

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 5, inclusive, answered orally.

Capital Programme

6. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which his Department continues to review specific areas of infrastructural deficiency such as road, rail, water, housing, telecommunications and-or energy with a view to a determination as to the way to proceed to address these issues in the context of overall requirements as part of planned economic recovery and mindful of fiscal constraints; if the concept of a development bond has been considered as a means of addressing such deficiencies in the short and medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42044/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): My Department commenced a review of the public capital programme in April of this year in parallel with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure. The purpose of the review is to assess all areas of public capital investment and to refresh the existing investment strategy and multi-annual envelopes to ensure that they are in line with emerging Government priorities and that our limited resources are focussed on the areas that can best support continued, sustainable and equitable growth.

As the Deputy will be aware, new multi-annual ministerial expenditure ceilings (both capital and current) for the years 2015 to 2017 were published in the Comprehensive Expenditure Report on Budget Day. This Budget marked a move away from cuts to overall spending and allowed for some targeted increases in both capital and current expenditure. On the capital side, significant levels of Government investment are set out for the next three years to support Social Housing, Transport, Education, Health and the Enterprise Sector. The Capital Review is being finalised at the moment and will be published before the end of the year. It will set out a multi-annual capital investment framework to the end of the decade, including the 3 year ceilings announced in the Budget.

The Deputy has asked specifically about the potential for using development bonds to fund national infrastructure. The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) indicates that project-specific bonds would not be the most effective way forward. However, the Government has been actively exploring other non-traditional approaches to financing capital projects that could be viable, and we have been able to make some notable announcements recently. In this context, on Budget Day I announced that it is intended that €400m of public investment would be available, including from the proceeds of the sale of the Bord Gáis energy business, for investment in social housing through an off-balance sheet financial vehicle which will channel funds to the voluntary housing sector. I also announced that Public Private Partnerships would

be used to deliver 1,500 social housing units by 2017. Both of these are in addition to the significant direct Exchequer investment in the social housing programme over the next three years, and the appropriate use of non-traditional funding approaches such as these can help us increase the level of investment available beyond what we can provide through normal Exchequer voted spending.

The Deputy will also be aware that we are setting up the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) to channel investment from the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) towards productive investment in sectors of strategic importance to the Irish economy. The ISIF will seek to leverage and maximise the resources transferred from the NPRF by attracting third-party co-investment. In this way, the Fund's assets can be used as a catalyst to attract additional capital for investment in the Irish economy.

Questions Nos. 7 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Flood Prevention Measures

11. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied with the rate of progress of improving flood defences following last year's severe damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42047/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government Decision of 11 February 2014 allocated total funding of up to €69.5 million for clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014. Of this sum of €69.5 million, up to €19.6 million was allocated for repair of existing coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure based on cost estimates and submissions made by the local authorities concerned to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG). This funding is being made available to the local authorities via the Office of Public Works (OPW) based on programmes of works submitted by the local authorities. The Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Agriculture, Food and the Marine are responsible for the approval of programmes of work and the disbursement of funding for repair of other damaged public infrastructure such as roads, piers, harbours and other community facilities and amenities.

In addition to the €19.6m funding for local authorities, an amount of €1.2m was also allocated under the Government Decision for repair of damage to OPW's own coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure.

Based on the programmes of works for repairs to coastal protection infrastructure that were submitted by local authorities, total funding of €19.0 million was approved by the OPW for 176 projects that were deemed to be within the scope of the works covered by the Government Decision. In this regard I would point out that the Government Decision did not allocate funding for strengthening or new coastal protection works. It applied to repairs of existing infrastructure only.

The prioritisation and progression of the repair works is entirely a matter for the local authorities. The progress made by local authorities in carrying out the repairs has varied from county to county depending on the particular circumstances prevailing and the scale and nature of the damage to be repaired in that area. Overall however, I am generally satisfied that the Councils have gone about the repair work in an efficient manner and I encourage them to continue to progress the works as expeditiously as possible.

I am satisfied that the OPW has made excellent progress on the repair of damage to the flood defence infrastructure, mainly embankments, for which it is directly responsible and that most of the required repair work has now been completed.

The question of improving flood defences through significant strengthening or upgrading of existing defences or new works is a separate issue to the programmes of repair works for which specific funding was allocated by the Government Decision. The requirements for such improvement or new works is being assessed in the context of the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) programme. The principal output of this important programme will be a series of integrated plans of specific measures to address, in a comprehensive and sustainable way, the significant flood risk factors in the main areas of flood risk throughout the country.

Good progress is being made on the six regional CFRAM Studies under the National CFRAM Programme. There are three main stages in the Programme each involving public consultation:

- Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) - finalised in 2011
- Flood Hazard Mapping - 2013 – 2014; informal public consultation on maps now underway and formal, statutory public consultation to commence early 2015
- Catchment Flood Risk Management Plans – draft Plans available by end 2015 with a view to having Plans finalised in 2016

Departmental Reports

12. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to address the issues raised in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report in respect of waste of public money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42051/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I outlined previously in relation to a similar question on the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report, the focus of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is on well-managed and well-targeted public spending, through modernised, effective and accountable public services. The recently published report on the 'Accounts of the Public Service 2013' is part of the wider accountability framework for the delivery of these services.

The report in question is concerned with the accountability of departments and offices in respect of their administration of public funds. As outlined by the Comptroller and Auditor General, it was prepared on the basis of audited information, where available, and other information, documentation and explanations obtained from the relevant government departments and offices.

Drafts of relevant parts of the Report were sent to the departments and offices concerned and their comments were requested. Where appropriate, those comments are incorporated into the Report. As such, the Report itself contains information on the actions being taken across the relevant Departments on foot of the recommendations of the Comptroller and Auditor General. In this context, the majority of the recommendations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General have been agreed by the relevant Accounting Officers and indeed, where appropriate, by my own Department.

In due course, the Committee of Public Accounts will examine and report to Dáil Éireann

on this Report and my Department will prepare a formal response to the recommendations, (the ‘Minute of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform’) in consultation with the departments and offices concerned.

Public Procurement Contracts Social Clauses

13. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to increase the social dividend and community benefit from spending on public procurement contracts, in view of the impending requirements under the new EU rules agreed in January 2014. [42057/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The main purpose of the EU public procurement regime is to open up the market and to ensure the free movement of supplies, services and works within the EU having regard to Treaty of Rome principles including transparency, proportionality and equal treatment. This is the rationale that shapes the detailed rules (Directives) governing the regime.

The new EU rules comprise a suite of three Directives (Public Procurement, Utilities and Concessions) that repeal the existing rules governing the conduct of procurement across the EU but the basic architecture of EU procurement will remain intact. The changes in the new regime were agreed principally to streamline the public procurement process and to put in place more simplified and flexible rules to reduce red tape and to make the procurement process more efficient.

While most of the rules are mandatory for Ireland and all other Member States to implement into national law, there is some limited policy latitude permitted to Member States in transposing the new regime into national legislation. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is currently exploring policy choices as part of the transposition process. In this context, I launched on Friday last, 31st October, a public consultation on the new Directives. The document is available on the OGP website www.procurement.ie and written submissions are invited from stakeholders and interested parties on the issues raised in the consultation document by 12 December 2014. Consideration will be given to the responses received, (including those related to the environmental, social and labour law considerations article 18(2) requirements) when drafting the Statutory Instruments to implement the EU rules into national law.

Social clauses in contracts place obligations on suppliers to perform actions focussed on broader policy considerations. They can be used in public procurement in cases where they are targeted at factoring into the procurement process consideration of social issues such as employment opportunities, equal opportunities and social inclusion. In order to be compatible with EU law, they must be made known to all interested parties at tender stage and must not restrict participation by contractors from other Member States.

As the Deputy is fully aware, the Government has recently supported in principle a Private Members Bill put forward by her Party in relation to social clauses. The Government is not opposed to the principle of social clauses and sees significant merit in developing a social clauses framework. We believe however that the inclusion of social clauses needs to be done in a targeted manner and not in the “across the board manner” suggested by the Bill. The Government favours a targeted approach to the use of social clauses focussed on contracts where employers are likely to be hiring additional workers to deliver the contract. This is likely to mitigate the risk of displacing workers already in employment while offering the opportunity of assisting with labour activation measures for the long-term unemployed.

I should point out that, as the Deputy is aware, there are already a number of initiatives under way in this area.

A devolved schools programme is being administered by the NDFA on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. This involves three contracts covering fourteen sites with the works comprising both stand-alone, new build and extensions/refurbishment works. Construction work started on all three of the contracts during Spring 2014. The aggregate capital value of the contracts is c. €70m. I understand that overall compliance in relation to the pilot clause has been good. The Department of Social Protection and its local Intreo offices are working closely with the appointed contractors to support the pilot initiative. There has been strong positive engagement from the contractors involved in each of the projects.

In addition on the 9th of June I announced the establishment of a Social Clauses Project Group to pro-actively look at projects with a view to including social clauses to ensure those awarded contracts contribute to employment or training opportunities for long term unemployed.

Specific projects that are currently in planning and are deemed potentially suitable for the inclusion of employment opportunities and social inclusion will be identified and targeted to maximise the potential opportunities from these projects.

I have asked the Office of Government Procurement to review this pilot project after 12 months and then to issue guidance.

Overall the Government believes that further debate and discussion is required as to the correct policy approach regarding enabling social clauses, mindful of the need to maintain flexibility and adapt to changing circumstances.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

14. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the payment of bonuses and incentive pay at Irish Water and other semi-State agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42046/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In 2012 the Government reviewed the position on the payment of performance related reward schemes or bonuses for Chief Executive Officers in Commercial State Companies and agreed to continue with the policy which it introduced in 2011 of requesting the State Companies concerned not to award such bonus payments in light of the serious state of the public finances. Furthermore the Government agreed to continue with the practice of excluding the payment of bonus provisions in the employment contracts of newly appointed CEOs to such State Companies as well as in respect of contract renewals for incumbent CEOs.

The requirement to cease such forms of bonus payment together with other basic salary reductions introduced by this Government in respect of the CEOs in State Companies was necessitated by the very difficult financial and economic circumstances facing this country. The Government will accordingly continue to consider future policy developments in relation to performance related pay for the CEOs concerned in the light of prevailing circumstances.

I have no role in relation to the Performance Related Award Schemes for staff below CEO level in Commercial State Companies.

It is expected that the Boards of these organisations act responsibly in designing and imple-

menting pay structures that drive performance in the competitive environment in which they operate, while ensuring that they are fully compliant with Government pay policy. In view of the fact that Irish Water is a newly created monopoly entity, it will be important that the organisation actively demonstrates that it is performing well for the people it serves before any additional award system can be shown to be merited.

With regard to the Non-Commercial State Companies, it is a matter of Government policy that Performance Related Award Schemes continue to be suspended on an indefinite basis. Access to such schemes is no longer included in the employment contracts for newly-appointed CEOs or in contract renewals for incumbent CEOs. It is a matter for parent Departments in the first instance to ensure that all bodies under their aegis are fully in compliance with Government pay policy in its application.

Appointments to State Boards

15. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he expects members of the Irish diaspora to be appointed to strengthen State boards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42052/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy will be aware the Government recently announced a revised model for Ministerial appointments to State Boards. In future, all appointments to State Boards must be advertised openly on the State Boards portal at www.stateboards.ie, which is operated by the Public Appointments Service.

My officials are currently preparing overarching guidelines on appointments for approval by Government, including issues related to diversity. As part of this process all Departments have been contacted seeking comprehensive details on all State Boards under their aegis.

It is envisaged that candidates for membership of State Boards will be required to meet specific and detailed criteria determined by the relevant Minister as necessary for the effective performance of the relevant role. Selection will be by way of a transparent assessment system run by the Public Appointments Service.

All candidates applying for membership of State Boards, including those from the group referred to in the Deputy's question, will be assessed against the specified criteria on a consistent and uniform basis.

Public Procurement Contracts

16. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if consideration will be given to ensuring the reform of the public procurement under way here takes into account the local economic benefits criterion through the use of the multiplier methodology along the lines of similar stipulations which exist in other EU member states and which by all appearances do not contravene EU competition law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42021/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the EU rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against

particular candidates on grounds such as nationality, organisational size, etc. and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

The Government acknowledges the significant role that SMEs play in the Irish economy and is committed to ensuring that SMEs are fully engaged with public sector procurement and the opportunities presenting.

In April of this year my Department reviewed and updated existing guidelines and procedures aimed at promoting SME participation in public procurement. Circular 10/14 was issued and sets out new initiatives aimed at opening up opportunities for small businesses that want to tender for public contracts and also to ensure that engaging with government procurement is easy and low cost. The main thrust of the circular is as follows:

- buyers are advised to undertake market analysis prior to tendering in order to better understand the range of goods and services on offer, the competitive landscape, including the specific capabilities of SMEs, etc.

