations. If the results of the analysis reveals the presence of any illegal stretching agents, I can assure the Deputy that the Revenue Commissioners will take action and pursue prosecutions against offenders where possible.

I am further advised that Revenue and the oil sector have co-operated very successfully to tackle diesel laundering and are confident that, with this co-operation and with the supply chain information available to Revenue, the problem of petrol stretching can also be tackled successfully. In this regard it is essential that petrol distributors report on any reduction in the pattern

of legitimate supplies of fuel to the retail trade which may indicate that specific retailers are shifting some of their sourcing to laundered or “stretched” fuel.

In addition, motorists themselves should take care with regard to their source of petrol and report any suspicions concerning adulterated fuel which may have damaged their engines to Revenue who will investigate such reports and pursue prosecutions against offenders where possible. In that regard Revenue has recently launched a dedicated section of its website at www.revenue.ie specifically on the shadow economy and this includes an electronic reporting facility for anyone who has information about shadow economy practices such as petrol stretching.

Table 1- Complaints re suspected petrol contamination to An Garda Síochána Mayo’s Division June - September 2014

Month	Claremorris District	Ballina District
June	0	0
July	1	0
August	10	0
September	59	16
Total	70	16

Residency Permits

116. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a stamp 4 application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37532/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service that the person mentioned by the Deputy applied for a change of immigration status on 10 February 2014. This application will shortly receive attention and a reply will duly issue to his legal representative.

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

Residency Permits

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding examination of residency entitlement in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37561/14]

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 concerned was granted permission to remain in the State for the two year period ending 16th November, 2014. It will be open to the person concerned to apply in writing for the renewal of this permission one month before their current permission expires.

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.

Asylum Applications

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding determination of eligibility for asylum and-or refugee status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37563/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, if the person whose details were supplied 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

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37566/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status does not arise at this time in the case of the person whose details were supplied.

As the Deputy will be 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

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37568/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status does not arise at this time in the case of the person whose details were supplied.

As the Deputy will be 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

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed with regard to a passport in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37569/14]

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 concerned has applied for a right of residency in the State, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child, and based also on the principles of the Zambrano Judgment. While the person concerned has submitted some of the required documentation, other items of documentation remain outstanding. Foremost among the outstanding items are a clear copy of the bio-data page from the Irish citizen child's passport and documentation which shows the role they are playing in the child's life. Upon receipt of the outstanding documentation, this application can be further considered.

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.

Deportation Orders

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37571/14]

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 concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, made on 25th May, 2011.

Representations have been received on behalf of the person concerned, requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This application is under consideration at present. The Deputy might wish to note that the decision resulting from this consideration will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

As the Deputy will be aware, the effect of a Deportation Order is that the person subject of the Order must leave the State and remain thereafter outside the State.

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.

Naturalisation Applications

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare regarding an application for naturalisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37572/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Officials in the Citizen-

ship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) inform me that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question or her mother.

Section 15 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in her absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. The conditions are that the applicant must:

- be of full age

- be of good character

- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years

- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation

- have, before a judge of the District Court in open court, in a citizenship ceremony or in such manner as the Minister, for special reasons, allows—

- (i) made a declaration, in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, and

- (ii) undertaken to faithfully observe the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values.

A foreign national who is married to, or is the civil partner of, an Irish citizen for at least three years may apply for naturalisation under section 15A of the Irish Naturalisation and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, where they have been continuously resident in the island of Ireland for the year immediately prior to the date of their application and for two out of the four years prior to that year. The marriage or civil partnership must be subsisting and recognised under Irish law. Section 15A provides that the Minister may waive certain conditions for naturalisation if satisfied that the applicant would suffer serious consequences in respect of his or her bodily integrity or liberty if not granted Irish citizenship.

Section 16 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in her absolute discretion, waive some or all of the statutory conditions in certain circumstances e.g. where an applicant is of Irish descent or of Irish associations; where an applicant is a person who is a refugee within the meaning of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; where an applicant is a Stateless person within the meaning of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons; or where the application is made on behalf of the minor child of a naturalised Irish citizen.

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

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

School Completion Programme

124. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 745 of 17 September 2014, in relation to the review of the school completion programme to be completed by the Economic and Social Research Institute, if the steering committee overseeing the review will seek submissions from the staff and groups involved in locally managed projects providing support to young people under the programme. [37455/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The planned programme review of School Completion Programme, indicated in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure has commenced. The objectives of the review are to identify best practice, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to build upon the valuable learning and experience obtained to date across the programme.

The plan for the review includes arrangements to capture the views of a range of stakeholders, including staff and all those involved in the organisation and administration of the School Completion Programme.

It includes a survey to gather the views of project co-ordinators and chairpersons of the 124 local school completion programme projects throughout the country, case studies of projects involving staff and participating schools and interviews with national stakeholders who have a direct interest in the programme.

It is anticipated that the review will be completed during the current academic year.

Child Abuse Reports

125. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will report on the work of the Ryan report monitoring group since its establishment to date; and if a fourth progress report for the Ryan report implementation plan is being or has been prepared. [37456/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Following the publication of the Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report), in May 2009 a detailed Implementation Plan was published. The overall aim of the Plan which contains a total of 99 actions, is to make a difference to children's lives by addressing past failings and putting measures in place to achieve better outcomes in the delivery of services to children and families.

Implementation of the Plan has been overseen by a High Level Group chaired by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Group includes representatives from my Department, the Child and Family Agency (formerly the HSE), HIQA, the Irish Youth Justice Service, the Department of Education and Skills and An Garda Síochána. In May 2011, the Children's Rights Alliance were invited to join the Group in order to ensure the inclusion of the voices of children and civic society.

The Monitoring Group has presented three progress reports to the Government to date, which have been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The fourth and final monitoring report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Ryan Report is currently being finalised by officials in my Department and it will be published in the near future. While not wishing to pre-empt either the contents of the report, or the views of the Monitoring Group, I wish to reiterate that the Government has committed to the full implementation of the recom-

mendations contained in the Ryan Report.

My Department will continue to monitor the delivery of actions contained in the implementation plan in the context of the ongoing monitoring of the Child and Family Agency's Corporate Plan and Performance Statement. Work is underway in my Department to prepare a monitoring framework for all significant child care reports which is intended to be put in place following the completion of the formal monitoring process for the Ryan Commission Implementation Plan.

Appointments to State Boards

126. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37484/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy may be aware, in line with the Government decision of April 2011, new arrangements were put in place for the making of appointments to State Boards and bodies. Following this Government Decision, all vacancies on the boards of State Bodies under the aegis of my Department are advertised on my Department's website and I have invited expressions of interest from persons interested in being appointed to the boards of State Bodies and Agencies operating under the Department's aegis. The notice indicates the vacancies in the boards of the respective bodies. My officials acknowledge all expressions of interest received and maintain a database of those expressions. My Department's website is monitored and updated on a regular basis to reflect the number of vacancies as they arise.

48 persons have been appointed to the boards of management of bodies under the aegis of my Department, since its establishment in June 2011. 100% of all appointments to the boards of management of bodies under the aegis of my Department since its establishment in June 2011 have been advertised publicly on my Department's website. Of these, 19% were appointed to the Family Support Agency via the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Expressions of interest for the Board of the Management of the Family Support Agency were also sought via the Public Appointments Service (PAS) who ran a competition for the filling of vacancies on that Board. Following this process, the Minister appointed members to the Board of Management of the Family Support Agency in September 2013.

Agency	Board Membership	Appointed since June 2011
Child and Family Agency	9	9*
Adoption Authority	7	2
Children's Detention School Board of Management	13	13
Family Support Agency	n/a	23
National Educational Welfare Board	n/a	10

*Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board were dissolved and the service provision for these Agencies along with Child and Family Services previously provided by the HSE transferred to the new Agency with effect from 1st January, 2014. The membership of the board of the Family Support Agency was appointed to the board of the new Child and Family Agency on its establishment on January 1st 2014. The Ombudsman for Children's Office does not have a board.

Child Care Qualifications

127. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in relation to child care and early childhood education facilities, the minimum qualifications required for service being provided by individuals or teachers to children; if there are grants available for child care providers to obtain the necessary qualifications; the advice available to a person (details supplied) in County Cork who was recently informed that their qualifications are no longer recognised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37590/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The commitment to improve the quality of early childhood care and education is a key priority for my Department and a number of reforms in key areas to enhance the quality of the service provided are being progressed. These include the introduction of minimum qualification standards for those working directly with children in the pre-school sector.

Amendments have been made to the Child Care Act 1991 to underpin the proposed reforms and Regulations giving effect to these legislative changes are expected to be published shortly. The new Regulations will impose qualification requirements of a minimum Level 5 award on the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) in early childhood care and education for all staff working in early years services (no requirement currently exists). This requirement applies from September 2014 in the case of new services, and from September 2015 in the case of existing services. In addition, the minimum qualification requirement for pre-school leaders delivering the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme will be increased from a Level 5 award to a Level 6, from the same dates.

In light of the proposed timeframes for the introduction of new qualification requirements, the Department has sought to work with the childcare sector to accelerate the process for training and upskilling staff and improving the quality of care delivered to children. Some €0.9 million was provided to support a training programme in 2013 to provide support to staff who are seeking to meet the qualification requirements.

In March of this year, the Learner Fund was launched. This Fund, which has an allocation of €3 million over the two years 2014 and 2015 and is sufficient to support all eligible applicants, is designed to support existing childcare staff to up-skill to meet new qualification requirements. The Learner Fund is being administered by Pobal, with the assistance of local City and County Childcare Committees. The fund closed for applications from childcare staff at the end of April this year but it is hoped to make further funding available later this year which will provide for additional places for staff seeking training support.

Working with children in an early childhood care and education setting is a professional role which requires the achievement of core skills and knowledge including Child Development 0-6, Early Learning Theory and Practice and Child Health and Welfare as well as a supervised practicum. For the purposes of my Department's childcare programmes, it recognises certain qualifications as being equivalent to NFQ qualifications for its purposes. However, the content must include the topics listed.

In relation to childcare services providing the free pre-school provision under the ECCE programme, it is currently a requirement that the pre-school leader hold a major award at level 5 or an equivalent qualification. Completion of part of a degree programme does not meet the requirement for a major award. It is the responsibility of childcare services participating in the programme to submit to my Department documentary evidence that the pre-school leader in the service holds the required qualifications. All applications will be evaluated and the service advised of the outcome.

Clinical Indemnity Scheme

128. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a matter (details supplied) in relation to insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37459/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Clinical Indemnity Scheme (CIS) covers the clinical activities of public health doctors, nurses, dentists and other community based clinical staff providing services on behalf of the Health Services Executive (HSE).

Apart from this Scheme, the Clinical Indemnity Scheme does not provide indemnity to healthcare professionals who are providing private services in the community (i.e. those who are not providing services on behalf of the HSE). Healthcare professionals operating in a private capacity must purchase indemnity cover from the medical defence organisations or from commercial insurers. Accordingly, the cost of premiums is solely a matter between the private practitioner and the indemnity provider.