- the circular promotes transparency in procurement by requiring supplies and general services contracts with an estimated value of €25,000 be advertised on the Government's electronic tendering portal, e-Tenders,

- it encourages suppliers including SMEs to fully use e-Tenders and avail of its facilities in relation to registration, e-tendering and automatic alerts in relation to future tendering opportunities

- buyers are encouraged not to set turnover thresholds at more than twice the estimated contract value and puts limits on insurance levels for suppliers, where possible

- promotes greater use of "open" tendering and less use of "restrictive" tendering

- it encourages SMEs to consider using consortia where they are not of sufficient scale to tender in their own right or where they may lack certain capabilities necessary to provide a compelling proposition

- it encourages Contracting Authorities to break large contracts down into lots where reasonable to do so and where it does not expose the State to undue risk or significant management overheads

The SME Working Group, established under the Government's Action Plan for Jobs, was consulted on the new Guidelines. The new Circular has been broadly welcomed by industry representative associations.

The Office of Government Procurement also supports the work of Enterprise Ireland and InterTrade Ireland in building awareness of public procurement and supporting training for small suppliers in bidding for public contracts. The OGP for example supported two "Meet the Buyer" events in Belfast and Dublin last year attended by approximately 1,000 suppliers. Approximately 1,700 are expected to attend similar events this year. In addition, the OGP supported the 'Go 2 Tender' programme run by InterTrade Ireland which was attended by 317 SMEs last year. This year InterTrade Ireland are also delivering a programme on Consortia Building to assist SMEs in developing understanding to enable them to jointly bid for state contracts.

The Office of Government Procurement is establishing structures for its sourcing teams around categories of procurement spend e.g. ICT, professional services, facilities management, etc. These specialised sourcing teams will work with representatives from Departments & Agencies in Category Councils to develop category-specific strategies that seek to establish the

best commercial approach to the supply market that balances the need to achieve value for the money for the State with other objectives such as supply market sustainability, and other Government Policy objectives. The content of these strategies will vary depending upon the nature of the goods and services required.

Before any significant sourcing activity is undertaken, the OGP will conduct a full supply market analysis to establish a comprehensive understanding of that market on the appropriate national, regional or local basis. Part of this analysis would take into account the relative importance the scale of State business and the current market structures, and build the results of this analysis into the final strategy to maximise sustainable competition and opportunities for SMEs.

The reform of public procurement across the public service is on-going and will continue to provide opportunities to the SME sector to win business. The Office of Government Procurement will continue to work with industry to ensure that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way and to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly.

Croke Park Agreement Issues

17. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to reverse the pay cuts for lower-paid public servants as promised under the Croke Park agreement. [42068/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In relation to the pay and pension reductions imposed on public servants through the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009-2013, the reductions were progressively structured so it is those on lower incomes who are least affected, with the highest reductions imposed on the highest paid. Significantly, the most recent pay reduction effected by the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, was confined to those public servants on annual salaries of €65,000 or more only, and the core pay of almost 87% of public servants was not impacted by this pay reduction.

The Deputy will be aware that in seeking the most recent savings and reductions from the public service pay and pensions bill, public service employers and trade unions entered into negotiations and concluded a collective agreement, the Haddington Road Agreement. This three year Agreement, effective from July 2013, built upon and reaffirmed the existing overall commitments in the Public Service Agreement (Croke Park Agreement) including those in relation to lower paid public servants and sets the terms of pay in the public service until 2016.

As provided for in the Haddington Road Agreement, and subsequently legislated for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, the rate of PRD on the €15,000 to €20,000 band of pay received in a year was reduced from 5% to 2.5% on 1 January 2014. This rate cut is worth €125 annually in gross terms to most public servants, with those taxed at the standard rate enjoying the greater gain in terms of take-home pay boost.

The public service unions have indicated their intention, should the State's financial circumstances permit, to lodge a pay claim next year. If such a claim is made, the Government will of course have to consider it, in line with the prevailing fiscal position. As I have already stated, the legal position concerning the financial emergency legislation, which has underpinned the reductions to date, will also have to be addressed as part of putting in place more normal pay setting arrangements in the public service for the future.

Finally my colleague the Minister for Business and Employment is currently developing proposals to implement the Government programme commitment to establish a Low Pay Commission (LPC) on a statutory basis as an independent body to make annual recommendations to the Government about the appropriate level of the minimum wage and related matters.

I would anticipate that the Commission would also have to take into account low paid public servants as part of their considerations.

Severe Weather Events Expenditure

18. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total amount of funding approved for works by his Department arising out of the storms last January; the amount claimed to date by local authorities; the amount expended to date by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42022/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government Decision of 11 February 2014 allocated total funding of up to €69.5 million for clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014. Of this sum of €69.5 million, up to €19.6 million was allocated for repair of existing coastal protection and flood defences based on submissions and cost estimates made by the local authorities concerned to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG). This funding for repair of damaged coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure is being made available to the local authorities via the Office of Public Works (OPW) based on programmes of works submitted by the local authorities. The Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Agriculture, Food and the Marine are responsible for the approval of programmes of work and the disbursement of funding for repair of other damaged public infrastructure such as roads, piers, harbours and other community facilities and amenities.

In addition to the €19.6m funding for local authorities, an amount of €1.2m was also allocated under the Government Decision for repair of damage to OPW's own coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure.

Based on the programmes of works of repairs to coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure that were submitted by local authorities, total funding of €19.0 million was approved by the OPW for 176 projects that were deemed to be within the scope of the works covered by the Government Decision. The prioritisation and progression of projects is entirely a matter for the local authorities concerned.

To date, local authorities have submitted claims for drawn down of funding of €1.639 million in respect of projects that have been completed, are under construction, or where contracts for the works have been placed. The OPW has paid a total of €385,000 to date to the local authorities in respect of those claims. The balance of claims are being processed by the OPW and will be paid very shortly. The local authorities have indicated to the OPW that further substantial drawn down applications will be submitted by them before the end of this year.

Information on the drawn down of funding by the local authorities in respect of the storm damage allocations is provided on the OPW website . This information is updated on a monthly basis.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

19. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to tackle low pay in the public service. [42003/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Notwithstanding the necessary imposition of pay reductions on public servants through the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009-2013, terms and conditions including pay rates for public servants have traditionally been determined through collective bargaining processes with due regard to statutory provisions including the National Minimum Wage Act. Indeed, the Deputy will be aware that one of the first actions of this Government on taking office was to increase with effect from July 2011, the Statutory Minimum Wage rate, reduced by the previous Government in 2010, to its pre-existing rate. While the fiscal emergency which arose through the mismanagement of the economy by the previous Government gave rise to the exceptional statutory reductions in pay imposed on public servants, the process of collective bargaining has survived and has been highlighted by the concluding of difficult public service agreements including most recently, the Haddington Road Agreement, by staff representatives and their public service employers.

In relation to the pay reductions imposed on public servants through the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009-2013, the reductions imposed have been progressive, thereby ensuring that reductions imposed impacted on low paid workers least and that higher reductions were imposed on the higher paid. Significantly, the more recent pay cuts applied to public servants under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 and the Haddington Road Agreement apply only to those higher paid public servants on annual salaries of €65,000 or more. The core pay of 87% of the workers in the public service was not reduced by the legislation.

The Haddington Road Agreement sets the terms of pay in the public service until 2016. The fiscal targets in Budget 2014, which the Government is committed to achieving, are based on the reduced remuneration rates as well as on the revenue accruing from the Pension Related Deduction and Public Service Pension Reduction as provided for under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts.

In order to continue the recent encouraging evidence of progress in relation to the public finances, any amelioration in the impact of the Financial Emergency measures, and public service pay policy generally, will continue to have regard to our overall fiscal targets including achieving a deficit of less than 3% of GDP by the end of 2015. Nevertheless, the Government has acted to begin an amelioration of the measures. As provided for in the Haddington Road Agreement and subsequently legislated for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, the rate of PRD on the €15,000 to €20,000 band of pay received in a year fell from 5% to 2.5% on 1 January 2014. This rate cut is worth €125 annually in gross terms to most public servants, with those taxed at the standard rate enjoying the greater gain in terms of an increase to take-home pay.

The public service unions have indicated their intention, should the State's financial circumstances permit, to lodge a pay claim next year. If such a claim is made the Government will of course have to consider it, in line with the prevailing fiscal position. The legal position concerning the financial emergency legislation, which has underpinned the reductions to date, will also have to be addressed as part of putting in place more normal pay setting arrangements in the public service for the future.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

20. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under his aegis. [42065/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that my Department does not use the services of recruitment or employment agencies. The Department has used the services of the Public Appointments Service, "PAS" in all our recruitment requirements and related advertising. PAS has a budget allocation for this purpose. The Department would only be required to pay additional costs in cases where we have requested advertisements to be placed in specific publications or with requirements above the PAS general standard/format. Since my Department was established in July 2011 I have not incurred any additional costs.

The following table is a list of bodies under my remit that paid fees to recruitment and employment agencies from 2011 to date:

-	Fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies	Fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies	Fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies	Fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies
Office / Body	2011 (€)	2012 (€)	2013 (€)	2014 to date (€)
Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)*	€170,864	€144,867	€94,080	€43,650
Valuation Office	€108,306			
Institute of Public Administration (IPA)				€528
Office of Public Works**	€237,223	€207,962	€255,601	€227,595
Totals	€516,393	€352,829	€349,681	€271,773

* The costs incurred by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) represent total costs funded by both Northern Ireland and Ireland. In the time available for responding it was not possible for the SEUPB to apply a North South split to these costs. Where necessary, an exchange rate of £1 = €1.278 has been used.

** Established personnel in the Office of Public Works are recruited via the Public Appointments Service and Industrial Personnel are recruited directly by the Office.

Departmental Expenditure

21. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide the details of average cuts paid by his Department and State agencies under his aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies is received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42066/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that my Department does not use the services of recruitment or employment agencies. The Department has used the services of the Public Appointments Service, "PAS" in all our recruitment requirements and related advertising. PAS has a budget allocation for this purpose. The Department would only be required to pay additional costs in cases where we have requested advertisements to be placed in specific publications or with requirements above the PAS general standard/format. Since my Department was established in July 2011 I have not incurred any additional costs.

The arrangement with regard to the proportion of fees paid to the worker by the agency is primarily a matter for both of those parties and, quite often, my office would not have knowledge of the details of such arrangements.

The average proportion of the gross fee that the agencies receive for their administration in the Office of Public Works is in the region of 13% and the worker receives approximately 87%.

In 2014 the Institute for Public Administration paid a fee amounting to €527.96 to an employment agency which related to a salary paid to an employee amounting to €6,598.96.

The following table shows the fees paid by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to recruitment and temporary employment agencies from 2011 to date:

Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)*

Fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies

Year	Recruitment/ EmploymentA- gency Total Cost(€)	Total Amount Paid to Employ- ees(€)	Agency Mark- up Fee(€)	Ancillary Costs ** (€)
2011	€170,864	€109,353	€30,756	€30,756
2012	€144,867	€92,715	€26,076	€26,076
2013	€94,080	€60,211	€16,934	€16,934
2014 to date	€43,650	€27,936	€7,857	€7,857
Total	€453,461	€290,215	€81,623	€81,623

* The costs incurred by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) represent total costs funded by both Northern Ireland and Ireland. In the time available for responding it was not possible for the SEUPB to apply a North South split to these costs. Where necessary, an exchange rate of £1 = €1.278 has been used.

**Ancillary costs are separate to the agency mark-up fee and the total amount of money paid to employees. Ancillary costs include holiday pay which is paid directly to the employee, National Insurance contributions passed on to the Revenue, and the cost to the agency of payroll processing costs.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

22. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to facilitate public sector workers on contracts of indefinite duration in progressing to more favourable permanent contracts. [42064/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As Minister

for Public Expenditure and Reform I have overarching responsibility for recruitment to the Civil Service. Such recruitment is governed by the Public Service (Management and Recruitment) Act 2004. Under the Act, the method of appointment to a permanent Civil Service post is as a result of being successful in a competition run by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) or by another licence holder such as the head of a Department or Office. Selection processes are open to all eligible applicants who meet minimum entry criteria.

The mismanagement of a fixed-term contract may lead to an employee having an entitlement to a contract of indefinite duration. A contract of indefinite duration is an employment contract which is not defined by an objective condition such as arriving at a specific date, completing a specific task or the occurrence of a specific event. It should be noted that in the Civil Service context, entitlement to a contract of indefinite duration is not the same as being appointed as an established civil servant. A contract of indefinite duration may still be linked to a specific activity and can be terminated by notice as provided in the Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts (1972-2005).

It is a matter for Human Resource Units in all Departments and Agencies to have procedures in place for dealing with the recruitment and employment of fixed-term employees and the management of their contracts. My Department issues Guidelines on “Best Practice for the Recruitment and Management of Fixed-term Employees in the Irish Civil Service”. These are revised from time to time as required. The most recent version issued in April 2014 and took account of changes arising as result of the Single Pension Scheme and the Haddington Road Agreement. The Guidelines can be found on my Department’s HR Management website. Any proposal from a Department for a change in the status of an employee from being on a contract of indefinite duration to a permanent employee would need to comply with the Public Service (Management and Recruitment) Act 2004 and be sanctioned by my Department.

Decisions on the filling of posts, permanent or otherwise, in other public service bodies are a matter for the employing bodies in the context of their business needs.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

23. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on comments made by an official (details supplied) from his Department on 30 October 2014 that the idea of the sector being permanent and pensionable is not written in stone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42067/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Taoiseach and I launched the Civil Service Renewal Plan on the 30th of October 2014. This Plan outlines a vision for the Civil Service and outlines 25 actions that will bring about practical changes in four thematic areas.