Speech and Language Therapy

129. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health if he will review speech and language therapy in respect of children (details supplied) in County Cork; his views on the considerable distance that these children must travel daily to access a specific speech and language disorder class; if she will examine if this is the best use of resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37425/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Professional Qualifications

130. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to amend proposed legislation to allow orthoptists to prescribe glasses contingent on satisfying the CORU regulations on scope of practice for that profession by requiring a CORU accredited qualification in refraction and prescribing to meet the regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37427/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): There are no plans at present to extend the scope of practice of orthoptists to include the prescription of spectacles. An extension of scope of practice would require primary legislation.

Orthoptists are one of the professions designated, in the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, for registration under the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU). It is intended that the Registration Board for this profession will be established under CORU by the end of 2015.

Health Services Provision

131. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the way a person (details supplied) in County Kildare may apply or proceed with a necessary item for the care of their child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37432/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Dep-

uty'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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

132. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the progress in reimbursing persons on the long-term illness scheme who were also medical card holders and paying the prescription charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37442/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive is making final preparation for the refunds to persons holding Long Term Illness (LTI) eligibility who paid prescription charges for medicines dispensed in respect of their LTI condition(s) in the period October 2010 to December 2013. It is expected that refunds will be issued by the end October 2014.

Patient Safety

133. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Information and Quality Authority has put in place a standard to monitor patient safety risks and publish the outcome, morbidity and mortality, for sub-arachnoid haemorrhage patients who are brought to hospitals which cannot provide emergency neurosurgical treatment and are then referred but not accepted for treatment in the national referral centre for neurosurgery, Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; and if no such standard has been put in place, the reasons for the non-implementation of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37445/14]

134. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Information and Quality Authority has ever submitted a proposed standard for approval, under the Health Act 2007, to monitor patient safety risks and to publish the outcome, morbidity or mortality, for sub-arachnoid haemorrhage patients who are not accepted for emergency neurosurgical or endovascular treatment in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; and if such patient safety standards are not in place, the way the authority may fulfil its obligation under the Health Act 2007, section 8(1)(b), to set standards on safety and quality, and 8(1)(c) to monitor compliance with the standards referred to in 8(1)(b). [37446/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 134 together.

My Department has been informed by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) that it supported discussions between the Health Service Executive, Beaumont Hospital and Cork University Hospital which resulted in the publication in 2010 of Guidelines for the Management of a Patient with a Sub-arachnoid Haemorrhage. Governance of implementation, adherence, monitoring and audit associated with the Guideline is the responsibility of the service providers.

Under the Health Act 2007, HIQA monitors compliance with the National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare, which were published in June 2012. The National Standards are not illness or condition specific but they have been designed so that they can be implemented in all healthcare services, settings and locations. Theme 2 (Effective Care and Support) of the National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare states that the fundamental principle of effective care and support is that it consistently delivers the best achievable outcomes for people using a service within the context of that service, and the resources available to it. The Standards pro-

mote the use of National Clinical Guidelines and nationally agreed protocols, care bundles and care pathways where available.

Hospital Procedures

135. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in 2012, 100 sub-arachnoid haemorrhage patients were denied emergency neuro-surgical treatment in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; further to Parliamentary Question No. 823 of 17 July 2012, his views that Beaumont Hospital does not have sufficient funds to enable it to review the outcome for SAH patients in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 despite the fact that this data is apparently stored on the hospital's computer system; and if the issue is insufficient resources, his plans to address the issue. [37447/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the detailed query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to him directly.

Medical Card Applications

136. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card renewal application in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37454/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Administration

137. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a matter (details supplied) in relation to medical card patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37458/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Fees paid to dentists who are contracted to provide services to medical card patients have been fixed by regulation under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act, 2009. The Act requires the Minister to carry out a review each year of the operation, effectiveness and impact of the amounts and rates fixed by these regulations. The next review will take place in 2015.

Orthodontic Service Waiting Lists

138. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health when orthodontic work will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the current waiting time in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37464/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE

provides orthodontic treatment to patients based on their level of clinical need. An individual's access to orthodontic treatment is determined against a set of clinical guidelines and priority is given to patients with greatest needs. The HSE has been asked to examine the specific query raised by the Deputy and to reply to him as soon as possible.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

139. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Daxas is covered under the drugs payment scheme; if not, the efforts being made in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37465/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility 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.

Hospital Appointment Status

140. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be granted an appointment in the orthopaedic unit in University Hospital Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37467/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the Deputy's further question in relation to this patient, I have again asked the Health Service Executive to respond to him directly in this matter.

Hospital Services

141. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the software and hardware replacement plans for the pathology unit of Kerry General Hospital; and if there will be any stoppages in services over the coming months. [37472/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medical Card Applications

142. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be reached in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37481/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Appointments to State Boards

143. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37491/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The nomination and appointment process for boards of bodies under the aegis of the Department of Health is set out in legislation. In line with Government Decision S180/20/10/1424 of 2011, relating to the advertising for expressions of interest in vacancies on State Boards, my Department currently advertises for board vacancies as they arise, where I, as Minister for Health, have nominating rights under relevant legislation. I also appoint members on the nomination of various bodies, again in accordance with the relevant legislation.

There were some exceptions to the advertising process in 2012 and 2013. In 2012, the members of the Hepatitis C Compensation Tribunal were appointed, on the advice of the Attorney General, as these members carry out a very specific role in relation to assessing the quantum of awards under the Hepatitis C Compensation Tribunal Act. Another exception was in the case of some hospital boards, e.g. Beaumont and St James's, where the term of existing members was extended as a prudent provisional measure, to allow time for appropriate competencies required in members of these boards to be set out, given the Health Reform Programme and its impact on hospital configuration. Appointments of the new board members were subsequently advertised.

In 2012 existing board members of the National Paediatric Hospital Board were re-appointed for a 3 month period to allow time to consider the competencies required by board members into the future. In January 2013 four Departmental officials and two HSE nominated officials were appointed for a number of months for the same reason. In July 2013, the Chairperson and 3 other members for which the Minister had nominating rights were also appointed.

The table below sets out the number of appointments to State Boards under the remit of the Department, where the Minister has nominating rights since March 2011 to 2014 (to date), including the number that were publicly advertised and the percentage of appointments filled from the advertising process. It should be noted that there were no advertising campaigns in 2011, but 34 appointments were made where the Minister had nominating rights.

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014 (to date)
Total Number of Board Appointments	50	144	205	95
Appointments made where Minister has nominating rights	34	100	140	61
Number of Positions Advertised	N/A	98	115	61

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014 (to date)
% of Appointments made drawn directly from the public advertisement process	N/A	31(32)%	41(36%)	44(72%)

State Bodies Funding

144. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the budget provided to Health Information and Quality Authority for the past five years; if it has sufficient resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37518/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The published estimate and the outturn for the Health Information and Quality Authority for the past 5 years is as follows:

-	Published Estimate - (€m)	Out-turn - (€m)
2009	13.571	11.10
2010	14.757	9.50
2011	11.700	8.80
2012	13.000	9.00
2013	12.740	10.00

While sufficient financial resources have been made available to HIQA to perform its regulatory and monitoring functions HIQA, like all State Bodies, must operate within the overall Government employment control framework.

Hospital Investigations

145. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Information and Quality Authority has investigated Beaumont Hospital's accident and emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37519/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has been informed by the Health Information and Quality Authority that it has not carried out an investigation of the Emergency Department at Beaumont Hospital.

Health Services Staff

146. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to prevent young general practitioners from emigrating or changing profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37520/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The GP plays a central role in the health service and, in most cases, he/she is the first medical practitioner whose advice a patient seeks. The majority of GPs in Ireland are private contractors who provide services to the public health system under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme. As of 30 April 2014, 2,416 GPs were contracted to provide services under the GMS Scheme. GP co-operatives also provide out-

of-hours services to *circa* 90% of the population.

The recruitment and retention of doctors, including GPs, in the public health system is a priority for me as Minister for Health. That is why I am committed to the implementation of the recommendations of the Strategic Review of Medical Training and Career Structure completed earlier this year.

In July 2013, a Working Group, chaired by Professor Brian MacCraith, President of DCU, was established to carry out the Strategic Review. The Working Group was tasked with examining and making high-level recommendations relating to training and career pathways for doctors with a view to:

- improving graduate retention in the public health system;
- planning for future service needs;
- and realising maximum benefit from investment in medical education and training.

In the course of its work, the Group considered issues including:

- the pathway for training at every level from Intern to Specialist;
- mentoring practices and career planning supports for medical graduates;
- measures to improve the quality of the training experience;
- career structures for doctors on completion of training.

The Strategic Review reports address a range of barriers and issues relating to the recruitment and retention of doctors in the Irish public health service, including general practice, and offer solutions and recommendations that will enable us to build a sustainable medical workforce for the future.

Magdalen Laundries

147. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his views on a judge's recommendation (details supplied) that Magdalen women should have access to the full range of services currently enjoyed by holders of the Health (Amendment) Act 1996 card and therefore this will be covered in forthcoming legislation, particularly as the women signed waivers of their legal rights against the State in the expectation that the judge's recommendations would be complied with in full. [37530/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Officials in the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health and the Office of the Attorney General are currently working to draft, as a priority, legislation which will provide for a range of health and personal social services to be made available to former residents of Magdalen laundries. It is the intention that the legislation will encompass the comprehensive range of services identified by Judge Quirke in his report as being required to address the health concerns of the Magdalen women. Subject to drafting being completed and to the agreement of Government, it is expected that the Bill will be published later in 2014.

Hospital Waiting Lists

148. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the way he will deal with the distress experienced by the number of public hospital patients experiencing long delays and lack of clarity over dates for procedures taking place; in view of the closure of projects such as

the national treatment purchase scheme, if he is in a position to offer measures to address this distress to ensure that hospitals provide patients with realistic waiting times and time limits for procedures to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37531/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The HSE is continuing to experience a significant increase in demand for its services which is reflected in an upward trend reported in waiting lists for July 2014. The success of the outpatient initiative run by the HSE at the end of 2013 and further validation work in 2014 resulted in facilitation of 33,000 additional outpatient appointments in 2013 and an additional 55,883 outpatient appointments thus far in 2014.

Increases in outpatient activity have had the consequence of driving up in-patient and day case waiting lists as patients are referred for appropriate treatment. In addition, other pressures such as almost 30,000 new cancer diagnoses each year place increasing demands of the order of 3000 – 6000 additional referral requirements on the system each month.

The role of the National Treatment Purchase Fund is working in close co-operation with the SDU to unblock access to acute services by improving the flow of patients through the service, and by streamlining waiting lists, including referrals from GPs.