The objective for Government is that this plan will create a more unified, professional, responsive and open Civil Service. We want to ensure that our Civil Service is effective, efficient and ready to meet all current and future challenges.

Amongst the 25 specific action points are commitments to maximise the performance and potential of all Civil Service employees and organisations. The issue of ‘permanent and pensionable’ is obviously relevant in the context of addressing underperformance where, in certain instances, a more rigorous disciplinary procedure, up to and including dismissal may be necessary.

The capacity and capability of the Civil Service in effectively and efficiently performing its

roles both for the public and for government is fundamentally dependent on the quality of its human resources. In implementing these actions we hope to maximise the potential of our staff.

Public Service Contracts

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the criteria and the measures undertaken for the awarding of public contracts, with regard to ensuring that indigenous Irish companies receive fair access to this valuable work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42062/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The reform of the procurement system across the public service is a key element of the reform programme for the public service. Public Procurement savings enable public service organisations deliver much needed services within the tighter budgets that they must now operate within. The fragmented procurement arrangements across the public service have enabled suppliers to charge different public service bodies different prices for the same goods and services. This is not sustainable, as the State cannot afford to continue to purchase works, goods and services in a manner that undermines the level of services it can deliver.

Reforms are being carried out in a manner that recognises the importance of SMEs in the economic recovery of the country. The establishment of the Office of Government Procurement is a key element to bringing a more professional and whole of government approach to procurement. It will drive fair, transparent and open competition in the marketplace but also continue to work with business to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly.

The State has immense purchasing power, spending in the region of €12 billion per annum on goods, services and works. This level of expenditure affords significant business opportunities for firms that can supply the products and services that are required by public bodies. The Office of Government Procurement estimates that approximately 95% of this annual procurement spend goes to Irish suppliers. It is clear therefore that public procurement activity is already a significant driver of employment opportunities and economic growth within the State.

Circular 10/14 issued in April of this year will open up opportunities for small businesses to bid for State business. It will also help to simplify and streamline the public procurement process, and reduce the administrative burden on businesses that want to tender for public contracts.

Businesses who are successful in winning public contracts often win repeat business and given the consistent nature of public procurement processes, are often well placed to win public sector contracts abroad. (The public procurement market in the EU is estimated to be valued in excess of €2.4 trillion annually.) As a Government we want to see Irish business being competitive and winning business both here and abroad.

Public Procurement Contracts

25. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to introduce stronger measures to prevent conflicts of interest, favouritism and corruption in public procurement contracts, in view of the impending requirements under the new EU rules agreed in January 2014. [42058/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The main purpose of the EU public procurement regime is to open up the market and to ensure the free movement of supplies, services and works within the EU having regard to Treaty of Rome principles including transparency, proportionality and equal treatment. This is the rationale that shapes the detailed rules (Directives) governing the regime.

Under existing public procurement rules, contracting authorities are required to ensure that staff involved in purchasing or placing contracts are familiar with the EU and national rules that apply in relation to public procurement. In particular Article 45 of EU Directive 2004/18/EC requires contracting authorities to exclude from tendering any tenderers who have been convicted of various types or categories of offence, including corruption, fraud, money laundering, and participation in a criminal organisation. The Directive also includes various permissible grounds for exclusion at the contracting authority's discretion, including bankruptcy, criminal conviction (where not attracting mandatory exclusion), grave professional misconduct, serious misrepresentation, and non-payment of tax or social security by the economic operator. These provisions have been incorporated into Irish law under Regulation 53 of SI 329 and are reflected in the Model Tender and Contract Document which issued in 2011 and which cover the procurement of goods and general services.

For works, goods and services contracts, these provisions are contained in the Instructions to Tenderers and conditions of contract, where the standard forms of contract are used. These latter documents also require that any conflict of interest, or potential conflict of interest, on the part of a tenderer, individual employees, or agents or subcontractors of a tenderer to be fully disclosed to the Contracting Authority as soon as it becomes apparent. This may result in elimination from a competition or termination of a contract. The provisions also prohibit gifts, consideration or commission of any kind as an inducement or reward in relation to the award or performance of any public sector contract.

In relation to buyers, employees in the public sector are required to adhere to ethical standards under the relevant legislation including the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995, the Standards in Public Office Act 2001 and the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889 - 2005. Public procurers involved in procurement are required, under these legislative instruments, to operate to the highest ethical standards in public office. These requirements comply fully with the existing rules governing public procurement.

The new public Directives are generally similar to the existing rules with respect to exclusion, although with some additions. For example the grounds for mandatory exclusion have been updated and expanded to include human trafficking, etc. Breach of tax or social security obligations by the economic operator, established by "final and binding judicial or administrative finding" is now to be a mandatory exclusion ground, rather than discretionary. The permissible / discretionary grounds for exclusion are also extended compared with the current rules, to cover cases where: an economic operator has entered agreements aimed at distorting competition.

The Office of Government Procurement is currently exploring policy choices as part of the transposition process. In this context, on Friday last, 31st October, I launched a public consultation on the new Directives. The document is available on the OGP website www.procurement.ie and written submissions are invited from stakeholders and interested parties on the issues raised in the consultation document by 12th December, 2014. Consideration will be given to the responses received when drafting the Statutory Instruments to implement the EU rules into national law.

On foot of responses received from the public consultation and ongoing discussions with the

Attorney General's Office, consideration will be given to any further appropriate measures for contracting authorities to take to prevent, identify and remedy conflicts of interest arising in the conduct of the procurement process. Issues around prior involvement of candidate or tenderers within the meaning of article 41 of the new Directive will also be considered.

If the Deputy has any concerns or information regarding potential ethical breaches, I would encourage you to raise the matter with the relevant contracting authority or enforcement body.

Public Sector Staff Redundancies

26. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has conducted an analysis of the costs and benefits of the voluntary redundancy scheme which operated in the public service in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42053/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I have mentioned in previous replies on this matter, before the Government decision was taken in respect of introducing Voluntary Redundancy in the Public Service, an analysis of the likely Exchequer impacts was carried out to estimate the cost of such a scheme, the payback period for the State and its overall net present value.

This analysis estimated that for every 1,000 employees who opted to participate in a Voluntary Redundancy programme there would be an estimated gross cost of approximately €109 million. The gross payroll savings for 1,000 employees was estimated at approximately €57 million every year. Therefore the initial cost of 1,000 employees leaving would be recouped within two years. The analysis also proposed that further savings would also be realised in the future when these employees reached retirement age because of their reduced pension entitlements.

In 2013, just under 500 staff left the Public Service under a Voluntary Redundancy scheme. This was largely in the Local Authority area (389), with small pockets in the Defence, Education and Semi-State sectors. It would have been the responsibility of local sectoral management to oversee the offer of these schemes, under the agreed standard terms.

It is important to note that:

- the approach to Voluntary Redundancy schemes has been to allow public service organisations to use it on a targeted basis in different areas where it makes sense and can be shown to offer value for money in the long run; and that

- Voluntary Redundancy is by definition not compulsory, and therefore people will only leave if that is what they want; equally there is no automatic right to redundancy. All applications are considered in the context of ongoing business needs and service provision priorities.

Office of Public Works Projects

27. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason his Department has given permission to the Office of Public Works to prefund projects of a capital nature arising from the storm damage last January when similar expenditure arising out of same storm damage approved by other Departments is not allowed to be prefunded under the rules laid down by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42023/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Si-

mon Harris): The Government Decision of 11th February 2014 allocated total funding of up to €69.5 million for clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13th December 2013 to 6th January 2014. Of this sum of €69.5 million, up to €19.6 million was allocated for repair of existing coastal protection and flood defences based on submissions and cost estimates made by the local authorities concerned to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG). This funding for repair of damaged coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure is being made available to the local authorities via the Office of Public Works (OPW) based on programmes of works submitted by the local authorities. The Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Agriculture, Food and the Marine are responsible for the approval of programmes of work and the disbursement of funding for repair of other damaged public infrastructure such as roads, piers, harbours and other community facilities and amenities.

Based on the programmes of works of repairs to coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure that were submitted by local authorities, total funding of €19.0 million was approved by the OPW for 176 projects that were deemed to be within the scope of the works covered by the Government Decision. The prioritisation and progression of projects is entirely a matter for the local authorities concerned.

Where the OPW is funding local authorities in carrying out flood defence or coastal protection projects, it is the practice of the Office to seek to enable those bodies to meet liabilities as they arise by providing funding where binding contracts have been entered into by the local authorities. This ensures that the local authorities can proceed with and maintain efficient progression of these projects without the risk of delays due to internal cash flow or financing difficulties. In the case of the projects on the approved programmes of repairs to coastal infrastructure, advances of up to 80% of the funding approved for these works may be made to local authorities on request provided the relevant Director of Services in the local authority certifies that specific conditions have been met, in particular that binding contracts have been entered into by the local authority for the works. Payment of the full amount approved is made on receipt of a statement by the Director of Services certifying that all the applicable conditions have been complied with, including that the works for which funding was allocated have been completed.

The OPW is satisfied that its current practice in relation to funding local authorities is appropriate and accords with the relevant guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The OPW is not aware of the specific funding procedures applied by other Departments in relation to the storm damage repairs.

Public Procurement Contracts

28. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the actions his Department and the Office of Government Procurement intend to take to increase indigenous small and medium enterprises tendering for public procurement contracts. [42060/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the EU rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular candidates on grounds such as nationality, organisational size, etc. and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

The Government acknowledges the significant role that SMEs play in the Irish economy and

is committed to ensuring that SMEs are fully engaged with public sector procurement and the opportunities presenting.

In April of this year my Department reviewed and updated existing guidelines and procedures aimed at promoting SME participation in public procurement. Circular 10/14 was issued and sets out new initiatives aimed at opening up opportunities for small businesses that want to tender for public contracts and also to ensure that engaging with government procurement is easy and low cost. The main thrust of the circular is as follows:

- buyers are advised to undertake market analysis prior to tendering in order to better understand the range of goods and services on offer, the competitive landscape, including the specific capabilities of SMEs, etc.

- the circular promotes transparency in procurement by requiring supplies and general services contracts with an estimated value of €25,000 be advertised on the Government's electronic tendering portal, e-Tenders,

- it encourages suppliers including SMEs to fully use e-Tenders and avail of its facilities in relation to registration, e-tendering and automatic alerts in relation to future tendering opportunities

- buyers are encouraged not to set turnover thresholds at more than twice the estimated contract value and puts limits on insurance levels for suppliers where possible

- promotes greater use of "open" tendering and less use of "restrictive" tendering

- it encourages SMEs to consider using consortia where they are not of sufficient scale to tender in their own right or where they may lack certain capabilities necessary to provide a compelling proposition

- it encourages Contracting Authorities to break large contracts down into lots where reasonable to do so and where it does not expose the State to undue risk or significant management overheads

The new Circular has been broadly welcomed by industry representative associations. The reform of public procurement across the public service is on-going and will continue to provide opportunities to the SME sector to win business. The Office of Government Procurement will continue to work with industry to ensure that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way and to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly.

The Office of Government Procurement also supports the work of Enterprise Ireland and InterTrade Ireland in building awareness of public procurement and supporting training for small suppliers in bidding for public contracts. The OGP for example supported two "Meet the Buyer" events in Belfast and Dublin last year attended by approximately 1,000 suppliers. Approximately 1,700 are expected to attend similar events this year. In addition, the OGP supported the 'Go 2 Tender' programme run by InterTrade Ireland which was attended by 317 SMEs last year. This year InterTrade Ireland are also delivering a programme on Consortia Building to assist SMEs in developing understanding to enable them to jointly bid for state contracts.

The OGP will continue to work with industry to ensure that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way and to ensure that Government procurement policies are business friendly.

Public Sector Allowances Expenditure

29. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the breakdown by Department and allowance category of the savings in allowances in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42048/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Following the Government Decision in September 2012 on the Review of Public Service Allowances and Premium Pay, in cases where the review found that there is no business case for payment of an allowance to new beneficiaries, no appointee to a public service post since 31 January 2012 will receive that allowance.

Given in general allowances have been discontinued for new appointees to posts, the precise figures on savings to the pay bill in 2014 and future years depends on the rate of staff turnover across the public service. Where appropriate, savings arising have been incorporated into the pay allocations for 2014.

A number of the sectoral agreements incorporated into the Haddington Road Agreement in 2013, indicate the intention of the relevant sectoral management to review or amend certain allowances in payment to staff. The Agreement provides that there will be full co-operation with the Allowances review, taking account of the recommendations contained in Labour Court Recommendation 20448. It is a matter therefore for local management to advance the ongoing review and elimination as appropriate of allowances in each sector during the lifetime of the Agreement. The Haddington Road Oversight Group is keeping the matter under general review.

Economic Data

30. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he and his Department continue to monitor the impact of fiscal and economic constraints imposed throughout the economy in the course of the economic downturn with a view to identifying specific targets for amelioration as part of the planned economic recovery; if he anticipates the further softening of measures taken at the beginning of the downturn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42045/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The banking crisis in 2008 and subsequent recession had a profound impact on the public finances necessitating the implementation of significant expenditure reductions over a six year period.