The HSE National Director of Acute Hospital Services has asked all hospitals to provide an action plan to address their waiting lists. These individual hospital plans will be assessed and monitored by the SDU/NTPF scheduled care team. There are several potential strategies hospitals can use when planning their resources most effectively around the delivery of the national access targets for their patients. For example, improvements in chronological scheduling, consistent validation of waiting lists and active engagement with patients to reduce ‘DNA’ or Did Not Attend rates are underway to address outpatient waiting lists; similar measures, as well as optimisation of theatre capacity and day of surgery admission where possible are being employed to improve management of in-patient and day case waiting lists. The HSE, in collaboration with the SDU and all acute hospitals, is continuing to tackle waiting lists for the remainder of 2014.

Drug Treatment Programmes Funding

149. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the large cumulative cuts suffered by front-line drugs services since 2008 and the impact this has had on the ability of drugs task forces to maintain drugs services in their communities and to counter emerging drugs issues; if he will ensure that there are no further cuts in 2015; and if he will examine the possibility of allowing the reinstatement of some drugs projects in 2015. [37537/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In line with the National Drugs Strategy, the Government is committed to continuing support for initiatives to tackle the drug problem. Funding in 2015 for community drugs initiatives will be determined in the context of the Estimates process, taking into account the need to protect front line service provision as far as possible. In line with previous years, funding will be focused on areas where there is the highest concentration of drugs activity.

Hospital Waiting Lists

150. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5 will receive an appointment for an operation in Beaumont Hospital without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37538/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 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 her on this matter.

Ambulance Service Report

151. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when the ambulance report regarding the death of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37539/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

HSE Records

152. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the total annual cost to the Health Service Executive for the storage of records and archives which are ultimately intended to be forwarded to the National Archives in time; the sites at which these records are stored; the cost of engaging outside professional services in respect of the storage of records; if he will include the HSE as a named body under the Schedule of the National Archives Act 1986; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37555/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Issues relating to the National Archives Act, 1986 are a matter for the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The Health Service Executive is not a scheduled body under this Act and no application has been made to include the Health Service Executive in the schedule.

The maintenance and preservation of its own records is a 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 Applications

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will have a doctor appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37560/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Delays

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37565/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Delays

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37567/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Ambulance Service Provision

156. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding ambulances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37585/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Issues

157. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the replacement for the motorised transport grant and the mobility allowance; when he hopes to announce same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37594/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Conscious of

the reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Schemes in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes on 26th February 2013. The Government subsequently decided that the preparatory work required for a new travel subsidy scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. Work is ongoing on the policy proposals to be brought to Government for the drafting of primary legislation for a new scheme. Decisions in relation to eligibility criteria have yet to be made in relation to any potential new scheme.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

158. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet a delegation from the drugs task force in order to deal with the drugs crisis. [37604/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The membership of the Oversight Forum on Drugs which I chair, includes representatives of the networks of the chairs of the Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces. Both the chairs and the co-ordinators of the Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces are represented on the National Co-ordinating Committee for Drug and Alcohol Task Forces. These arrangements ensure that national policy on drugs is informed by the work of the Task Forces. In addition, in line with the National Drugs Strategy, I plan to arrange a meeting with the chairs and co-ordinators of the Task Forces in due course.

Health Services

159. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support a matter (details supplied) regarding a medical condition. [37605/14]

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.

Health Services

160. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support families of children with a medical condition (details supplied). [37606/14]

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.

Overseas Development Aid

161. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the expected level of funding that will be provided in his Department's budget for overseas aid in budget 2015; and if the commitment to provide overseas aid at a level of 0.7% of GNI by 2015 will be fulfilled. [37452/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Sean Sherlock): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, which is at the heart of our foreign policy. Our policy on International Development, "One World, One

Future”, clearly states our commitment to the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) for Official Development Assistance (ODA), and to making further progress towards it when economic circumstances permit. Since coming to office, this Government has managed to successfully stabilise the budget for development assistance. This is a significant achievement, in extremely difficult budgetary and fiscal circumstances. In 2011 we provided €657 million for ODA, and between 2012 and 2013 our allocation to ODA increased slightly from €629 million to €637 million. For 2014 we expect to provide in excess of €600 million for ODA.

These are substantial allocations of public funds and provide clear evidence of our support and commitment to the aid programme. They also represent a genuine investment on behalf of the Irish people in assisting those less fortunate than ourselves.

The estimates process for Budget 2015 is now in its final stages. As with allocations to all Government Departments, Budget 2015 allocations for ODA will be framed in the context of our policy commitments and the overall budgetary circumstances we face. The final 2015 Budget allocation, which is ultimately a decision for Government, will be announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on 14 October next. The Deputy will appreciate I am currently not in a position to announce the 2015 ODA budget, but as I have repeatedly stated publicly, and in response to earlier Questions, I and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade have made, and will continue to make, the strongest case possible for the allocation to the development assistance programme.

Appointments to State Boards

162. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37490/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are no State Boards under the aegis of my Department.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

163. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he had discussions during his recent visit to the US with members of Congress and/or with members of the US Administration in relation to the Immigration Reform Bill; when this legislation is likely to be enacted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37533/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I visited New York, Washington D.C. and Boston over the period from 23 September to 1 October. While there I had a wide range of meetings covering UN issues as well as bilateral and community matters. On US immigration reform, which remains a key Government priority, I met with both Irish community groups and high level government contacts.

My programme included discussions with Vice President Joe Biden, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, Secretary of State John Kerry, and Congressman Joseph Kennedy. I had a meeting in New York with Irish-American community leaders, including from the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers, Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, Ancient Order of Hibernians and the New York branch of the GAA, with whom the Government has worked closely

on our shared US immigration reform agenda. I also had the opportunity to visit the Emerald Isle Immigration Center and Aisling Irish Center in New York and the Irish International Immigrant Center in Boston, which gave me the opportunity to meet some of those most affected by the current state of affairs.

Following the bipartisan US Senate bill last year, and despite extensive combined efforts at Government, Embassy and Irish-American community levels since then, the US House of Representatives has not yet taken action that would deliver relief for undocumented Irish migrants in the US or an improved facility for future legal migration between Ireland and the US. While it appeared before the summer to be the intention of President Obama and his Administration to examine the scope for action on immigration via executive authority, President Obama announced on September 6 that he would delay any such action until after the November US elections.

The exact extent, nature and timing of any action that the U.S. Administration will be ready to take remains to be confirmed and there is clearly no guarantee as to the outcome that can be achieved via executive action. However, in my contacts in Washington, including in my conversation with the White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, I stressed the importance of addressing the needs and concerns of the undocumented Irish migrants in any such action. There are of course limits to what executive action is likely to be able to do and so further progress on the legislative track is also necessary.

While there appears to be some willingness to consider further action in Congress at some future point, this is dependent on many factors and will not be easy to achieve. The Government will continue to work resolutely for progress over the coming months from which currently undocumented Irish migrants in the U.S. and their families can benefit.

UN Issues

164. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at his recent meeting with the UN Secretary General; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37534/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In the course of my recent visit to New York for the General Assembly of the United Nations I had the opportunity to meet the Secretary General of the Organisation, His Excellency Ban Ki Moon. The Secretary General was accompanied by senior Irish staff from the United Nations Secretariat. Among the issues we discussed were UN peacekeeping, the current conflicts in the Middle East, the situation in Ukraine, climate change and the Ebola crisis. The Secretary General spoke warmly in praise of Ireland's contribution to peace keeping efforts, particularly in difficult regions and welcomed Ireland's initiative to provide training in peacekeeping to certain African States. He also expressed gratitude for Ireland's contributions to the work of the UN in other areas.

I took the opportunity of the meeting to present the Secretary General with a copy of the UNICEF Ireland 'Dublin Declaration on Children and Youth 2014' and invited him to visit Ireland in 2015.

Northern Ireland Issues

165. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he discussed with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the need to establish an independent review of the murder of 11 people in Ballymurphy in August 1971; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37535/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government has consistently raised the issue of the need to establish an independent review into the Ballymurphy cases, both at the level of the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Government issued statements expressing disappointment at the decision of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 29 April 2014 not to appoint a Hillsborough-style panel to review the Ballymurphy cases. The Government is committed to playing an active and constructive role in dealing with the past, including through raising relevant matters with counterparts in the British Government.

There is an urgent need to establish a fair, balanced and comprehensive framework for dealing with the past and the Government believes that legacy issues should be addressed in the upcoming all-Party talks.

Northern Ireland Issues

166. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he discussed with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and/or with members of the Northern Ireland Executive, the need to establish the North-South consultative forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37536/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A North South Consultative Forum was provided for in the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement provided further that the Northern Ireland Executive would support the establishment of an independent North/South Consultative Forum. In September 2008, the Irish Government submitted proposals for the role, format, membership and operation of a North South Consultative Forum to the Executive for its consideration, and facilitated three consultative conferences, the most recent of which was in January 2011. The Government awaits a response from the Executive.

Civil society has played an important role in the transformation of Northern Ireland. At the recent Reconciliation Networking Forum which I hosted in Dublin Castle on 15 September, and which brought together a diverse array of community groups and NGOs funded by my Department's Reconciliation Fund, it was clear that there is considerable support for a strong and enabling North South Consultative Civic Forum.

The Taoiseach has raised the establishment of a Forum at each Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council he has attended and it is on the agenda for the forthcoming meeting on 3 October 2014.

Religious Persecution

167. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise the issue of the persecuted Christians in 60 countries worldwide and make this a priority matter. [37600/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland strongly condemns and attaches great importance to combating all forms of persecution or discrimination based on religion or belief and incitement to religious hatred, irrespective of where they occur or who are the victims. We firmly believe in tolerance, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

Ireland consistently presses for effective action to counter the persecution of minorities

in all relevant international fora, including the EU and UN. Just this week (29 September) I highlighted the issue when I addressed the UN General Assembly in New York. I also raised it during my meeting with UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon.

The persecution of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East is a cause for particularly serious concern. In recent weeks, we have seen the extreme brutality and lawlessness demonstrated by ISIS in Iraq and in Syria which is utterly abhorrent and unacceptable. Threats and violence aimed at minority communities, including Christians and Yazidis, are intolerable.

I am extremely concerned for the plight of Christians and other minorities and the threat they face from ISIS. Accordingly, Ireland has allocated €1.1 million to the emergency response to the conflict and unfolding humanitarian catastrophe, with a focus which includes Christians and other minority groups.

Ireland is also working within the EU to address these issues, notably with the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief adopted during Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union last year. These Guidelines provide EU officials with an overview of the legal and policy framework within which the right to freedom of religion or belief is protected. They also elaborate an EU strategy on how to engage with third countries on the right to freedom of religion or belief, a strategy which we hope to see bear fruit as we assess the implementation of the Guidelines.

Ireland stands in solidarity with human rights defenders around the world advocating for their right to freedom of religion or belief, and we will continue to work to help to realise a world in which this right is respected and protected.

I can assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue to actively support freedom of religion or belief across our foreign policy.