Gross voted expenditure has been reduced from its peak of €63.1 billion in 2009 to €54.5 billion in 2013. This represents a reduction of approximately 13½ per cent between 2009 and 2013. The gross voted expenditure allocation for 2014 is €53 billion.

The implementation of these expenditure adjustments has contributed towards a radical improvement in the sustainability of the public finances and has been delivered through the efforts of all Departments and their agencies to seek savings, pursue efficiencies, and manage within constrained budgets, often while meeting increasing demands for the public services they deliver.

Only now, after 6 years of fiscal consolidation, is our economy beginning to recover, with this economic recovery leading to an improvement in the fiscal outlook. Because of this, the Government can now achieve the key budgetary objective of bringing the deficit below 3% of

GDP in 2015 without having to make further cuts to spending. Indeed, in the recent Budget we were able to provide for some targeted spending increases for areas of priority. The Comprehensive Expenditure Report 2015 - 2017, published on Budget day, shows that total gross voted expenditure for 2015 will be €53.6 billion, which is an increase of €0.6 billion over the allocation in the 2014 Revised Estimates.

When implementing expenditure reductions, the Government's priority has at all times been to protect our society's most vulnerable and support economic recovery to the greatest extent possible. In line with this priority, the increase in expenditure in 2015 is targeted at critical areas in Social Protection, Health, Education, and Housing, with capital investment targeted at providing more homes to those in need of support, and investment in vital infrastructure to underpin future economic growth.

My Department, through the implementation of successive Public Service Reform Plans has focused on the rationalisation of public sector bodies, implementation of shared services across Government Departments, increased evaluation of expenditure policies and programmes, and numerous other productivity-enhancing measures. This work will continue to ensure the ongoing delivery of expenditure efficiencies.

As outlined in the Comprehensive Expenditure Report, it is intended that expenditure will increase by further amounts in 2016 and 2017 to meet service pressures. The level of increases will be determined at that time taking into account our economic growth and our continued requirement to reduce the deficit and meet the requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact.

Our challenge as a Government over the coming years will be to ensure that the progress made in returning stability to the public finances is not undone by unnecessary profligacy. Decisions regarding the unwinding of measures taken during the fiscal crisis will be taken with due regard to the resource constraints which persist. We must use our recovery wisely through retaining and augmenting the benefits of improved efficiency, increased productivity, and enhanced fiscal discipline.

Public Procurement Contracts

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that the system of awarding public contracts allows indigenous Irish companies fair opportunity in the tender process; if he has planned any particular initiatives that will help improve access for Irish companies to bid and be awarded public contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42063/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the EU rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular candidates on grounds such as nationality, organisational size, etc. and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

The Government acknowledges the significant role that SMEs play in the Irish economy and is committed to ensuring that SMEs are fully engaged with public sector procurement and the opportunities presenting.

In April of this year my Department reviewed and updated existing guidelines and procedures aimed at promoting SME participation in public procurement. Circular 10/14 was issued and sets out new initiatives aimed at opening up opportunities for small businesses that want

to tender for public contracts and also to ensure that engaging with government procurement is easy and low cost. The main thrust of the circular is as follows:

- buyers are advised to undertake market analysis prior to tendering in order to better understand the range of goods and services on offer, the competitive landscape, including the specific capabilities of SMEs, etc.

- the circular promotes transparency in procurement by requiring supplies and general services contracts with an estimated value of €25,000 be advertised on the Government's electronic tendering portal, e-Tenders,

- it encourages suppliers including SMEs to fully use e-Tenders and avail of its facilities in relation to registration, e-tendering and automatic alerts in relation to future tendering opportunities

- buyers are encouraged not to set turnover thresholds at more than twice the estimated contract value and puts limits on insurance levels for suppliers, where possible

- promotes greater use of "open" tendering and less use of "restrictive" tendering

- it encourages SMEs to consider using consortia where they are not of sufficient scale to tender in their own right or where they may lack certain capabilities necessary to provide a compelling proposition

- it encourages Contracting Authorities to break large contracts down into lots where reasonable to do so and where it does not expose the State to undue risk or significant management overheads.

The SME Working Group, established under the Government's Action Plan for Jobs, was consulted on the new Guidelines. The new Circular has been broadly welcomed by industry representative associations.

The Office of Government Procurement also supports the work of Enterprise Ireland and InterTrade Ireland in building awareness of public procurement and supporting training for small suppliers in bidding for public contracts. The OGP for example supported two "Meet the Buyer" events in Belfast and Dublin last year attended by approximately 1,000 suppliers. Approximately 1,700 are expected to attend similar events this year. In addition, the OGP supported the "Go 2 Tender" programme run by InterTrade Ireland which was attended by 317 SMEs last year.

This year InterTrade Ireland are also delivering a programme on Consortia Building to assist SMEs in developing understanding to enable them to jointly bid for state contracts.

The reform of public procurement across the public service is on-going and will continue to provide opportunities to the SME sector to win business. The Office of Government Procurement will continue to work with industry to ensure that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way and to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly.

Civil Service Accountability

32. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the work completed to date in implementing the recommendations of the independent panel on strengthening civil service accountability and performance; if the consultation events held as part of this

process will be maintained as a mechanism for public sector workers to provide feedback on the performance of the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42020/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The report of the Independent Panel on Strengthening Civil Service Accountability and Performance was published on 11 June 2014. In the context of the development of a Civil Service Renewal Plan, I and my Department considered it and its recommendations.

On 30 October, the Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny, T.D., and I launched the Civil Service Renewal Plan. This Plan sets out a vision and a three year action plan for the Civil Service, and represents a fundamentally new direction for the Civil Service. It brings together the outcomes of two separate but related streams of work; the work of the Independent Panel on Strengthening Civil Service Accountability and Performance, and the work of the Civil Service Renewal Task Force.

The underlying focus of the Independent Panel's report to strengthen public trust in the administrative system and to ensure faster and more responsive policy delivery across the Civil Service is now reflected in the Civil Service Renewal Plan. Recommendations from the Independent Panel Report have been integrated into the Civil Service Renewal Plan. These include the establishment of a Civil Service Accountability Board chaired by the Taoiseach and with external membership, introduction of a performance review process for Secretaries General, and publication of "who does what and to whom they are answerable" for senior managers. In addition, the Renewal Plan includes the Independent Panel's recommendation in relation to organisational reviews, greater flexibility in decision making by Departments, establishment and governance of agencies, and an accountability code and training for special advisers.

The extensive engagement and consultation processes, that occurred as part of the work of the Civil Service Renewal Taskforce and Independent Panel on Strengthening Civil Service Accountability and Performance, received contributions in excess of 2,000 from staff and stakeholders. As the implementation phase of the Civil Service Renewal Plan is now being rolled out, further engagement from staff and external stakeholders is being sought. Officials at my Department have already convened a "Townhall" event for Civil Service staff today, Thursday, 6 November, and it is intended that further such events will be held in 2015. My Department has also invited written feedback on the Civil Service Renewal Plan from both staff and from external stakeholders, through our internal and external webpages. In addition, one of the agreed actions in the Renewal Plan is to introduce an annual standard Staff Engagement Survey to involve staff at all levels in ongoing organisational improvement.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

33. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the areas of recruitment planned for the public service; the grades at which recruitment will take place; and if the local authorities will be included. [42004/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have overarching responsibility for workforce planning and recruitment to the Civil Service. The following recruitment competitions for the Civil Service are currently in progress by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) or are scheduled to take place in 2015.

Competitions in Progress

A competition for Clerical Officer in the Civil and Public Service is ongoing and the first

offers of appointment from this competition are currently being made. It is anticipated that approximately 300 will be placed on the panel for the Civil Service.

A competition for Graduate Economist in the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service closed in late October. A competition for Administrative Officer in the Civil Service and for graduate recruitment for the Local Authority Sector also closed in late October.

Competitions Scheduled for remainder of 2014

An Executive Officer/ICT Specialist competition for the Civil Service will be announced this week. Arrangements for an open Executive Officer competition are being finalised and will be advertised later this month.

Competitions Scheduled for 2015

In respect of Civil Service competitions to be held in 2015, plans are being made for an Assistant Principal Officer competition which will include both open recruitment and interdepartmental elements. In addition, an open Principal Officer competition will take place in the first quarter of 2015.

Recruitment plans for the public service more generally are a matter, in the first instance, for the Minister with responsibility for each of the relevant sectors of the public service. In particular recruitment into the local authority sector is a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government within the overall framework currently in place to manage the public service pay bill and public service numbers.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

34. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Haddington Road agreement expires; if he has indicated to the public sector unions if and when talks on a successor agreement will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42050/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Haddington Road Agreement came into effect on 1 July 2013 and forms the cornerstone for public service pay policy over a three year period. Over the first 15 months of its lifetime, the Agreement has been a key enabler in reducing the cost of the public service pay and pensions bill. The cost reductions and productivity increases, and the reform dividend which the Agreement has facilitated, have allowed the Government the scope in 2014 to recruit additional staff to key front-line services. This demonstrates that the Agreement is delivering and is making a significant contribution to the Government's fiscal consolidation deficit target of below 3% GDP by 2015.

The public service unions have indicated their intention, should the State's financial circumstances permit, to lodge a pay claim next year. If such a claim is made the Government will of course have to consider it, in line with the prevailing fiscal position. The legal position concerning the financial emergency legislation, which has underpinned the public service and pension reductions to date, will also have to be addressed in that context.

Public Procurement Contracts

35. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide the provisions in public procurement contracts that preclude contractors from engaging

in exploitative work practices. [42061/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public procurement procedures require all applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. There are requirements placed upon contractors at each stage of the procurement process.

In this regard, **at tender stage**, applicants must sign a declaration in relation to their financial standing, their legal standing, their payment of taxes and social contributions; and a statement that none of the circumstances for exclusion apply. The criteria upon which contracting authorities may exclude applicants from the award procedure of public contracts are set out in public procurement regulations and directives. Before an applicant, in relation to certain breaches is excluded, the applicant may make a case and provide supporting evidence as to why it should not be excluded. The contracting authority must consider this evidence before deciding whether to exclude or include an applicant.

In order to be considered for the award of contracts, whether works contracts for construction or service contracts for design team members, applicants must pre-qualify by meeting criteria which are designed to assess their competence. Those who do not meet minimum criteria are excluded from further participation in a tender competition.

At award stage, it is a condition of award of public contracts (above €10,000) that the successful applicant provides to a contracting authority either a current Tax Clearance Certificate or demonstrate a satisfactory level of subcontractor tax compliance in the case of the construction, forestry or meat processing sectors, who are subject to Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT). The same tax clearance requirement applies to any non-resident contractor being awarded a public contract.

At implementation stage, the obligations under the contract take effect. Clause 2 of the standard form of the public works contracts requires the contractor, his personnel and subcontractors to comply with all legal requirements. There is a substantial body of legislation that directly or indirectly governs construction activities, however two key pieces of industry specific legislation; the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013 and the Building Control Regulations 1997-2014 both place considerable responsibility not only on contractors but on all those involved in construction projects including designers, supervisors and individual workers.

The ultimate sanction for serious breach of health and safety regulations is a criminal conviction and imprisonment. Compliance with health and safety regulations is separately assessed in a pre-qualification of a works contractor with supporting evidence required to demonstrate the applicant possesses sufficient resources and is competent to carry out the proposed works. The Works Requirements which are a key part of the contract documents also set out detailed specifications on how regulatory standards are to be met.

Contractors are required to submit on-going certification under Clause 5.3 (Pay and Conditions of Employment) of the contract that they have complied in full with the requirements of that clause which covers aspects such as compliance with employment law, and deductions for social welfare. Contractors are also required under this Clause to maintain records and timesheets in respect of all those engaged on the works.

The management of the tendering process for a public contract is a matter for each contracting authority. It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process. The contracting authority has the right to: audit specified documents; to withhold payment or part thereof if certification is not provided;

deduct from payment if certification is proven to be incorrect; and has the right to terminate the agreement where the contractor fails to remedy the situation.

Enforcement of employment law is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. The National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) have the necessary powers to compel employers to provide the documentary evidence to establish whether they may have breached employment law. Contracting authorities should report any concerns they may have on compliance with employment law, tax and social welfare payments during the course of a project to the appropriate statutory bodies, such as NERA, the Revenue Commissioners, Social Protection, etc.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports

36. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will require former senior public servants and executives of commercial semi-State companies to appear before Oireachtas committees investigating matters relevant to their actions while in the employment of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42054/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Houses of the Oireachtas (Powers, Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013 amended and simplified the law on the compellability of witnesses to Oireachtas Committees that have the power, conferred by the relevant House or both Houses, to send for persons, papers and records. This applies both to the conduct of parliamentary inquiries into matters of significant public importance, and to other committee business.

This legislation allows an Oireachtas Committee to direct any person in the State to attend before it on matters relevant to its proceedings. It also permits an Oireachtas Committee to request a person to make discovery on oath of documents in their control, or to make a statement in writing on certain matters.