Foreign Conflicts

168. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding US drones in Pakistan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37607/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government remains deeply concerned by instances where innocent civilians, including children, have been killed by drone attacks. A panel discussion of experts on the use of armed drones in counter-terrorism and military operations was organised by the UN Human Rights Council on 22nd September 2014. Ireland, in a statement delivered at this panel discussion, said that while armed drones as such are not illegal, there is a need to address and investigate possible disproportionate civilian casualties caused by their use.

Ireland said that states must take responsibility for their actions. They must make every effort to avoid civilian casualties, and must take steps to address and investigate harm caused to civilians. States must facilitate prompt, independent and impartial investigations where civilian deaths or injuries are reported. In cases where drone strikes are proven to have been unlawful, access to an effective remedy must be provided.

Ireland commended efforts made to date to quantify the use of armed drones, and urged States to be as transparent as possible concerning their use. The release by States of information concerning the extent of use of armed drones, and the numbers and identities of casualties, would constitute a significant step forward in promoting greater accountability.

Ireland has consistently taken the view that the use of drones must be in accordance with international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law.

Teacher Training Provision

169. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the re-introduction of a subsidy in initial teacher training and education (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37522/14]

183. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the role of her Department in determining and assessing the quality and benefit of the Gaeltacht placement programme in view of the recommendations presented by the Gaeltacht placement working group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37589/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 and 183 together.

Changes to the structure and content of the Gaeltacht Placement arose from the Teaching Council’s new accreditation criteria, published in June 2011 (Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers) which provide, inter alia, for “an extended and re-conceptualised Gaeltacht residency which will now form part of the overall programme and be under the direct jurisdiction of the teacher education providers.”

The Teaching Council established a Gaeltacht Placement Working Group and published a report in May 2012 which, among other things, provides for the placement duration to be extended to take place in two blocks of two weeks and a common course content across all initial teacher education providers. Initial teacher education providers have responsibility for quality assuring the content, teaching and assessment of the Gaeltacht element of initial teacher education programmes. My Department supports the changes as contributing to overall quality improvement in initial teacher education.

A decision was made to abolish payments by my Department towards the cost of attendance at Gaeltacht courses by initial teacher education students with effect from September 2012. In making difficult decisions such as this, priority was given to protecting resources for front line education services as far as possible in the coming years, which is especially challenging with rising numbers of school-going children. The changes to the gaeltacht placement grant were publicised in advance of implementation so that students would be aware of the new arrangements before embarking on Initial Teacher Education programmes.

I can appreciate that supporting a student through third level education can be challenging. However, I am not in a position to reinstate funding to this area.

Student Grant Scheme Application Numbers

170. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of first time student grant applications received by Student Universal Support Ireland this year; the number of these that have been fully processed; the number of these for which colleges have been informed that fees will be paid by SUSI; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37419/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am informed by SUSI that as at 30th September 2014 SUSI has received 61,907 new student grant applications for the

2014/15 academic year. Of these 19,194 applications have been processed to completion. Of those processed to completion 8,742 new applications have been awarded grants.

Confirmation is currently being sought from colleges that the students awarded grants are registered and in attendance on their courses before their grants can be paid.

Student Grant Scheme Application Numbers

171. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of renewal applications received by Student Universal Support Ireland this year; the number of these that have been fully processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37420/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am informed by SUSI that as at the 30th September, 2014 SUSI received 38,039 renewal grant applications for the 2014/15 academic year. Of these 30,519 applications have been processed to completion. Of those processed to completion 28,095 renewal applications have been awarded grants.

SUSI is currently awaiting documentation from a number of students and will continue to finalise grant applications as this documentation is received.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

172. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a grant application to Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of persons (details supplied); if it will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37421/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the applications of the students referred to by the Deputy are currently being assessed and the students will be notified directly by SUSI of the outcome in the coming days.

Speech and Language Therapy

173. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review speech and language therapy in respect of children (details supplied) in County Cork; her views on the considerable distance that these children must travel daily to access a specific speech and language disorder class; if she will examine if this is the best use of resources; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37424/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to firstly explain that the enrolment of a child to a school is a matter in the first instance for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through their network of SENOs are available to assist parents to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs.

A range of placement options are available for pupils with Specific Speech & Language Disorder (SSLD). These include special classes for pupils with SSLD in primary schools. Applications to establish such classes are considered by the school’s assigned Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and are approved by the National Council for Special Education

(NCSE).

The criteria for establishing special classes for pupils with SSLD are set out in Circular 0038/2007. The establishment of such classes is contingent on the provision of Speech and Language Therapy support being provided to the class by the Health Service Executive (HSE).

In general, children who meet the criteria for enrolment in Special Classes for pupils with SSLD are eligible for free transport to the SSLD class nearest to his or her place of residence, subject to the terms of the school transport scheme.

Children who meet the criteria and who are not enrolled in a Special Class for pupils with SSLD qualify for additional teaching support through an allocation of resource teaching hours, processed by the National Council for Special Education.

As such, pupils with SSLD have the option of attending their local school with additional teaching supports and speech & language therapy through the primary care service, or attending a Special Class for pupils with SSLD with speech and language therapy services provided in class by the HSE.

In the case to which the Deputy refers, I am advised that a number of different placement options were explored for the children, including enrolment in their local mainstream primary school with additional supports as outlined above. In this case the parents accepted placements in a specific speech and language disorder class in the school where the children are currently enrolled. Special school transport arrangements were then put in place.

While it has been suggested that funding made available for school transport might be diverted to employ a speech and language therapist, the Deputy will be aware that this option is not possible. My Department currently has no responsibility or mandate for the Speech and Language service, which is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Health through the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The matter relating to the provision of speech and language therapy has been referred to my colleague, the Minister for Health for direct reply.

Student Grant Scheme Payments

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way an overpayment in respect of a higher education grant occurred in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37431/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The student referred to by the Deputy was initially refused funding under the Student Grant Scheme for the 2013/14 academic year as she did not satisfy the Nationality requirements of the scheme. She appealed the decision to SUSI and provided evidence of Naturalisation from March 2014. A letter issued to her on 25th April 2014 advising her of her eligibility.

The student was entitled to three monthly payments from March 2014, however eight payments issued to her account in error on 15th May 2014. A letter issued to the student on 27th May 2014 advising her of this error and requested her to contact the Payments Department to discuss repayment options. This letter was re-issued to the student on 13th August 2014.

Any overpayment of a grant is required to be repaid by the student in accordance with the Student Support Act 2011 and the Student Grant Scheme. SUSI implements a repayment policy

under which students are asked to agree a repayment plan that is appropriate to their circumstances. SUSI deals with such repayments carefully and sensitively having regard to the ability of students to make repayments.

Universities Governance

175. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an art installation (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37437/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the Universities Act 1997 universities such as Trinity College Dublin are autonomous statutory bodies and the management and operation of their facilities is therefore the responsibility of the college authorities. Accordingly I have no function in relation to the concerns raised by the Deputy.

School Staffing

176. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the difficulties being faced by small schools which could lose a teacher due to the school having a very small number of pupils short of the Department’s guidelines for pupil-teacher ratio, in particular schools that may be short a few pupils for the deadline on 30 September 2014 but are expecting pupils to enrol after this date; if she will allow these schools some flexibility in these circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37451/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the Department website. The staffing arrangements for the 2014/15 school year (Circular 0007/2014) were published on 24 January, 2014. The staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The appeals criteria is also set out in Circular 0007/2014. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

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 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.

My Department has expanded the existing appeals process so that it is accessible to the schools that are affected by the small schools 2012 budget measure. In this regard small schools did not lose their classroom post if they projected sustainable increased enrolments in September 2014 that would be sufficient to allow them to retain their existing classroom posts over the longer term. Post allocated under this appeal criterion cannot be retained if the projected enrolment is not achieved.

The next meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board will be held in October, 2014. The closing date for schools to submit an appeal application to the Department’s Primary Allocations Section is Friday 3 October, 2014.

Schools Building Projects Status

177. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that

has been made to date with the provision of new schools in Carrigtwohill, County Cork, specifically the new second level school expected to commence operation in the 2016-17 school year and the amalgamation of the two primary schools (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37461/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department, working in conjunction with Cork County Council, has identified suitable lands to facilitate the planned building projects for the schools referred to by the Deputy. I can confirm that the acquisition of the site is being progressed, however due to the commercially sensitive nature of acquisitions generally I am not in a position to give further details at this time.

Once the acquisition of the site is finalised, a design team for the project will be appointed with a view to progression to tender and construction.

School Transport Provision

178. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a major problem regarding school transport to a school (details supplied) in County Galway where a school bus is arriving 25 minutes late each day; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that up to 80 children are arriving half an hour late for school each day; the way she will address this situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37463/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Bus Éireann, which operates the School Transport Scheme on behalf of my Department, is responsible for the timetabling and scheduling of services.

Officials in my Department are aware of the issues outlined by the Deputy and have requested that Bus Éireann address the timetabling issues in conjunction with the school and by reviewing the local school bus network as a matter of urgency.

Arrangements are being progressed by Bus Éireann to address the situation with effect from early next week.

Appointments to State Boards

179. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of her Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37487/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy should note that Board appointments, while made by me as Minister, are not in all cases made at my sole discretion. Individuals may be nominated for appointment by various organisations as specified in the relevant statute of the body concerned.

The following table provides details in relation to the numbers of appointments to State boards under the aegis of my Department since 2011, including the number of appointments made from those who applied through the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Approximately 40% of the positions to which I can make direct appointments were filled through the appointment of PAS applicants.

The Deputy should further note that in making direct Ministerial appointments, a Minister is

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not necessarily confined to those who made such expressions of interest in order to ensure that all of those appointed had the relevant skills and competencies for the positions.

Name of Board	Number of appointments made to state boards since 2011	Number of positions advertised over which the Minister can directly appoint [Note 1]	Appointments made from members of the public who applied through the PAS process	Year appointments made			
				2011	2012	2013	2014
An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)	2	0	0		2		
An Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS)	3 [Note 2]	0	0	1		2	
Grangegorman Development Agency (GDA)	17	7	3		15		2
Higher Education Authority (HEA)	13	10	2	1	9	1	2
Irish Research Council	14	0	0		14		
Léargas	12	9	0		10	2	
National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)	12	1	0		12		
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA)	26 [Note 3]	3	2		25	1	
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)	14	13	2			14	
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	11	8	3		10		1
Skillnets Ltd	4	0	0	3	1		
State Examinations Commission (SEC)	5	5	2		5		
Teaching Council	37	3	0		37		

Name of Board	Number of appointments made to state boards since 2011	Number of positions advertised over which the Minister can directly appoint [Note 1]	Appointments made from members of the public who applied through the PAS process				Year appointments made
				2011	2012	2013	2014
An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanún-aigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)	13	9	9			13	
Residential Institutions Statutory Fund (RISF)	12 (Note 4)	9	6 (Note 4)			10	2
Residential Institution Redress Board (RIRB)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)			
Residential Institute Review Committee (RIRC)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)			
Education Finance Board (EFB)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)	See (Note 5)			

Notes:

Note 1: Appointments, while made by the Minister, are not in all cases made at his sole discretion. Individuals may be nominated for appointment by various organisations as specified in the relevant statute of the body concerned.

Note 2: Two interim appointments were made to the Board of Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) in January 2013 pending the dissolution of the body in October 2013. Accordingly, these vacancies were not published on PAS. Appointments to the Board of FÁS were made following consultation with the Minister for Social Protection and the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

Note 3: The 25 member NCCA was appointed in 2012 with one resignee being replaced in November 2013.

Note 4: In addition to the appointment of persons who applied to PAS a further two appointees applied directly to the Department. Following the resignation of two appointees in 2013, the consequential vacancies were filled by persons who had submitted expressions of interest to PAS (one vacancy was filled in 2013, the other in 2014). An appointee who had not submitted an expression of Interest to PAS resigned in 2014 and was replaced by a person who had not submitted an expression of interest to PAS

Note 5: The existing members* of the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB) and the Residential Institutions Review Committee (RIRC) have held office from at least 2008 and were most recently re-appointed earlier this year until 31st December 2014 or until such time as the bodies have completed their work, whichever is the sooner. The final membership

of the Education Finance Board (EFB) were appointed in February 2012 for a one year term or until the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund (RISF) was established whichever was the earlier. The RISF was established and the EFB dissolved in March 2013. The 9 member Board consisted of a Chairperson, four former residents of institutions and four ordinary members. The views of survivor groups and other interested parties were sought on appointments of former resident members of the Board.

*apart from the Chair of the RIRB who was appointed in 2008 until such time as the Board completes its functions.

Departmental Bodies Abolition

180. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to reduce the number of quangos in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37509/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): For the Deputy’s information, under the Public Service Reform Plan a number of bodies under the remit of this Department were identified for rationalisation or merger as follows:

The Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology and the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences were merged in March 2012 to form the Irish Research Council (IRC), which is a sub-board of the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

Under the provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC) were amalgamated to form Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

Under the provisions of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, 16 Education and Training Boards have replaced 33 Vocational Education Committees.

The Deputy may also wish to note the following:

In June 2011, the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board transferred to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Since September 2011, the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) is within the remit of Dublin West Education Centre alongside the Department’s largest support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

The City of Dublin VEC has replaced 66 grant awarding bodies as a single awarding authority for student grants.

The implementation of the Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 will also result in consolidation of Higher Education provision.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

181. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to reduce pay for top earners earning over €100,000 in the education sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37515/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The salaries of staff in the education sector who earn more than €100,000 have been independently established through the normal pay determination structures for the Public Sector and there are no plans to alter these arrangements. As the Deputy will be aware there have been two pay cuts for public servants since the beginning of the financial crisis and, as part of the Public Service Stability (Haddington Road) Agreement 2013-2016, the Government has affirmed that public service pay will not be revisited over the lifetime of the Agreement.

School Transport Eligibility

182. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has not been given any transport assistance towards attending second level education on the mainland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37588/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Under the terms of my Department’s Post Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child referred to by the Deputy is not attending her nearest education centre and is therefore not eligible for school transport.

While it is the prerogative of parents to send their children to the school of their choice, eligibility for school transport is to the nearest school.

I understand that the family of the child in question has been in receipt of the Remote Area Boarding Grant.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 169.

School Transport Applications

184. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the case of a child (details supplied) in County Louth who is being refused school transport, yet this child’s two older siblings are attending the same school and are deemed eligible for school transport; if her further attention has been drawn to the fact that the national school which the child attends is the closest school, 3.9 km from the family home; if this decision will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37593/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Under the terms of my Department’s Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann, which operates the scheme on behalf of my Department, has advised that the child in question is not attending his nearest national school and is therefore not eligible for school transport.

While it is the prerogative of parents to send their children to the school of their choice, eligibility for school transport is to the nearest school.

In general, existing eligible children and children who had an eligibility for school transport under the former “Closed School Rule” retain their transport eligibility for the duration of their primary education cycle provided there is no change to their current circumstances.

Siblings of these children and other children who are not attending their nearest school may apply for school transport on a concessionary basis only in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Primary School Transport Scheme.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

The family should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office in Dundalk (Tel. No. 042-9355065) regarding the availability of school transport on a concessionary basis.

School Staffing

185. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding staffing at a school in Dublin 17. [37597/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department has been in contact with the school referred to by the Deputy and has clarified the staffing arrangements for the 2014/15 school year.

Tax Rebates

186. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason car tax rebates are only processed in less than quarterly refunds. [37554/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952 provides for the making of regulations for refunds of motor tax. The current regulations have been in force since 1992 and provide for the surrender of a motor tax disc in certain limited circumstances, such as where the vehicle has been stolen, scrapped or where the owner ceases to use the vehicle due to illness. For administrative reasons, the Regulations specifically provide that, in these circumstances, the disc must be surrendered to the licensing authority not less than three months before the expiry of the disc.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

187. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on a matter regarding a sewerage treatment plant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37418/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): 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 Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant has operated since 2003. While there was initially an odour issue, major improvements have been carried out which have abated the odour significantly. Irish Water is continuing to invest in improvements in the process operation and

performance of the Ringsend Plant and are confident that odours can be effectively managed.

Irish Water 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.

Community Development Initiatives

188. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding funding for the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks that does valuable work in supporting disadvantaged women at national and local level; if he will ensure that the current level of funding allocated to NCCWN is guaranteed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37441/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 551, 552, 553, 554, 557, 558, 559, 560 and 579 of 30 September 2014, which sets out the position in this matter.

Private Residential Tenancies Board

189. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the composition of the board of the Private Residential Tenancies Board and their areas of expertise; the number of tenants and the number of landlords who are members of the board; the number of board members who are linked with landlord representative bodies or property related businesses; the number of members who are linked with tenant representative bodies or agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37468/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004. The primary functions of the Board are to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants in the private rented residential sector.

Section 153 of the Act provides for a Board of up to 15 members including the Chairperson. The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2012 which is currently before the Oireachtas provides, *inter alia*, for the reduction of the Board membership numbers from 15 to 12; membership has accordingly been capped at this lower number since 2010. The Act provides that the members of the Board shall be appointed by the Minister and membership shall not exceed 5 years.

The composition of the Board and their areas of expertise are outlined in the following table.

Name	Description
Ms. Catriona Walsh Chairperson	Solicitor
Mr. Joe Meehan	Dept. of Social Protection
Mr. Tim Ryan	PR Consultant
Ms. Tricia Sheehy Skeffington	Barrister
Mr. John Fitzgerald	Property Professional - Member of Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (I.P.A.V.)

Name	Description
Mr. Paul Flood	Estates Manager, Health Services Executive, Dublin North.
Mr. Noel Merrick	Property Professional - Member of Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (I.P.A.V.)
Ms. Rhonda Donaghey	Trade Union Official
Mr. Noel Conroy	Former Commissioner An Garda Síochana 2003-2007
Mr. Gareth Robinson	Barrister
Ms. Kathleen McKillion	Head of Development, Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)
Mr. James Leahy	I.T. Technician

Water Charges Administration

190. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a landlord or former tenant will bear responsibility for any unpaid water bill when the tenant leaves the residence rented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37478/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 584 of 30 September 2014. The position is unchanged.

Appointments to State Boards

191. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37488/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since July 2011, my Department's website has been used as the primary mechanism for seeking expressions of interest from suitably qualified and experienced persons, for consideration as members or chairpersons of the boards of State bodies under my Department's aegis.

It should be noted that in the case of certain appointments, statutory selection procedures must be followed or nominations must be sought from independent nominating panels before appointments are made by the Minister or the Government, as appropriate. In addition, in the case of a number of Boards, not all of the appointments to the body concerned are made by the Minister, and in some situations appointments are made with the consent of another Minister.

Details in relation to the mechanisms applicable to appointments made since 2011 are being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

In line with a recent Government Decision, a Revised Model for Ministerial Appointments to State Boards, brought forward by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, is being put in place, operating through the Public Appointments Service, and will govern relevant future appointments.

Local Authority Housing Provision

192. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to increase the supply of housing in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37516/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Government's Construction 2020 – A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector, published in May 2014, aims to build a competitive, innovative and sustainable construction sector. It provides for a National Framework for Housing Supply to be established on a statutory footing with an annual National Statement of Projected Housing Supply and Demand published every June. The Housing Agency has been asked to take the lead in implementing this Action.

The proper management of all State land is critical; accordingly, both lands that have been transferred to the Housing Agency and local authority held lands suitable for development will be the first sites considered in any future targeted social housing building programme. In line with the commitments under Construction 2020, a Housing Supply Co-ordination Task Force for Dublin has been established with an immediate focus on addressing supply-related issues.

The Review of Part V of the Planning and Development Acts, which provides for social and affordable housing supply, has been completed by the Housing Agency, at my Department's request, and has recently been submitted to Government. It is anticipated that any legislative changes required on foot of the review will, be incorporated into the General Scheme of a new Planning Bill, which is expected to be published shortly.

My intention is that the Social Housing Strategy, required under Action 8 of "Construction 2020" and now in preparation, will be both challenging and innovative, and will provide the basis for an enhanced approach to social housing provision in Ireland. The Strategy 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. I expect that the Strategy will be ready for consideration by Government in the coming weeks.

I expect the final output across all social housing programmes for 2014 to be in the region of 6,000 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.

Irish Water Staff

193. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if vacancies in Irish Water were subject to open competition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37517/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): 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.

Irish Water is currently recruiting to build up its internal capabilities and the recruitment of staff is an operational matter for the organisation. It was agreed by the Steering Group for the Water Sector Reform Programme that, to ensure skills within the sector were fully availed of in building up the new organisation, competitions for positions below the senior management team level, in asset management, capital delivery and operations would be restricted to staff in the partner organisations i.e. Bord Gáis Éireann, local authorities and my Department in the first instance. Open competitions are held for all other positions and details of these are available on

Irish Water's website www.water.ie.

I understand from data supplied to my Department by Irish Water that 519 staff have been recruited up to 30 September 2014. Of these, 153 have been recruited from local authorities, 88 from Bord Gáis and 5 from my Department.

Leader Programmes Funding

194. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding an application to Mayo north east Leader by a company (details supplied); when a decision will issue; if it will be expedited due to the delay to the planned completion date and the uncertainty that is being caused to the local community and the contractor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37524/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There are 35 Local Development Companies (LDCs) contracted, on my Department's behalf, to deliver the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP) throughout the country. In line with the 'bottom-up' approach to rural development the LDCs are the principal decision-makers in relation to the allocation of project funding. Such decisions are made in the context of the local development strategy of the individual groups and in line with the Programme's Operating Rules and EU regulations.

The only exception to this is the requirement to seek final approval from my Department in respect of projects that request funding of €150,000 or more. The assessment of these higher value projects usually involves detailed consultations between my Department and the relevant local development company.