Former senior public servants and executives of commercial semi State companies are not exempted in this regard. Any use of compellability powers by an Oireachtas Committee must be sanctioned in advance in accordance with the provisions of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Powers, Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013. In relation to the conduct of inquiries, the House must pass a resolution in respect of the inquiry specifying whether the committee has or will have the power to send for persons, papers or records pursuant to the applicable rules and standing orders. In relation to the conduct of other committee business, a committee to whom the House conferred the power to send to persons, papers and records shall not use its compellability powers unless it has the consent in writing of the Committee on Procedure and Privileges to do so.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

37. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in view of his recent announcements in relation to budget 2015, his plans to restore public sector pay for those earning €35,000 per annum or less; and the improvements in pay and conditions that public sector workers earning €35,000 or less per annum may expect in 2014-2015. [42055/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Deputy will be aware that in seeking the most recent savings and reductions from the public service pay

and pensions bill, public service employers and trade unions entered into negotiations and concluded a collective agreement, the Haddington Road Agreement. This three year Agreement, effective from July 2013, built upon and reaffirmed the existing overall commitments in the Public Service Agreement (Croke Park Agreement) including those in relation to lower paid public servants and sets the terms of pay in the public service until 2016. The pay arrangements under that legislation were progressively structured so it is those on lower incomes who are least affected, with the highest reductions imposed on the highest paid. Significantly, the most recent pay reduction effected by the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, was confined to those public servants on annual salaries of €65,000 or more only, and the core pay of almost 87% of public servants was not impacted by this pay reduction.

As provided for in the Haddington Road Agreement, and subsequently legislated for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, the rate of PRD on the €15,000 to €20,000 band of pay received in a year was reduced from 5% to 2.5% on 1 January 2014. This rate cut is worth €125 annually in gross terms to most public servants, with those taxed at the standard rate enjoying the greater gain in terms of take-home pay boost.

The public service unions have indicated their intention, should the State's financial circumstances permit, to lodge a pay claim next year. If such a claim is made, the Government will of course have to consider it, in line with the prevailing fiscal position. The legal position concerning the financial emergency legislation, which has underpinned the reductions to date, will also have to be addressed as part of putting in place more normal pay setting arrangements in the public service for the future.

Job Initiatives

38. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the steps that have been taken by her Department to ensure that the JobBridge scheme is not abused by employers; if her Department has discovered situations in which employers have reduced the working hours of long-term staff and compensated by recruiting JobBridge personnel; if this situation is under constant review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42528/14]

55. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on JobBridge covering the number of people who have availed of JobBridge; the number of people who have moved from JobBridge to full-time employment; the number of people who have failed to get full-time employment from JobBridge; the approach of the Department where the scheme has been abused by employers; and if there are any JobBridge positions in the Civil Service. [42675/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 38 and 55 together.

JobBridge includes a range of control and monitoring measures. Host organisations must give undertakings to meet rigorous scheme criteria before participating, they must complete regular compliance returns during the course of any internship, internships cannot reduce paid positions, there are limits on the number of internships that any one organisation can host and cooling off periods are used to prevent successive use of internships. In addition Internships are monitored extensively and any allegations of abuse are investigated as a priority. To date, more than 15,000 host organisations have participated in the scheme, and out of this number only 45 have been excluded from participation for a range of reasons related to non-compliance with the scheme criteria. An independent evaluation of JobBridge found only minimal levels of displacement but the Department remains vigilant for any potential adverse impact of Job-

Bridge upon the normal operation of the labour market.

As at 30th October, 2014, 34,636 individual internships had commenced since July, 2011, and 28,192 internships had finished. An independent evaluation of JobBridge found that 61% of former interns had moved into employment 5 months or more after the completion of their internship. This indicates that c 17,000 of the c 28,000 interns who have completed their internship moved into employment. I attach a table giving the number of JobBridge internships in the Civil Service.

Table 1. – Civil Service Internships

As at 15th October 2014

-	Finishers	Current Interns	Total Interns
D/Agriculture Food and Marine	16	0	16
D/Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	9	0	9
D/Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	32	11	43
D/Defence	4	0	4
D/Education and Skills	8	1	9
D/Environment, Community and Local Government	15	0	15
D/Finance	4	0	4
D/Health	13	1	14
D/Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation	9	1	10
D/Justice and Equality	98	4	102
D/Public Expenditure and Reform	26	3	29
D/Social Protection	9	0	9
D/Taoiseach	6	2	8
D/ Transport, Tourism and Sport	7	1	8
Houses of the Oireachtas	8	0	8
Office of the Attorney General	5	0	5
Chief State Solicitor's Office	4	0	4
Comptroller and Auditor General's Office	2	0	2
Ombudsman's Office	3	0	3

-	Finishers	Current Interns	Total Interns
Pensions Ombudsman's Office	5	0	5
Office of the Secretary General to the President	1	0	1
Revenue Commissioners	19	0	19
Valuation Office	3	0	3
Totals	306	24	330

Question No. 39 withdrawn.

Irish Water Administration

40. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she has signed the order permitting the collection of personal public service numbers by Irish Water as a scheduled body under the Act; if it has been signed; when it was signed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42546/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The legal basis of the PPS Number and its use is contained in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended). Only bodies specified in statute or their agents can use the PPS Number. Section 262 of the Act allows the PPS Number to be used by a specified body in certain limited ways in the course of a “transaction” with a member of the public. The section requires that the service being supplied must relate to a “natural person”, i.e., not a private function by a private company.

Persons are required by section 262 to provide their PPS Numbers to Specified Bodies for the purpose of a “transaction”.

The section also allows the Minister for Social Protection to share a person's public service identity (including their PPS Number) with a Specified Body for authentication purposes. Accordingly, as both the Minister for Social Protection and all Specified Bodies must operate in accordance with the provisions of the Act, there is no requirement for a separate order to be in place.

Section 20 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2014, which was enacted on the 17th July 2014, added Irish Water to the list of Specified Bodies. Irish Water has advised that PPS Numbers will only be processed by it in relation to confirming eligibility for allowances and accurately calculating water charges. Irish Water has posted information about its use of the PPS Number on the Register of PPS Number Users which is available on the Department of Social Protection website.

The Department is in discussions with Irish Water with regard to the appropriate assistance that can be given in relation to validation of PPS Number data.

Illness Benefit Reform

41. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her Department's views on illness benefit and proposed changes (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42548/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Recovery of Benefits and Assistance (RBA) scheme commenced on 1 August 2014 and requires that a compensator (generally an insurance company) must apply for a statement of recoverable benefits, before making a payment to an injured person in respect of a non-fatal personal injury.

Where there is a specified benefit paid within a specified period consequent on the personal injury, the compensator is liable to pay the Minister part or all of the recoverable benefit amount depending on whether the case is settled out of court, or the award is a result of a court order or Injuries Board assessment. It is the compensator and not the injured person who must pay the Minister.

I can assure the Deputy there is ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the RBA scheme, and any possible changes to the scheme will be considered in the light of operational experience.

Question No. 42 withdrawn.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

43. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when jobseeker's allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42553/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned made a jobseeker's allowance claim on the 26/05/2014. The person concerned was requested to provide certain information to support his application but failed to supply all information requested. His claim was disallowed as his means could not be established. The person concerned has appealed this disallowance and his file has been forwarded from the Local Office to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The person concerned will be advised of the outcome of the appeal once this process has been completed.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

44. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will facilitate access to jobseeker's allowance in the interim in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42564/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned made a jobseeker's allowance claim and was requested to furnish documentation to assess his entitlement to a payment, by letters on the 17/09/2014 and 22/10/2014. The claim cannot be processed until this documentation is received. It is open to the person concerned to contact his local office with any queries arising.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

45. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a

person (details supplied) in County Kildare qualifies for back to education allowance in view of their current status in receipt of disability allowance and their proposal to take up a VTOS, vocational training opportunities scheme, course; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42566/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has written to the person concerned on 30 October 2014 concerning their enquiry regarding potential eligibility to Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) and to ask that the person in question have the BTEA application form completed and stamped by the school/college. The entitlement of the person in question will be determined on receipt of this information and they will be notified directly of the outcome.

Guardian's Payment Applications

46. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when guardianship payment will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42568/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was awarded guardian's payment (contributory) from 25 January 2013 and received payment until 6 March 2014, as according to the records of the Department, the child concerned reached 18 years of age on 7 March 2014.

Guardian's payment, where eligibility is established, is payable until the child concerned reaches 18 years of age and is payable between the ages of 18 and 22 where the child concerned is in full time education by day, at a recognised educational facility.

In this regard, a certificate for completion by the relevant school or college attended by the child was issued to the person concerned in January 2014, in advance of the child's 18 birthday. A completed certificate has not yet been received.

Guardian's entitlement will be re-examined on provision of a completed certificate, which must bear the stamp of the relevant school or college attended by the child concerned.

Disability Allowance Applications

47. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42583/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm we received a request on 17 October 2014 for review of their disability allowance entitlement from the person concerned and this request is currently being processed. A decision on this review is expected to issue shortly directly to the person concerned.

Irish Water Administration

48. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her Department has finalised its agreement to exchange personal public service, PPS, number information with Irish Water; if there is a statutory basis for the collection and retention of PPS numbers

before such an agreement is reached; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42604/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The legal basis of the PPS Number and its use is contained in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended). Only bodies specified in statute or their agents can use the PPS Number. Section 262 of the Act allows the PPS Number to be used by a specified body in certain limited ways in the course of a “transaction” with a member of the public. The section requires that the service being supplied must relate to a “natural person” i.e. not a private function by a private company.

Persons are required by section 262 to provide their PPS Numbers to Specified Bodies for the purpose of a “transaction”.

The section also allows the Minister for Social Protection to share a person’s public service identity (including their PPS Number) with a Specified Body for authentication purposes. Accordingly, as both the Minister for Social Protection and all Specified Bodies must operate in accordance with the provisions of the Act, there is no requirement for a separate agreement to be in place.

Section 20 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2014, which was enacted on the 17 July 2014, added Irish Water to the list of Specified Bodies. Irish Water has advised that PPS Numbers will only be processed by it in relation to confirming eligibility for allowances and accurately calculating water charges. Irish Water has posted information about its use of the PPS Number on the Register of PPS Number Users which is available on the Department of Social Protection website.

The Department is in discussions with Irish Water with regard to the appropriate assistance that can be given in relation to validation of PPS Number data.

Question No. 49 withdrawn.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

50. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to her reply to Priority Questions on 21 October 2014 that on average rent allowance applications made in County Waterford are being processed on average within five to ten days, if she will confirm the number of rent allowance applications received within the first six months of 2014; the percentage of those applications that were processed and approved within five to ten days; the percentage that took in excess of three months to process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41205/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): 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.

The average number of claimants on the rent supplement scheme for 2014 to date in payment is approximately 76,200 with an average annualised cost to the State of €4,450 representing €344 million which has been provided for the scheme in 2014.

Waterford, represents 2% of the total recipient base with approximately 1,400 tenancies currently in receipt of rent supplement. At an average annual cost of €3,000, total forecast rent

supplement costs for Waterford will be in region of €4.2 million.

The scheme's cost per tenancy and related volume of recipients clearly suggests that the Department has a duty of care to ensure the legitimacy of tenancies presenting to the scheme. This includes not only verifying the existence of a tenancy, but the amount of rent required and an assessment of a person's means.

The timescale for determining applications for rent supplement is dependent, among other things, on the availability of the required information, such as confirmation of a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) by the relevant Local Authority, where applicable; details of the applicant's income and bank statements; and verification of the tenancy arrangements. Some aspects of the application process are inevitably time-consuming and delays can occur where investigations such as home visits or third party evidence are required. As outlined to the Deputy in response to parliamentary question 40164 on 21 October 2014, when the necessary information required to process an application is provided to the Department, a rent supplement claim will be processed within a short timeframe, approximately 5 to 10 days.

In the first six months of 2014, a total of 488 applications for rent supplement were registered in Waterford. An analysis of those claims currently still open indicates that 19% were processed and approved within 10 days of registration and 29% took more than 3 months to be processed and approved due to the investigation process and lack of required documentation. An additional 16% are awaiting decision, but cannot be approved as the Department is still waiting on information from the customer to enable a decision to be made.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

51. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on whether the revised monthly rental limits seek only to preclude certain properties from the rental pool and should have no bearing on the calculation of rent allowance; whether the rent allowance payable should be calculated based on family size and means assessed regardless of the property itself; her plans to abolish the revised monthly rental limits; whether this would in turn permit applicants to rent properties they see fit irrespective of the monthly rent and would ease the application process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41388/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): 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. As of the end of October 2014, there are approximately 72,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €344 million for 2014.

Rent supplement is subject to a statutory maximum limit on the amount of rent that a recipient may incur and is based on the location of the residence and family composition. The scheme provides assistance with reasonable accommodation costs and does not provide access to all housing in all areas. The Department has a responsibility to ensure that maximum value for money is achieved for both the rent supplement recipient and the taxpayer.

I am concerned that the impact of adjusting limits at a time of constrained supply will yield only a very marginal increase in available supply for rent supplement recipients, with the only certainty that raising limits will increase costs disproportionately for the Exchequer with little

or no new housing available to new recipients. Raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on many lower income workers, their families and students. I plan to keep this matter under close review.

I can assure the Deputy that officers administering rent supplement throughout the country have considerable experience and make every effort to ensure that accommodation needs are met including through the use of their discretionary statutory powers, as necessary. In light of a particular concentration of the homelessness problem in the Dublin area, the Department has agreed a tenancy sustainment protocol with the Dublin local authorities and voluntary organisations to support families on rent supplement who are at risk of losing their accommodation. Since the launch of this protocol in mid-June 2014, some 180 families have had their rent supplement claims revised by the Department. The Department is currently examining the need for such protocols in other areas.