A letter of approval in relation to this project was issued by my Department to MNELP on 1 October 2014.

Capital Assistance Scheme Funding

195. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total amounts allocated annually under the capital assistance scheme in each year of its operation to date; the total amount spent in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37541/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Capital Assistance scheme provides support, through the local authorities, towards the approved costs of housing bodies in providing accommodation for persons with specific categories of housing need, including older people, people with an intellectual, physical or mental health disability, homeless people, returning emigrants and victims of domestic violence. While initial annual allocations under the Capital Assistance Scheme for each year of its operation since 1985 are not readily available in my Department, the following table sets out the actual expenditure incurred under the scheme for each year up to 2013.

Capital Assistance Scheme

Year	Expenditure
1985	€8,336
1986	€0

Year	Expenditure
1987	€603,621
1988	€6,323,609
1989	€8,747,189
1990	€11,863,163
1991	€13,138,065
1992	€14,133,898
1993	€14,981,373
1994	€16,394,905
1995	€18,552,045
1996	€14,677,630
1997	€10,333,240
1998	€14,933,734
1999	€17,566,591
2000	€31,975,403
2001	€54,798,918
2002	€78,126,000
2003	€95,864,000
2004	€86,554,713
2005	€80,661,308
2006	€99,361,424
2007	€113,765,517
2008	€156,290,000
2009	€158,512,741
2010	€113,647,625
2011	€38,039,748
2012	€58,044,354
2013	€36,694,334

Social and Affordable Housing Expenditure

196. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amounts awarded, broken down by local authority area, under the capital loan and subsidy scheme for social housing in each year of its operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37542/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme commenced in 1991 to provide mortgage finance to approved housing bodies by way of loans from the Housing Finance Agency, to meet the cost of social rented accommodation for low-income families.

From the scheme's commencement to end-2013, the housing bodies have provided over 10,000 units of accommodation with loans approved to the value of over €1.5 billion from the Housing Finance Agency. A breakdown of these approvals and the number of units per local authority is set out in the following table. The information requested for each year is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme

Local Authority	Amount Approved	Units
Carlow	26,503,040	254
Cavan	7,701,913	48
Clare	13,971,816	131
Cork City	43,186,070	258
Cork North	27,108,037	203
Cork South	73,605,819	428
Donegal	57,271,240	452
Dublin City	334,035,473	1,731
Dun Laoire/Rathdown	89,170,836	366
Dundalk town	44,140,775	334
Drogheda Borough	27,057,748	226
Louth	17,893,594	99
Fingal	113,388,684	607
Galway	20,847,020	179
Galway City	19,655,905	180
Kerry	24,461,969	179
Kildare	57,735,757	509
Kilkenny	10,268,163	137
Laois	42,010,048	271
Leitrim	5,377,918	44
Limerick	14,677,176	103
Limerick City	8,558,008	99
Longford	29,470,658	200
Mayo	25,549,327	205
Meath	19,674,375	180
Monaghan	8,458,005	76
Offaly	28,790,094	271
Roscommon	4,072,442	35
Sligo	15,754,862	155
Sligo Borough	7,868,989	110
South Dublin	149,430,895	941
Tipperary North	47,870,933	280
Tipperary South	48,790,394	418
Waterford	12,999,288	141
Waterford City	31,129,791	268
Wexford	27,012,228	281
Wexford Borough	3,709,924	29
Wicklow	7,939,266	92

NAMA Social Housing Provision

197. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the local authorities that have availed of the NAMA-run special purpose

vehicle to bring greater housing stock forward for social housing purposes; the number of transfers that have taken place to each local authority; the number that are in development; the costs associated with each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37544/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department is working closely with NAMA, the Housing Agency, local authorities and approved housing bodies in relation to the delivery of social housing. Information in relation to the delivery of NAMA sourced units, including a full breakdown by county, of units delivered on quarterly basis, is available on the Housing Agency's website: www.housing.ie/NAMA.

Since the process began in December 2011 up to end of June 2014, 736 NAMA-sourced units have been delivered nationally through all delivery mechanisms. A further 603 properties are active transactions whereby terms are agreed or active negotiation is ongoing with all parties concerned, or where a detailed appraisal (i.e. determining the most likely delivery mechanism) is being carried out. It is expected that more than 1,000 units will have been delivered through this process by end 2014.

Of the 736 NAMA sourced units delivered to the end of June 2014, 250 units have been delivered through the NAMA special purpose vehicle (SPV). This represents over 60% of total delivery since the NAMA SPV first began delivery in April 2013. In total, my Department has approved funding for 457 units through the SPV. The total funding approved is €4.3m on an annual basis. The following table outlines the number of units approved per local authority, the associated funding approved and the number of units delivered as of June 2014.

Authority	Units Approved*	Annual Full Year Cost of Approved units	Units Delivered
Carlow County Council	5	31,374	
Cork County Council	83	594,201	72
DLR County Council	19	225,216	19
Dublin City Council	229	2,656,578	116
Fingal County Council	20	208,440	20
Galway County Council	10	48,804	
Kildare County Council	7	61,755	
Kilkenny County Council	19	124,998	
Meath County Council	11	77,964	11
Offaly County Council	30	158,613	
Waterford City and County Council	8	45,816	8
Westmeath County Council	16	90,641	4

Authority	Units Approved*	Annual Full Year Cost of Approved units	Units Delivered
Overall	457	4,324,400	250

*Includes delivered

There is considerable complexity in delivering units through this process and dealing with the range of legal and financial constraints involved. In some cases properties require substantial completion works.

Voluntary Housing Sector

198. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to establish an independent regulator for voluntary housing associations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37547/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In July 2013, Building for the Future a voluntary regulation code for the approved housing body (AHB) sector was published. The code sets out key governance, management and financial principles that AHBs commit to meeting on signing a Charter of Commitments. In February 2014 an interim Regulatory Committee was established to oversee the implementation of the code and to advise on the development of statutory regulation. The Committee includes experts in regulation, housing, law and finance and has been constituted as an independent committee operating, for the time being, within the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency.

A Regulation Office has also been established within the Agency to manage the day to day functions of implementing the voluntary code. To date, just over 160 AHBs have signed up to the code and further details are available on the Agency's website at <http://www.housing.ie/Regulation.aspx>.

In July 2014, the Government approved the preparation of the Heads of a Bill to provide for the statutory regulation and governance of AHBs. I expect that the finalised Heads of the Bill will be ready for submission to Government in Q1 2015, after which drafting of the Bill will be progressed by the office of the Parliamentary Counsel. The interim period of voluntary regulation will be a valuable source of information as to the scope and final content of the Bill.

Regulation will provide support and assurance to tenants, the Boards of AHBs and their external partners that the sector is well regulated. It will also safeguard the investment that has been made in the sector and encourage future investment.

Irish Water Establishment

199. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide the full details of the final agreements between local authorities and Irish Water in respect of asset transfers, staffing, compensation, and other issues related to the establishment of Irish Water; if Irish Water has transferred any monetary sum to a local authority or has agreed to do so in future; if he will provide the full cost to date for the operation of the water services transition office broken down by category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37548/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the transfer of water services functions

from the 34 water services authorities to Irish Water. With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for the provision of public water services.

Section 12 of the Act provides for the transfer of property from a local authority to Irish Water. Section 13 of the Act provides that any rights or liabilities relating to the property transferred to Irish Water under section 12 shall also stand transferred to Irish Water. Section 14 of the Act provides for the transfer of other liabilities from a water services authority to Irish Water by way of Ministerial Order.

To date, two Orders have been made under section 14 - the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Transfer of Other Liabilities) Order 2014, which was signed on 20 February 2014, and the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Transfer of Other Liabilities) Order (No. 2) 2014, which was signed on 24 April 2014. The Orders, which are available in the Oireachtas library, provided for the transfer of a total of 970 contracts from the local authorities to Irish Water.

Work is under way to prepare for the transfer of water services property and liabilities from the local authorities to Irish Water and it is expected that further Orders will be made in this regard in the coming months.

Irish Water has entered into service level agreements (SLA) with each of the local authorities for the provision of water services, as provided for under the Water Services (No.2) Act 2013. Staff in local authorities conducting work under these arrangements will remain local authority employees. The SLA reflects the transformation agenda required for the sector, with provision for annual service plans which will set out required performance, budgets and headcount.

The length of the service level agreement and the fact that the agreement will include a programme of change are reflected in a Framework document, agreed with the Trade Unions under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission, and which is available on my Department's website. This agreement, and the Water Services (No.2) Act 2013 provide that, in the event of a SLA coming to an end, the staff covered by that agreement will become Irish Water employees and their terms and conditions and superannuation arrangements will be protected by legislation.

The Water Services Transition Office was established to ensure appropriate local authority input into the reform agenda and prepare for the transfer of functions to Irish Water. My Department agreed outline budgets for both 2013 and 2014 to cover costs of staff seconded to the Office, recoupment of salaries of certain staff in local authorities and other necessary programme costs. An amount of €5.748 m was recouped in 2013 under the headings outlined in the following table.

Cost category	Paid to 31/12/13
WSTO - Staff costs	1,725,986.10
WSTO - non-pay costs	491,537.45
LA support staff	3,531,189.85
TOTALS	5,748,713.40

Non-pay costs include €278,285 paid to a variety of companies who provided specialist advice on legal, financial, health and safety and IT issues. The details are set out in the following table. The balance of €213,252 was incurred on general office running costs for services including rent, utilities and security expenses.

Name	Description	Cost
CCAS Consultancy	Financial accounting advice, reporting and software development.	€16,715.70
Price Waterhouse Coopers	Financial analysis on debtors, capital balances, liabilities	€45,246.00
Temetra	Work on financial billing systems and liaison with local authorities on billing solutions.	€1,322.28
Stallard and Associates	Support and advice in developing and negotiating SLA	€69,013.80
RDJ Solicitors	Legal advice on SLA	€84,378.30
Atkins Ireland Ltd	Updating of Fixed Asset Valuation Model	€3,190.00
Central Solutions	Sharepoint IT system training	€1,350.00
Ennovation Solutions	Set up and support for Alfresco system for data gathering	€50,245.50
IACT T/A Software Paths	Training for IT systems	€1,659.00
LGMA	Extranet Exchange	€1,666.67
Micromail	IT systems licenses	€3,498.12
Total		€278,285.37

No funds have been recouped to date in 2014 although an amount in the order of €1.3m is anticipated.

Local Authority Expenditure

200. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total annual cost to each local authority in the State for the storage of records and archives, including those records which are ultimately intended to be forwarded to the National Archives in time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37550/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under Section 80 of the Local Government Act 2001, local authorities are required to make proper arrangements for the management, custody, care and conservation of their records and archives and to provide public access to their archives.

The annual cost for the storage of records and archives is a matter for each local authority and this information is not collated by my Department.