Increasing housing supply and the reactivation of the construction activity is a critical issue for Government and key to restoring stability to the rental market. In this context, it should be noted that the Government has recently launched its Construction Strategy 2020.

As part of Budget 2015, Government also announced significant capital investment of over €2.2 billion for social housing for the next three years. In 2015, over €800 million will be invested in a range of housing programmes representing the first major investment in housing since 2009. My colleague, Alan Kelly T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, is also due to publish a Social Housing Strategy shortly. This will propose a range of approaches and reforms that are innovative and challenging and will provide a basis for an improved and sustainable approach to the provision of social housing supports in Ireland.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment may be made in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42645/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no record of an application for an exceptional needs payment from the person concerned. If she wishes to make an application she should contact her local Community Welfare Service.

Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme Eligibility

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if and when full mortgage interest relief will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42647/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client referred to has not made an application for mortgage interest supplement.

From 1 January 2014, the Mortgage Interest Supplement scheme closed to new entrants and no new applications are being accepted from that date.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when the jobseeker's allowance payment will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42657/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned together with the relevant Departmental papers were received and registered in that office on 29th October 2014. The appeal will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 38.

Departmental Expenditure

56. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide the details of average fees paid by her Department and those under her aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42712/14]

57. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by her Department and those under her aegis. [42726/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 57 together.

The Department of Social Protection does not pay fees to recruitment or employment agencies because all department staff, both temporary and permanent are recruited and appointed through the Public Appointments Service.

The agencies that operate under the aegis of the Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, and the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman. The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman did not engage recruitment agencies during the period in question.

The total amounts paid by the Citizens Information Board and the Pensions Authority to recruitment and employment agencies in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 are set out in tabular format.

Citizens Information Board

Year	Total amountsPaid	Agency Fee	Salary Inclusive of Employer PRSI & Holidays
2011	€52,825	€9,245	€43,580
2012	€20,899	€3,659	€17,241
2013	€16,561	€2,899	€13,662
2014	€31,872	€5,578	€26,294

Pensions Authority

Year	Total amount Paid	Agency Fee	Salary inclusive of employer PRSI and holidays
2011	€22,618	€5,089	€17,529
2012	€8,646	€1,945	€6,701
2013	€15,630	€3,517	€12,113
2014	€0	€0	€0

In addition the Pensions Authority engaged recruitment agencies to recruit staff on their behalf. Once recruited they became employees of and were paid by the Authority. Amounts paid to the agencies in respect of this service are set out in tabular format below.

Pensions Authority

Year	Agency Fee
2011	€11,922
2012	€7,056
2013	€5,641
2014	€14,760

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if the concept of a specific Government bond may be considered to fund the addressing of major infrastructure deficiencies such as those in respect of water, energy, roads, telecommunications, coastal erosion and flood alleviation or prevention that may otherwise have an impact on the Government's balance sheet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42607/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The proceeds of all borrowings by the Exchequer, as well as tax revenues, non-tax revenues and other receipts are lodged to the Exchequer account at the Central Bank of Ireland to fund on-going Government expenditure.

The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) has advised that project-specific bonds issued by the State which are linked to a specific project and which are serviced and repaid from the Exchequer in the same way as standard Government bonds, may be of limited interest to investors as they would be concerned about a relative lack of liquidity. Investors in project-specific bonds would require higher yields than standard Government bonds to reflect the lower liquidity. Such project-specific bonds, if issued by Government, would be on the Government's balance sheet.

However in the case of a Public Private Partnership (PPP), where the State selects a private consortium to Design, Build, Finance & Operate State infrastructure, that private consortium can issue project-specific bonds. Such bond issuance may be deemed to be outside of General Government provided that the necessary risks are contractually transferred to the private sector in line with Eurostat rules. The latter type bonds are considered by investors to carry significantly more risk than standard Government issued bonds and consequently require higher yields to reflect the risk profile. The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) has advised that there is currently a strong supply of funders / investors for PPP projects.

I am happy to confirm that the Government remains committed to exploring alternative means of financing capital projects. The NDFA is charged with advising on the optimal means of financing the costs of all public investment projects over €20 million in order to achieve

value for money, including the €2.25 billion stimulus package announced by the Government in July 2012. NDFA continues to facilitate securing funding for both PPPs and non-PPP capital projects from a wide range of sources including domestic and international banks, institutional investors and supranational organisations such as the European Investment Bank and the Council of Europe Development Bank.

Budget 2015

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he expects economic recovery to benefit from budget 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42620/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government's principal strategy for economic and budgetary policy for the last number of years, has been to put the economy and the public finances on a more stable footing. Through the implementation of substantial adjustments, significant progress has been made in restoring fiscal stability and economic growth. The economy is on a firm recovery path and a steady improvement in the public finances is under way.

The macroeconomic and fiscal framework underpinning Budget 2015 was more favourable than anticipated. This was down to positive economic developments over the summer, an increase in tax revenues compared to profile as well as a reduction in national debt interest costs. This allowed the introduction of a package of income tax reductions and expenditure increases amounting to €1,050 million in Budget 2015, or about 0.6 per cent of GDP. This package is likely to have a positive short-run impact on aggregate demand in the economy compared to an alternative of no policy change. The Budget package is estimated to have added 0.3 per cent to real GDP in 2015 and an additional 0.2 percentage points to employment growth.

Details of the economic impact of the measures introduced as part of Budget 2015 are set out on page C.51 in the Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2015 document published with the Budget and available at www.budget.gov.ie.

In terms of the outlook, my Department is forecasting GDP growth of 3.9 per cent in 2015. This is driven by a positive contribution from net exports on the back of economic growth in Ireland's trading partners. Domestic demand is set to contribute to growth as well, with growing employment and rising household incomes resulting in an increase in private consumption. Over the medium term, GDP growth of about 3.5 per cent a year is anticipated.

Financial Vehicle Corporations

60. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the securitisation special purpose vehicles that currently operate in the State. [42488/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank collects and publishes data on Financial Vehicle Corporations (FVCs) as defined in Regulation (EC) No. 24/2009 of the European Central Bank of 19 December 2008 concerning statistics on the assets and liabilities of financial vehicle corporations engaged in securitisation transactions.

The full data series for Ireland is available in the Economic Policy & Statistics section of the Central Bank website while Euro area statistics are available in the Monetary and Financial Statistics section of the ECB website.

Furthermore, the ECB publishes a list of reporting FVCs for all Euro area countries (including Ireland) on its website at: http://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/pdf/money/fvc/FVC_Overview.zip??ad6a28c567e5631b029a23297d050ab3.

Bank Stress Tests

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide detailed information of the costs incurred by each of the five Irish based institutions in respect of the recently concluded European Central Bank asset quality review and stress tests, including details of the fees paid or owed to each professional advisory firm; the person who pays the cost of the asset quality review and the stress tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42493/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank of Ireland (“CBI”) has informed me that seven banks in Ireland will have to pay €17.6 million between them to meet the costs of the Comprehensive Assessment conducted by the ECB and the CBI to review their assets and test the resilience of their balance sheets to certain stress situations. The CBI also notes the following:

- Whilst, the Irish Banking system being assessed is relatively small in terms of balance sheet size versus the outer countries, it was in the top 5 countries in terms of loan files to be reviewed and collateral to be valued - the most expensive element of an Asset Quality Review (“AQR”);

- In terms of banks, the CBI also had to conduct the Asset Quality Review for ACC (part of Rabobank), KBC Ireland (part of KBC Group) on a host basis, thus in cost terms were conducting the AQR for 7 banks;

- The CBI has extensive previous experience with balance sheet assessments and stress tests. Consequently it used exclusively internal expertise to conduct quality assurance on the data received from banks before it was passed to the ECB. It was then not necessary to utilise third parties to perform this function, resulting in a saving;

- All project management operations were carried out using the internal resources of the Central Bank or secondees, also resulting in a saving, due to it not being necessary to utilise third parties to perform this function, as can often be necessary;

- The CBI saved significant cost by utilising the file review results from the Balance Sheet Assessment (conducted in late 2013) where possible in this exercise (for Bank of Ireland and AIB);

The costs noted above exclude costs which may have been incurred by the banks themselves, details of which are confidential and commercially sensitive.

Tax Code

62. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify the 40 cent additional duty placed on cigarettes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42497/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated €53m to be generated by the additional duty placed on tobacco

products in Budget 2015 is €44m additional Excise and €9m additional VAT.

The calculation is based broadly on a “no change” basis but does incorporate a small projected fall in consumption of tobacco products resulting from the increase in prices. This approach to estimating the effect of changes in rates, which is also used for other excise products, is indicative of the potential additional tax yield that may arise in standard market conditions.

Property Taxation Assessments

63. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has projections for the revision of the property tax rates in 2016 and the implications this could have on property owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42539/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The valuation of a property for LPT purposes on 1 May 2013 will remain the assessable value for 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016. Therefore any increase in property values between now and 2016 will not have any impact on LPT for those years.

As I have previously stated, the central national rate for Local Property Tax will not vary for the lifetime of this Government. Any consideration of the likely position thereafter would be premature at this stage. However, the Deputy will be aware that LPT legislation enables local authorities to increase or decrease the rate of LPT by a “local adjustment factor” on properties located in their area for the years 2015 and onwards. This factor cannot exceed +15% or -15% of the central national rate.

Insurance Compensation Fund

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the up-to-date position concerning the liquidation of Setanta Insurance including details of the number and value of claims currently lodged with the liquidator, split between third party and first party claims; the anticipated outcome of the liquidation in terms of the availability of funds to meet any outstanding claims; the steps that have been taken to access the insurance compensation fund; the steps his Department is taking to ensure that no policyholder faces the prospect of being held personally liable for a claim liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42577/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the outset I would like to say that 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.

You will appreciate that a liquidation of an insurance company is a legally complex and time consuming process.

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.

I am pleased to say that I have been informed that having sought legal advice on the opera-

tion of the legislation, the Accountant is now satisfied that it is appropriate to make applications to the ICF for compensation prior to the completion of the liquidation of Setanta.

Every effort is being made to ensure that claims can be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. The Accountant of the Courts of Justice is in ongoing discussions with both the Setanta Liquidator and his legal advisors to put in place appropriate mechanisms to commence making applications to the High Court in accordance with the Insurance Act 1964. In tandem with this he is also working to acquire the necessary skilled resources to enable applications to the ICF to be processed effectively and efficiently. Due to the unprecedented nature and scale of the Setanta insolvency the Accountant is not yet in a position to provide a timetable for applications to be made to the Fund, but it is hoped that applications by the Accountant to the High Court can begin sooner rather than later.

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 most recent figures, which were provided to officials in my Department in July 2014, indicate that there were 2,004 open claims with Setanta. This number is expected to increase over the next two years until May 2016. The split of the number of claims, between first and third party claims was not provided to my Department. The net claims reserve (which indicates the amount at which it is expected that these claims will settle) for these open claims at that time was €34,977,453. This was split €1,173,769 for first party claims and €33,803,684 for third party claims. The net claims reserve figure does not take into account claims which have been incurred but not reported which is likely to be a material number. The Liquidator has advised that settlements can only be paid out after all of the company's liabilities are quantified, including claims. Based on current claims reserves the Liquidator has indicated to my Department that he does not expect to be in a position to meet more than 30% of claims.

Current estimates indicate that the shortfall for most Setanta claimants will be relatively small once they have received the 65% compensation available from the ICF as well as their distribution from the Liquidation. I understand that there is the very small number of large claims where the maximum ICF payment of €825,000 will apply. However it is important to note that this estimate is based on an evaluation of claims reserves. Actual claims experience may decrease the amount available for distribution by the Liquidator.

I appreciate that the current uncertainty regarding the timing of compensation payments is causing difficulty for the former customers of Setanta Insurance and I have asked that information on ICF procedures is made available publicly as soon as possible. The Accountant of the Courts of Justice can only deal with claims which are submitted by the Liquidator, so the advice to all claimants continues to be that they should contact the Liquidator of Setanta.

Tax Reliefs Cost

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of tax relief on medical and dental expenses in each year from 2010 to 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42593/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the cost of the claims for tax relief on health expenses, which includes medical and dental expenses, in 2012 (the most recent tax year for which data are currently available) is estimated to be in the order of €134 million. Figures for previous tax years are available in Revenue's Statistical Reports, available on the Commissioners' website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/publications/statistical-reports.html>, in the "Income Tax" chapter of each year (Table

IT6). Updates will be published on Commissioners' website in due course.

Question No. 66 withdrawn.

Property Taxation Exemptions

67. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Finance if the Catholic Church is exempt from paying property tax as it is a registered charity which results in an estimated loss to the State of in the region of €1.5 million per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42654/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that in accordance with Section 11 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) charitable organisations are liable to pay Local Property Tax (LPT) in the same way as any other residential property owner, unless an exemption can be claimed.