Electric Vehicle Grants

201. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to increase the number of electric vehicles here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37500/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme was introduced in April 2011 to incentivise and support, through grants of up to €5,000, the early deployment of electric vehicles in Ireland. These grants are in addition to the VRT reliefs of up to €5,000 which apply to electric vehicles. To date, support has been provided for the purchase of 525 new vehicles of which 243 were grant

aided in 2014 to date. The grant scheme will remain open for this year and, subject to finalisation of the budgetary arrangements, continue next year.

Additionally, the ESB, through its ecars programme, is continuing to roll out both publicly accessible charging infrastructure and domestic charge points. My Department understands that 892 public charge-points have now been installed nationally. These include 67 DC fast chargers, most of which have been installed on major roads. Additionally there are 918 domestic/commercial installations in place.

Departmental Agencies Board Appointments

202. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37485/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): This Government, almost immediately on establishment, made important changes in relation to appointments to State Boards with new arrangements widening the opportunity to participate on such Boards by extending a wide invitation for people to submit expressions of interest to serve on the boards of public bodies. In accordance with the Government Decision of 12 April 2011, my predecessor commenced a process of seeking, on the Department's website, expressions of Interest from persons wishing to be considered for appointment to vacancies on State Boards under the aegis of this Department. This information has been used to inform decisions for such appointments, but I would stress that such invitations are designed to extend the range of suitable persons from which a Minister might make appointments, not to constrain it. While appointments are made by the relevant Minister, I would add that appointments to Boards also include nominations, provided for by statute, by Committees of the Oireachtas, worker directors and ex-officio positions. While the precise structure varies from body to body, in total this can amount to a significant proportion of the Board in certain instances. While I am aware of the service that can be provided by the Public Appointments Service, I would point out that the arrangements I have outlined provide for a wide and varied process of selection for appointment.

All appointments are made in light of the applicable legislative requirements, objectives of the organisation and on the basis of appointees having the necessary competencies, expertise and experience to contribute effectively to the work of the particular boards.

In 2011 there were 31 applications received following the advertisement for Expressions of Interest from which 3 appointments were made. In 2012 there were 37 applications received following the advertisement for Expressions of Interest from which 5 appointments were made. In the current 2013/2014 call for Expressions of Interest there have been 118 applications received to date following the advertisement for Expressions of Interest from which 9 appointments were made.

There have been 114 appointments made to State Boards under the aegis of my Department in the period March 2011 to date. The percentage of these appointments filled from the Expressions of Interest received amounts to 15%. It should be noted that about 30% of the appointments made were either ex-officio appointments, reappointments, the appointment of worker directors chosen by election, or appointments made from nominations made by an Oireachtas Committee.

On 30 September, my colleague the Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform announced

further steps to strengthen the process of Board appointments and my Department will be liaising with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure that procedures in my Department are in line with the new measures proposed.

Cycling Facilities Provision

203. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding national cycle routes (details supplied); the progress to date; the work that has been done; the timeframe for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37443/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The two greenway projects to which the Deputy refers were submitted to my Department as applications under the National Cycle Network (Funding Programme 2014-2016).

The “Clonee to Durrow” greenway project was selected, following assessment by an expert panel, to receive funding under the NCN Programme. The deadline for completion of projects under this programme is end 2016. However, Waterford County Council have indicated that the project will be completed in January, 2016. Consultation with landowners is currently being finalised and accommodation works agreed. It is planned to commence site clearance in October 2014 and commence construction work in Q1 2015.

The “Kilmeaden to Bilberry” greenway project was selected to share in funding from the €200 million Government Stimulus Package for infrastructure projects, €10 million of which was earmarked for the development of greenways. The criteria for selection of projects to receive funding from this source was the authority’s ability to complete the project within the 12 month timeframe so increasing the stimulus effect. Site clearance on the project is scheduled to commence in November, 2014 with construction work planned to commence in Q1 2015.

Departmental Agencies Board Appointments

204. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of his Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service by year from 2011 to date in 2014. [37496/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that a new model for appointments to State Boards, making use of the Public Appointment Service, will come into effect later this year. At present, my Department maintains its own database of applicants compiled from expressions of interest as advertised on our website. This will be superseded by the new model when it is in place.

In making any Board appointments, I am not confined to those who make such expressions of interest but I do ensure that all of those appointed have the relevant qualifications for the positions. In that respect, I have regard to the body or agency in question and the appropriate mix of skills and experience required on the Board. I may, from time to time, also decide not to fill all existing vacancies.

All details relating to current State Boards and members can be found at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/state-board-membership-and-approved-fees>.

Cycling Facilities Provision

205. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the progress and success of the beta bicycle hanger project in Dublin city; his plans to increase participation in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37501/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Dublin City Council is responsible for the development of all cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

Accordingly, I have forwarded your request to the NTA and have asked them to reply to you directly. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Integrated Ticketing

206. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider expanding the use of the Leap card as a means of payment for small transactions in private businesses, as is the practice in a number of other countries with integrated ticketing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37503/14]

207. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is possible to integrate the Leap card with the public transport systems in other European cities, in particular London and Edinburgh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37504/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 207 together.

Responsibility to develop, procure, implement, operate and maintain the Leap Card system is a function of the National Transport Authority (NTA).

I understand, however, that the NTA is considering a number of additional functions for the Leap card Scheme including using the electronic purse for non-transit purchases. However, to move into low value retail outside of direct public transport provision requires a significant change in the structures and governance of the Scheme to comply with the EU Directive on Electronic Money Issuance. The NTA, or a partner organisation, would be required to become an “Electronic Money Issuer” and establishing this would incur significant costs. The benefits of making the necessary changes are not considered sufficient at the present time to offset the costs of doing so. Additionally, the cardholder would most likely incur a commission charge when using the Leap electronic funds for such payments. There are very few other transit card schemes in the EU that support this functionality, it is more common in the Far East where different regulations apply.

With regard to integrating the scheme with systems in other European cities, I am informed by the NTA that the scheme in Ireland, like most of the other schemes in the EU, has developed a common card reader and card format that is unique to Ireland. Options being proposed for international interoperability are still in development and to date no over-arching standard has emerged as the dominant standard for Europe. At present, the EU includes a number of nationally supported smartcard ticketing schemes which are collaborating to seek to find ways to achieve cross border interoperability, however achieving consensus is some way off. The recent introduction of contactless bank card payment for public transport may in fact be the means by which interoperability is achieved in the future.

Public Transport Provision

208. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline his plans to tender 10% of Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann services to the private sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37507/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded 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.

National Transport Authority

209. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set out the position regarding the DART underground project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37508/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Railway Order for DART Underground is valid until 2024 but a High Court Judgement earlier this year has ruled that the period for serving Notices to Treat for the purpose of compulsory purchase of property under the Order should be 18 months rather than the 7 years set out in the Railway Order. This means that a decision on whether to proceed with DART Underground under the current Railway Order must be made by September 2015. DART Underground is now being reviewed and assessed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with other large public transport projects for the Dublin area. The 2010 business case for DART Underground is currently being updated and will be based on the latest data on population, transport demand, construction costs etc.

The NTA have advised me that the DART Underground report and the outcome from the Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study and the preliminary Business Case for the BRT to Swords will be available by early next year.

Following receipt and assessment of the reports I will then consider the options and priorities for addressing key public transport deficits in the GDA having regard to the costs and benefits and affordability of each project as well as funding sources and options including private funds, EIB loans and EU grants.

Significant additional Exchequer resources will be required to advance any new major project irrespective of the availability of private or EU funds. With existing funding levels the key priority is to protect investment made to date and to maintain safety standards. If additional funds become available, there will be many competing projects from all transport modes in all regions.

I will prioritise any additional funds for projects for which there is a clear need, which are affordable, have a sound business case and add value to existing infrastructure. I would expect that there will be public transport projects in the Dublin region which will meet these criteria if funds are available.

Vacancies on State Boards

210. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide in tabular form the percentage of vacant positions on State boards under the aegis of her Department that were filled from the panels created through open application by the Public Appointments Service, by year, from 2011 to date in 2014. [37483/14]

213. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to set out the selection process for appointments to boards of statutory bodies under her aegis; the process under which this selection is carried out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37591/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 and 213 together.

The processes involved in selecting candidates for vacancies on the bodies and agencies funded from my Department's Vote Group is set out as follows. In the case of certain bodies, board appointments may be made by the bodies themselves or on an ex-officio basis.

In 2012, my Department used the Public Appointments Service to identify suitable candidates for appointment to the board of Údarás na Gaeltachta, in line with section 6(2) of the Údarás na Gaeltachta Act 1979 (as amended by section 16(1) of the Gaeltacht Act 2012). I am advised that 4 out of the 7 the Ministerial appointees to Údarás na Gaeltachta were appointed from the panel created on foot of the publicly advertised process carried out by the Public Appointments Service. The remaining 5 members were appointed on foot of nominations by county councils that have a Gaeltacht area within their jurisdiction.

In the case of the boards of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, being agencies of the North-South Implementation Body – An Foras Teanga, appointments are made by the North South Ministerial Council arising from nominations on a 50:50 basis from each jurisdiction.

In addition to these processes, board appointments are also made following a publicly advertised process, under which expressions of interest are sought from the public by advertising on my Department's website. Finally, candidates may also be appointed who, in the view of the Minister of the day, have a contribution to make and who may be willing to serve.

The Government has recently agreed on a *Revised Model for Ministerial Appointments to State Boards* which complements the current system with a more structured approach to ensure that vacancies on State Boards are populated in a transparent way by the high-calibre personnel required to successfully perform their mandates. My officials are now engaged in the preparations for implementing this revised model and I look forward to the guidelines which Minister Howlin will present in the coming weeks in that regard.

Appointments to State Boards

211. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a list of the appointments and qualifications of those appointed to State boards since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37521/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As my Department was established on 2 June 2011, the information sought is being provided in respect of the period since then. Details concerning the appointments of board members to bodies and agencies funded from my Department's Vote Group since 2 June 2011 (both currently serving members and those no longer serving) and their qualifications/experience are set out in the following tables. Appointments to the boards of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, being agencies of the North South Implementation Body - An Foras Teanga, are made by the North South Ministerial Council, arising from nominations on a 50:50 basis from each jurisdiction.