The LPT legislation provides for a number of exemptions from the tax, two of which would be of particular relevance to charitable bodies. Under sections 7 and 7A of the Act an exemption may be provided for properties owned by a charitable body or trust that has been established solely for charitable purposes and that has been granted charitable status by Revenue. To qualify for the exemption under section 7, the property must be used solely or primarily to provide special needs accommodation to persons who by reason of old age, physical or mental disability or other cause require special accommodation and support to enable them to live in the community. To qualify for the exemption under section 7A, the property must be used for the sole purpose of providing residential accommodation in connection with the facilitation of recreational activities. Furthermore, the facilitation of recreational activities must arise in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the charity concerned.

Details of these and all other exemptions from LPT are available on the Revenue website www.revenue.ie.

Universal Social Charge Application

68. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the way a single, self-employed earner on an annual income of €15,000, €20,000, €25,000, €30,000, €40,000, €60,000, €100,000, €120,000, €150,000 and €200,000 will be affected by the income tax and universal social charge changes in 2015 compared to 2014 and if he will provide these figures in both cash terms and as a proportion of gross income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42661/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The data requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Gross Income	Income Tax		USC		Net Income		Annual-Change	Change as % of Gross Income
	Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed		
€	€	€	€	€	€	€	€	%
15,000	1,350	1,350	399	285	12,651	12,765	115	0.8%
20,000	2,350	2,350	719	545	16,131	16,305	174	0.9%
25,000	3,350	3,350	1,069	895	19,581	19,755	174	0.7%
30,000	4,350	4,350	1,419	1,245	23,031	23,205	174	0.6%
40,000	7,862	7,590	2,119	1,945	28,419	28,865	446	1.1%
60,000	16,062	15,590	3,519	3,345	38,019	38,665	646	1.1%
100,000	32,462	31,590	6,319	6,444	57,219	57,966	747	0.7%
120,000	40,662	39,590	8,319	8,644	66,219	66,966	747	0.6%
150,000	52,962	51,590	11,319	11,944	79,719	80,466	747	0.5%
200,000	73,462	71,590	16,319	17,444	102,219	102,966	747	0.4%

It should be noted that the introduction of the 8% USC rate and the increase in the existing 10% USC rate to 11%, provided for in the Budget, are necessary measures to limit the maximum benefit from the package of tax measures to approximately €14 per week for any individual taxpayer. This ensures that those with very high incomes will only benefit to the same extent, as those with more modest incomes, reinforcing the highly progressive nature of the Irish income tax system.

The changes announced in the Budget will ensure that all those currently paying income tax and/or USC will see a reduction in their tax bill in 2015. I propose to continue this reform in future Budgets, subject to the required economic growth and the consequent fiscal space available to the Government.

Pension Provisions

69. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the funding ability of a non-pension scheme member spouse who, pursuant to a pension adjustment order in divorce or separation cases, has pension benefits transferred to a spouse which are still deemed to be part of the pension assets of the original owner, given that a threshold of €2 million applies before punitive rates of tax apply and therefore is a de facto limit on pensions; his further views on a pension adjustment order which transfers benefit worth €2 million to the non-member, which effectively means that the member spouse has no allowance left to provide for a new family as the non-member spouse would have both the €2 million pension benefit and a €2 million allowance available to provide for their family; if he views this as contrary to the principle of equal treatment for both old and new families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42666/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Tax legislation provides for a limit or ceiling on the total capital value of tax-relieved pension benefits that an individual can draw down in their lifetime from all of their supplementary pension arrangements. This is known as the Standard Fund Threshold or SFT and was introduced on 7 December 2005 and amended since (most recently in Finance (No 2) Act 2013 which, among other things, reduced the SFT from €2.3 million to €2 million from 1 January 2014).

A higher limit, known as a Personal Fund Threshold or PFT, may be claimed where the capital value of an individual's pension benefits exceeded the SFT on the date of its introduction or on the dates of its reduction.

The SFT regime was introduced and subsequently amended mainly to deal with the abuse of the tax-relief arrangements for pensions which resulted in pension overfunding by individuals and to place a constraint on the cost to the Exchequer of tax relief for pension saving. The regime deals with these issues at the point of pension drawdown in retirement rather than by applying restrictions to pension savings or accrual upfront. There is, therefore, no restriction or limit on the contributions that an individual can make to his or her pension savings on an ongoing basis (other than the standard earnings and age-related percentage limits that determine the annual level of tax-relieved contributions that can be made by an individual). Instead, a significant tax charge is imposed on the value of retirement benefits above the SFT or PFT, as appropriate, when they are drawn down. In this way, the maximum allowable pension fund for tax purposes acts to discourage the building up of large pension funds in the first place or unwinds the tax advantage of funding for benefits above those limits by clawing back, through the significant tax charge, the tax relief granted.

Where an individual is a member of a pension scheme or arrangement on or after 7 December 2005 and the scheme or arrangement is or becomes subject to a pension adjustment order (PAO), then in calculating the capital value of any benefit drawn down at retirement from the pension scheme or arrangement (e.g. a pension, annuity, lump sum etc.) in respect of that individual for the purpose of establishing if their SFT or PFT has been exceeded, the benefits designated to a spouse or civil partner under the PAO are to be included in the calculation as if the PAO had not been made. Also, in calculating whether an entitlement to a PFT arises in the first place, the individual includes the capital value of his/her pension benefits as if the PAO had not been made.

The PAO exclusion provision was introduced as an anti-avoidance measure, designed to prevent an individual with a PFT, whose pension was subject to a PAO, from taking the view that as part of his or her pension had been assigned to a spouse/civil partner, he or she was then free to avail of further tax relief in building their part of the pension fund back up to the level of their PFT. If this had been permitted, it would have allowed a situation to arise whereby the aggregate amount of the pension funds built up originally with tax relief (in respect of which the PFT was granted) and then built back up again (with further tax relief) to the PFT amount, following the PAO, to greatly exceed the original amount of the PFT, at significant additional tax cost to the Exchequer. For these reasons, the legislation requires a PAO to be ignored for the purposes of determining whether an individual's SFT or PFT has been exceeded. The corollary of this is that the designated benefit going to the non-member spouse or partner is not included in determining the overall capital value of the non-member spouse or partner's supplementary pension benefits, if any, as to do so could result in double taxation.

In this year's Finance Bill, I am making provision that where, in cases involving PAOs, an individual's SFT or PFT is exceeded giving rise to an immediate tax charge on the excess at the higher income tax rate, that the tax charge is shared equitably between the former spouses or partners in relation to whom the PAO refers.

As to the request for my views on the particular scenario outlined in the question under which it is apparently being suggested that the entire value of an individual's pension benefits (which happen to equate to the current level of the SFT) are designated to a former spouse or partner under a PAO, it would be difficult to make any meaningful comment on the tax relief aspects of the particular scenario in isolation. This is a highly complex matter and each case depends on its own circumstances. In cases of divorce or separation where pension adjustment

orders have been made by the Court it is open to the parties to apply to court to have their pension adjustment orders varied if their circumstances change. It would be a matter for the courts to determine what would be appropriate in each case.

It is important, however, to address an apparent assumption in the question which is not correct. The SFT is not a €2 million allowance available to taxpayers, generally, or to a particular category of taxpayer, as is the case for example with the PAYE allowance to which PAYE taxpayers are entitled. The SFT has relevance and potential application only to individuals who are funding for or accruing pension benefits in pension saving arrangements approved by the Revenue Commissioners and who have relevant earnings out of which contributions to such arrangements are or are capable of being tax-relieved or tax subsidized. It has no direct application or relevance to individuals or taxpayers who are not in this position, including for example, the former spouses or partners of pension scheme members who are not in pension saving arrangements as described. Moreover, since the SFT operates as a limit or threshold at a relatively high value and only impacts when that threshold (or the higher PFT limit, if applicable) is exceeded, the funding for or accrual of pension benefits by the vast majority of individuals in pension saving arrangements whether or not impacted by PAOs are and will continue to be unaffected by the SFT regime.

Tax Yield

70. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance the additional revenues that would accrue to the State if the higher rate of income tax was raised by 4%. [42689/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Revenue Commissioners have published the Budget 2015 Ready Reckoner, on their website's statistics pages at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html>. The reckoner shows a number of indicative changes to Income Tax rates. While the Ready Reckoner does not show the specific costings requested by the Deputy, other changes can be estimated on a broadly pro-rata basis with those displayed in the Reckoner. The Ready Reckoner will be updated in due course to reflect post-Budget 2015 changes in Income Tax but the impact on the estimated costing in this case is expected to be relatively minimal.

Property Tax Exemptions

71. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on exemptions from the property tax for full-time mature students with a mortgage whose only means of income are social welfare payments until such time as they finish college and return to the workforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42691/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government decided that a liability to the Local Property Tax (LPT) should apply to all owners of residential property with a limited number of exemptions. Limiting the exemptions available allows the rate to be kept low for those liable persons who do not qualify for an exemption.

There is no specific exemption from LPT for full-time mature students with a mortgage whose only means of income is social welfare payments nor do I have any plans to introduce such an exemption. Such persons may be entitled to an exemption on other grounds or may qualify for a deferral subject to meeting the qualifying conditions.

To qualify for a deferral the property must be the sole or main residence of the liable person

and his or her gross income must be below certain thresholds. The thresholds are €15,000 for a single person and €25,000 for a married couple, civil partners or cohabiting couple. Deferral in respect of half of the LPT payable is possible where the gross income is above the threshold but less than €25,000 in the case of a single person and €35,000 in the case of a couple. Deferred LPT and interest will have to be discharged on the sale/transfer of the property.

Owner/occupiers whose sole source of income is a social welfare payment should qualify for a deferral.

Tax Credits

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of providing a flat €100 tax credit against water charges; the way this differs in cost from the tax credit proposed in the budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42698/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): On the assumption that the Deputy means a €100 tax credit to be delivered at source in respect of every household in the State, the approximate cost would be €165 million, based on an estimated 1.65 million households in the State.

The tax relief announced in the Budget was provisionally estimated to cost €40 million. As previously indicated to the Deputy, a number of measures were announced on Budget day to improve the overall affordability of water charges. The objective of these supports is to assist households in the country who pay their Water bills.

Following on from the announcement on Budget day, officials from my Department are working closely with their colleagues in the other relevant Departments and Agencies, in the development of the processes that will be employed to deliver the relief.

As I stated on Budget day and subsequently, we will design the measure as broadly and efficiently as possible, to ensure that the relief reaches all households who pay their charges.

Departmental Expenditure

73. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the details of average cuts paid by his Department and those under his aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is, the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies that is received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42707/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to inform the Deputy that in respect of my Department all external recruitment is conducted by the Public Appointments Service.

I will contact the Deputy directly in respect of bodies under the aegis of my Department in due course.

Departmental Contracts Data

74. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and

those under his aegis. [42721/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to inform the Deputy that in respect of my Department all external recruitment is conducted by the Public Appointments Service.

I will contact the Deputy directly in respect of bodies under the aegis of my Department in due course.

Flood Risk Assessments

75. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will confirm that every area which experienced flooding in the past year has been included under the CFRAM study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42740/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Many of the areas that experienced significant damage as a result of tidal or river flooding in the past year would be included under the CFRAM studies. However, it cannot be said that every area that experienced flooding is so included. The CFRAM programme is assessing in detail 300 areas of potentially significant flood risk known as Areas for Further Assessment or AFAs. These 300 AFAs, which include 90 located in coastal locations, were identified under the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) exercise which was completed in 2011 as a requirement of the EU Floods Directive. The PFRA was a national screening exercise, based on available and readily derivable information to identify areas where there may be a significant risk associated with flooding and was subject to public consultation at the time.

Good progress is being made on the six regional CFRAM Studies under the National CFRAM Programme. The CFRAM Programme will be used to determine national priorities for State investment in flood defences, on a systematic and objective basis, using Multi-Criteria Analysis. More information on the Programme is available on www.cfram.ie.

Outside of the CFRAM Programme, it is open to local authorities to apply to the Office of Public Works for funding of flood mitigation works under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. Any application received will be assessed under the eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, and having regard to the overall availability of funding. It is also open to local authorities to carry out flood mitigation and coastal protection works using their own resources.

Public Service Reform Plan Measures

76. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the meaning of his statement in the budget speech that Departments and agencies will now be able to manage their own staffing levels; if this means that they may employ staff at any level they require; that promotions will be on merit, that Departments will be able to create new posts without supervision or approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42428/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I announced on Budget Day last month, I will seek to put in place new arrangements to replace the Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion in the Public Service from 2015 onwards. This will be subject to the issuance of formal delegated sanction by my Department to all other Government Departments and Offices, in return for agreed commitments by them to man-

age staff resources within agreed pay ceilings and to meet ongoing reform and efficiency objectives. Under the new arrangements, which my Department has begun to discuss in detail with the other Government Departments, sectoral managers will be incentivised to make further savings. Where this is achieved - for example, by recasting the grade mix or reassigning duties or introducing more efficient work practices - such savings can now be reinvested in expanding services to meet demand, including hiring more staff as appropriate. There will be restrictions and controls to prevent unwarranted grade drift and unsustainable recruitment, and of course recruitment will be carried by the Public Appointment Service, in the normal course of events. Merit based recruitment and promotions are now the norm across the Public Service.