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Suzanne McDougald	Gallerist and Art Collector
Mary Keane	Deputy Director General of the Law Society of Ireland, responsible for the Society's Policy and Public Affairs function.
Margaret Glynn	M.A. History of Art and Design U. L. 2003.
Mary Daly	President of the Royal Irish Academy
Bernie Brennan	Vice President of the Royal Dublin Society
Fred Krehbiel	International Business representative
John O'Brien	International Business representative

National Concert Hall

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Gerry Kearney (Chair)	Former Secretary General of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
Dearbhla Collins	Pianist
Laurie Cearr	General Manager, Music in Great Irish Houses.
Gina Menzies	Lecturer in Medical Ethics, Royal College of Surgeons.
Alma Hynes	Head of Volunteer Department for the Wexford Opera Festival.
Deborah Kelleher	Director, Royal Irish Academy of Music.
Rachel Holstead	Music consultant and freelance composer.
Maura McGrath	Senior management and executive experience across the private and public sectors and also not for profit organisations in Ireland and abroad.
Rebecca Gageby	Head of Programmes and Administration at the Royal Irish Academy.
Kieran Tobin	Retired Communications and Corporate Affairs Director, Irish Distillers.
John McGrane	Retired Ulster Bank Director
Ray Bates	Former Director, National Lottery.
Peter McEvoy	Project management consultant.
Barney Whelan	Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs at An Post.
Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin	Pianist, composer, recording artist and academic, who holds the Professorship of Music at the Irish World Music Academy of Music and Dance based at the University of Limerick. Former Chair of Culture Ireland.
Bruce Arnold	Journalist
Margaret Ryan	Marketing Practitioner
Artemis Kent	Director, Greystones Youth Orchestra and Head of Music at the Bray Institute of Further Education.
Pat Heneghan	PR Consultant
Patricia Slavin	Primary School Principal and qualified ballet teacher from the Royal Academy, London.

Irish Museum of Modern Art

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Emma Goltz	A patron of the Arts and company director.
Jane Dillon Byrne	A former member of the Arts Council; she currently serves on the board of the Pavilion Theatre
Sheila O'Regan	A museum curator, radio producer and presenter and historian.
John McNulty	Businessman active in local cultural, sporting and language initiatives.

Arts Council

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Sheila Pratschke (Chair)	Studied fine art and arts management, worked in many arts organisations and institutions in Ireland and abroad and was awarded the 'Ordre Nationale du Merite' by the French State.
Joan Sheehy	Actress with extensive experience in professional theatre for over three decades.
Miriam Dunne	Has 25 years experience as a professional arts manager and producer in arts organisations, festivals, venues and events.
Monica Spencer	A freelance producer, festival organiser and performance related facilitator with extensive experience of arts management and delivery.
Éimear O'Connor	An art historian specialising in Irish art who was elected an Honorary Royal Hibernian Academician in 2010 for her contribution to the Arts in Ireland.
Brian Maguire	A visual artist.
John McAuliffe	A writer and academic, currently chief poetry critic for the Irish Times and co-editor of The Manchester Review.
Ciarán Walsh	A graduate of communications studies from Dublin City University who has been involved in the performing arts for almost 20 years.
Mark O'Regan	A professional actor with a long association with the Abbey and Gate Theatres in Dublin.
John Fanning	A specialist in advertising, branding, marketing and communication who has a long standing commitment to the Arts.

Censorship of Publications Board

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Shane McCarthy (Chair)	Solicitor

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Noelle O'Connor	Senior lecturer in tourism and hospitality studies
Sinéad Prunty	Barrister
Georgina Byrne	Librarian who holds qualifications in English literature, information studies and management.
Philip Moynihan	Retired Chief Superintendent, An Garda Síochána.

Irish Film Board

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Bill O'Herlihy (Chair)	Television broadcaster and businessman
Annie Doona	President of the Institute of Art, Design and Technology
Katie Holly	Managing Director of Blinder Films
Kate O'Toole	Actress and Chairwoman of the Galway Film Fleadh
Seamus Deasy	Director of Photography
John Rice	BAFTA and IFTA winning producer, co-founder and CEO of JAM Media
Maurice Sweeney	Documentary film maker.

The Heritage Council

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Conor Newman (Chair)	University lecturer
Fidelma Mullane	Specialist in vernacular architecture
Catherine Heaney	Communications consultant
Ciara Breathnach	University lecturer
Michael Parsons	Former school principal
Kieran O'Connor	University lecturer
Ted Creedon	Broadcaster and journalist

National Archives Advisory Council

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Joanne Rothwell	Archivist, Waterford County Archives
Deirdre McMahon	Senior lecturer and Head of Department, Mary Immaculate College and member of the Irish Manuscripts Commission
Máire Mac Conghail	Professional genealogist and member of the Irish Manuscripts Commission
Mary McAuliffe	Historian, lecturer in the School of Social Justice, UCD
Raymond Refaussé	Librarian and archivist, Church of Ireland Library
Paul Rouse	Historian and lecturer in the School of History of Art and Archives, UCD

Crawford Art Gallery

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
John Bowen (Chair)	CEO of Bowen Construction
Una Feely	Arts management and co-founder of the IndieCork Festival
Sheila Maguire	Hospital administrator in Cork University Hospital and former VEC member
Tim Brosnan	Cork City Councillor
Jim Corr	Former Cork City Councillor and former Cork City VEC Chairman
Declan Moylan	International Chairman of Mason, Hayes and Curran
Noel O’Keeffe	Former Cork County Engineer
Kevin Lonergan	Principal Officer, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
Anne Doherty	Cork City Manager

Chester Beatty Library

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Patricia Donlon	Former Curator of the Chester Beatty Library and former Director of the National Library.
Eamonn Ceannt	Artist, sculptor and Former Bursar, UCD
Declan Downey	Professor of History of Art and Archives, UCD
Brian McGing	Regius Chair, School of Classics, TCD

Irish Manuscripts Commission

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
James McGuire (Chair)	Managing Editor of the Dictionary of Irish Biography
Mary O’Dowd	Professor of Gender History, Queen’s University
Jane Ohlmeyer	Professor of Modern History, TCD
Deirdre McMahon	Senior lecturer and Head of History Department, Mary Immaculate College
Greta Jones	Emeritus Professor of History, University of Ulster
Máire Mac Conghail	Professional Genealogist
Nicholas Canny	Director of the Moore Institute, NUI Galway
David Dickson	Associate Professor of Modern History, TCD
David Edwards	Historian, UCC
Chris Flynn	Principal Officer, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
James Kelly	Historian, St. Patrick’s College
Michael Kennedy	Executive editor of the Royal Irish Academy’s ‘Documents on Irish Foreign Policy’ series
John McCafferty	School Of History and Archives, UCD
Donal Moore	City Archivist, Waterford City Archive

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Thomas O'Connor	Dean of Arts, Celtic Studies and Philosophy NUI, Maynooth
Dáibhí Ó Cróinín	Acting Registrar and Deputy President, NUI Galway
Ruan O'Donnell	Senior Lecturer in History, UL
Maggie Smith	Director of the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland
Catherine Fahy	Acting Director, NLI
Frances McGee	Former Director, National Archives

Údarás na Gaeltachta

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Anna Ní Ghallachair (Chair)	Director of the Languages Centre, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Dairíona Nic Con Iomaire	Primary school principal
Pádraig Ó hAinifín	Health Service Executive employee
Eunan Mac Cuinneagáin	Regional manager of WESTBIC in Cill Charthaigh
Micheál Ó Scanaill	Businessman and former teacher
Séamus Cosáí Mac Gearailt	Nominated by Kerry County Council
Seán Ó Cuireán	Solicitor and manager of Donegal Volunteer Centre
Seosamh Ó Laoi	Nominated by Galway County Council
Ian Mac Aindriú	Nominated by Mayo County Council
Cathal Seoighe	Nominated by Meath County Council.
Daithí Alcorn	Nominated by Donegal County Council

Foras na Gaeilge

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Liam Ó Maolmhichíl (Chair)	Former Director General of the GAA, primary school teacher and school inspector.
Eoghan Mac Cormaic (Vice Chair)	Member of Conradh na Gaeilge and employee of Glór na nGael with an interest in education.
Áine Ní Chiaráin	Journalist and former civil servant with an interest in local history.
Bríd Ní Chonghóile	Senior Executive of Gaillimh le Gaeilge, former board member of Galway City VEC and member of Galway City Public Forum.
Therese Ruane	Teacher, former board member of County Mayo VEC, member of Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and Director of Gnó Mhaigh Eo.
Caitríona Ní Shúilleabháin	Teacher
Pól Callaghan	Head of Information and Policy with the Citizens Advice Bureau in Northern Ireland and former MLA.

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Colm Cavanagh	Former Business Development Manager with the North West Regional College, President of the NI Council for Integrated Education, Chair of London-Derry Connections and Vice President of the Alliance Party.
Seosamh Mac Donnchadha	Former teacher, Irish Language Organiser with Galway CCVC, CEO of Foras na Gaeilge, President of the GAA and Chairperson of TG4, CEO of Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board.
Tomás Mac Eochagáin	Director with Griffith College Dublin
Marcus Mac Ruairí	Journalist and writer and Development Officer for Glór na nGael.
Seán Mícheál Ó Dómhnaill	Former school principal and greatly involved in community development and in his local GAA club.
Dónal Ó hAiniféin	School Principal of GS Mhíchíl Chíosóig.
Éamonn Ó Gribín	Retired, member of the SDLP and Conradh na Gaeilge, among other memberships.
Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire	Member of Cork County Council and Chairperson of the Council's Arts, Culture and Language Committee.
Liam Kennedy	Lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast.
Thomas Sharkey	Local Councillor and Secondary School teacher of Irish

Ulster-Scots Agency

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
Tom Scott (Chair)	Board member of a local enterprise agency and involved with several private and public sector bodies with a strong interest in the Ulster-Scots heritage and culture.
Tony Crooks (Vice-Chair)	Numerous academic qualifications and a strong interest in the Ulster-Scots language, culture and heritage.
Hilary Singleton	Founding member of an Ulster-Scots group with vast experience and knowledge of the Ulster-Scots heritage and culture.
Ida Fisher	Extensive experience in local government in County Donegal with an interest in Ulster-Scots heritage and culture.
Val O'Kelly	Worked in a professional and voluntary capacity with many local and national voluntary groups and has an interest in Ulster-Scots heritage and culture.
Sharon Treacy-Dunne	Has a special interest in the promotion of Ulster-Scots music and culture and has commissioned several works in the Ulster-Scots genre.

Appointments since 2 June 2011	Qualifications/Experience of Appointees
William Leathem	Current Chairman of an Ulster-Scots group with a long standing interest in the Ulster-Scots history and culture, particularly in the promotion of the Ulster-Scots music.
Trevor Wilson	Vice President of an Ulster-Scots group with a long standing interest in the Ulster-Scots heritage and culture.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Applications

212. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her officials have examined an application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme; the payments that have issued since year one of 15 to the applicant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37586/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An application for compensation under the Cessation of Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question. I am advised that a payment of €1,500 in respect of Year 1 of 15 (2011) has been made to this applicant. The qualifying criteria for the Cessation of Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme are that:

- The claimant must have a legal interest in one of the 53 raised bog special areas of conservation – ownership or turbary right;
- The claimant must have been the owner or entitled to exercise turbary rights on the land in question on 25 May 2010;
- The turbary on the site must not be exhausted;
- The claimant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the relevant five year period; and
- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

Following an inspection by officials of my Department of the plot of bog in respect of which the applicant has applied for compensation, it appears that a supply of turf had not been cut on the land in question during the relevant five year period.

The application has been reviewed within my Department and arrangements will be made to meet with the applicant to discuss his case as soon as possible.

Question No. 213 answered with Question No. 210.