This change in policy is not about giving a blanket sanction for widespread recruitment or promotion across the Public Service, nor does it signal an end to the efficiency drive that has defined public service reform over the last few years. Rather, it is about giving those best placed - front-line managers - a degree of freedom in management of staff resources to meet the demands which they face. With this comes responsibility to make the right decisions, to continue to implement reform, and to continue to achieve efficiency gains. That requirement will be reflected in the terms and conditions of sanction that are being finalised.

Coastal Protection

77. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a coastal repair works project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42504/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government Decision of 11 February 2014 allocated total funding of up to €69.5 million for clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure that was damaged as a result of severe weather in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014. Of this sum of €69.5 million, up to €19.6 million was allocated for repair of existing coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure *based on cost estimates and submissions made by the local authorities* concerned to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG).

The DoECLG wrote to Councils notifying them of their allocations under the Government Decision and, in this regard, Clare County Council was informed that, based on its submission and estimate of repair costs, up to €8,276,433 was being made available for repair of damaged coastal protection infrastructure in Clare.

The work at Quilty was not included as repair costs in the Council's submission to the D/EC&LG and, consequently, was not included in that Department's notified allocation for repair funding to the Council following the Government decision. The works at Quilty were not included also in the Council's programme of works which was submitted to and approved by the Office of Public Works (OPW)*.

Additionally, it was pointed out to the Council that the Government Decision stated that new coastal protection and coastal defences or works to strengthen existing defences, which are separate from the repair and restoration works on which the €19.6m figure was based, would require more detailed examination in the context of the OPW Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management studies.

*Clare County Council did submit a number of applications to the OPW following the Government decision. These included an application for Quilty, Co. Clare in the sum of €189,833

for repairs to existing rock armour and an existing wall which was damaged and collapsed during the storms. This application however falls outside of the scope of the specific funding allocation provided by the Government Decision of 11 February in that the damage occurred as a result of the severe weather and high tides experienced in February and the Government decision related only to storm damage occurring in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014.

Flooding Data

78. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of houses by county that experienced flooding in the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42522/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) does not systematically gather or collate data on the number of houses which have experienced flooding. The OPW would receive information and data on significant flood events from a number of sources including Local Authorities, the consultants undertaking the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) projects on behalf of the OPW and members of the public. Information received by the OPW is used to populate a national database on historic flood events which is available on the website www.floodmaps.ie. The format, accuracy and reliability of the flood data submitted has been variable and, in order to try and improve the reliability and usefulness of the information, the OPW recently introduced a set of guidelines for flood data capture in the form of a practical flood data collection handbook. This sets out the type of data that should be collected under a range of headings including details on the Impacts to Property - Residential, Community and Commercial.

This new guidance should help to improve the quality and reliability of information on the impact of flood events which is available on www.floodmaps.ie

Flood Prevention Measures

79. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42544/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is not aware of any project at the embankments in question at Ballynacally and Kildysart, County Clare. I am advised that these embankments were constructed by the former Land Commission and, as such, the OPW does not have any responsibility in this area.

Flood Prevention Measures

80. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position in respect of a project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42582/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works has not, to date, received an application from Clare County Council under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for

works at Thomond Villas, Clarecastle, County Clare. Should an application be received it will be considered having regard to the relevant eligibility criteria of the Scheme and the overall availability of resources for flood risk management.

Consultancy Contracts Data

81. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of reports from external consultants commissioned by his Department in the years 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; the costs incurred by his Department to commission these reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42590/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question the following table outlines the total amount spent on external reports commissioned by my Department since its inception in 2011:

Name of External Report	Costs	Date of Commission	Date or Expected Date of Publication	Name of External Consultant
Independent verification of savings arising under the Public Service Agreement	€35,819.80	16 May 2011	June 2011	MKO Partners Ltd
Report on Reasons Behind Voter Behaviour in the Oireachtas Inquiry Referendum 2011	€41,043.20	23 November 2011	January 2012	Red C Research and Marketing Ltd.
Options for the next National Lottery licence	€615 (including VAT)	7th February 2012	2 March 2012	Davy Corporate Finance
Independent verification of savings arising under the Public Service Agreement	€31,586.40	23 March 2012	13 June 2012	Grant Thornton
Capacity and Capability Review of Central Procurement Function	€30,750.00	May 2012	6 September 2012	Accenture
ICT-MF Executive Assessment	€30,750.00	August 2012	November 2012	Innovation Value Institute, NUIM

Name of External Report	Costs	Date of Commission	Date or Expected Date of Publication	Name of External Consultant
Independent verification of savings arising under the Public Service Agreement	€24,206.40	4 February 2013	3 July 2013	Grant Thornton
Debt Management Final Report	€110,000 plus VAT	Q2 - 2013	Published 24th July 2014	BearingPoint
Report of a Consultation with Civil Society Representatives and Citizens on Ireland's Participation in the Open Government Partnership	Funding of €25,735.25 was provided to Transparency International Ireland in 2013 following a competitive tender process to support a public consultation with civil society and the preparation of a report of their recommendations and proposals for potential inclusion in Ireland's Open Government Partnership National Action Plan.	10 June 2013	Published on 2 October 2013	Transparency International, Ireland
Capacity & Capability Review of the Estate Portfolio function of the Office of Public Works (excluding Heritage Services)	€130,000.00 + VAT	12 November 2013	Report has been received by the Office of Public Works and circulated to staff	Concerto Partners LLP

Name of External Report	Costs	Date of Commission	Date or Expected Date of Publication	Name of External Consultant
Open Data project:- Best Practice Handbook-Data Audit Report - Roadmap for Open Data- Evaluation Framework - Open Data Publication Handbook	€19,188.00	3 March 2014	July 2014	Insight Centre for Data Analytics, NUI Galway
Development of Training & Organisation Development	€22,900	March 2014	July 2014(date is approximate, relates to draft Report)	Baker Tilly Ryan Glennon. Trinity House, Charleston Road, Ranelagh, Dublin 6
Value for Money Report of Dublin Castle's Conference Facilities	€4,674.00 Incl Vat.	7 April 2014	Qtr 3, 2014	Newmarket Consulting
Fund Structuring Services Agreement for Social Housing and Energy Efficiency in Ireland	€26,766.65	27 February 2014	5 November 2014	European Investment Bank

In the course of its normal business activity, the Office of Public Works engages technical consultants on many of its projects, primarily architectural and engineering. The costs of these consultants would be included in the overall project costs and are not included here.

Housing Issues

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects it may be feasible to encourage further investment in the public housing procurement programme in order to address the serious housing crisis inherited from the previous administration with the emphasis on the number becoming homeless on a daily basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42609/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Responsibility for developing housing policy, proposals for its funding and implementation are primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government. As indicated in my announcement of a €2.2 billion investment for social housing in the Budget, I understand that he will be shortly bringing forward a new Social Housing Strategy that will contain more detailed proposals in this regard.

Fiscal Policy

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he is satisfied that all expenditure and reform targets have been met to date and will continue to so do far in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42616/14]

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he and his Department have anticipated budgetary overruns in any particular Departments or State bodies in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42618/14]

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which public expenditure objectives set out by the troika remain on course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42619/14]

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which targets achieved to date in the area of public expenditure and reform will have a lasting and beneficial economic impact; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42621/14]

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that progress to date on the issue of public expenditure and reform remains in line with expectations. [42632/14]

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he expects public expenditure reform targets to remain on course for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42658/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83, 85 and 86 to 89, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will note that Ireland is no longer subject to the Troika programme as this was successfully exited at end-2013. There remain, however, annual deficit ceilings set out in the Excessive Deficit Procedure which the Government must meet, and our fiscal policies are predicated on achieving these. To date, the Government's approach to fiscal consolidation, comprising both tax and expenditure measures, has proven successful as we have achieved all targets.

2015 represents the last year in which Ireland will be in an Excessive Deficit Procedure, and Budget 2015 and the Comprehensive Expenditure Report 2015 to 2017 are designed to deliver a deficit of below 3% of GDP. In the subsequent years, Ireland is committed to managing its public finances in line with the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact.

Our task in achieving our fiscal targets has of course been assisted by the strong recovery under way in our economy. The latest GDP data shows that output expanded by 7.7% in the year to Q2 2014, while unemployment, a key priority of this Government, continues to fall. This has offered the Government a degree of flexibility in implementing fiscal policy as the latest Exchequer returns show that revenues from taxation are almost €1.1 billion ahead of profile.

This recovery has of course been aided by the fiscal policy objectives and reforms implemented by this Government. A precondition for economic growth is prudent and sustainable management of the public finances. Added to this, the economic growth-friendly environment and policies, as well as the significant public sector reforms undertaken, provide the foundations for sustained economic growth and prosperity for years to come.

Aside from their contribution to economic growth, reforms to the way in which the public sector operates will provide Irish citizens with high-quality public services that are delivered

in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The increased focus on evaluation of expenditure policies and programmes has also contributed to our ability to effectively manage and allocate resources across all areas of public policy. For example, the forthcoming publication of the Capital Review will set out multi-annual capital expenditure ceilings for Departments, and identify those areas in which the Government must invest in order to promote future growth and resolve pressing social issues.

With regard to expenditure management in 2014, my Department regularly analyses expenditure trends across all areas of Voted expenditure. As of end-October 2014, Gross Voted expenditure of €44.2 billion was 0.9% ahead of profile, with Health Group expenditure being 3.8% over profile. My Department continues to engage with all Departments to ensure that expenditure overruns are managed without posing risks to the Government's overall fiscal objectives.

Public Service Reform Plan Update

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide any future reform objectives over the next two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42617/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Since this Government took office, sustainable and far reaching Public Service Reform has been a key element of our strategy to meet the challenges that have faced the country in recent years. Public Service Reform will also continue to play a key role in our recovery.

As the Deputy will be aware, we published our first Public Service Reform Plan in November 2011. A Progress Report on the Reform Plan was published in September 2012 and a second Progress Report was published in January this year (available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie). These reports set out the significant progress that has been made to date.

In January this year, I published the Government's second Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016. There are over 230 specific actions set out in the Reform Plan including greater use of shared services and innovative approaches to service delivery; increased use of technology and improved engagement with service users; more efficient and effective public procurement and property management; increased accountability and transparency in public decision making; enhanced leadership and performance management; and a continued focus on building the required capacity and capability to deliver reform and service improvements across the Public Service. The new Reform Plan is also available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie.

Last week, the Taoiseach and I launched the Civil Service Renewal Plan. This ambitious plan incorporates a vision and a three year action plan to renew the Civil Service. It delivers on a key Programme for Government commitment and represents a fundamental new vision and direction for the Civil Service. The Plan outlines the practical changes that will create a more unified, professional, responsive, open and accountable Civil Service, providing a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland.

Overall, I am satisfied that we have made very strong progress to date on the delivery of reform and that we have also set out a clear and ambitious reform agenda for the Civil and Public Service over the coming years. *Questions Nos. 85 to 89, inclusive, answered with Question No. 83.*

Irish Water Administration

90. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if Irish Water is subject to the Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act 1980; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42487/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Contracts for the supply of water would be considered to come within the scope of the Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act 1980.

As the economic regulator for public water services, the Commission for Energy Regulation is required by Part 5 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 to have regard, among other things, to the need to ensure that the customers of Irish Water are provided with the quality of service provided for in a code of practice approved by the Commission. The Commission has published an Irish Water Customer Handbook that includes a Customer Charter, terms and conditions of supply for domestic customers, and Codes of Practice on customer communication, metering, billing, vulnerable customers, network operation and complaint handling. The Charter and the Codes contain specific requirements relating to the consumer protection measures to be put in place by Irish Water.

While the Commission for Energy Regulation has the primary responsibility for protecting the interests of water customers, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission remains responsible for consumer legislation of general application, such as the Consumer Protection Act 2007 and the European Communities (Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts) Regulations 1995 and 2000.

Departmental Expenditure

91. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide the details of average cuts paid by his Department and those under his aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42710/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recruitment of staff to my Department is ordinarily conducted through the Public Appointments Service (PAS), and where relevant through the redeployment mechanism introduced by Government to manage the reduction of numbers employed in the public sector in recent times.

Across the Department and its Offices, the only instance of use of an employment agency relates to the provision to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) of legal secretarial services. The fee received by the agency in the period 2012 to date is approximately €28,000 plus VAT. This represents just under 21% of the total amount paid to the agency, the balance of which is paid to the worker concerned. The agency is responsible for all administration costs in respect of the worker including, for example, administration of payroll and any human resource costs arising. In addition, they would be responsible for discharging employers' PRSI liability amounting to some €4,000, in respect of the worker, out of this fee. The breakdown of fees paid each year, including VAT, is as follows:

Year	€
2012	€12.45k
2013	€12.51k

Year	€
2014 (to date)	€9.6k

Separately, I have asked all Agencies under the aegis of my Department to advise me of fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies, and I will communicate this information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Expenditure

92. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under his aegis. [42724/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recruitment of staff to my Department is ordinarily conducted through the Public Appointments Service (PAS), and where relevant through the redeployment mechanism introduced by Government to manage the reduction of numbers employed in the public sector in recent times.

Across the Department and its Offices, the only instance of use of an employment agency relates to the provision to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) of legal secretarial services. The fee received by the agency in the period 2012 to date is approximately €28,000 plus VAT. This represents just under 21% of the total amount paid to the agency, the balance of which is paid to the worker concerned. The agency is responsible for all administration costs in respect of the worker including, for example, administration of payroll and any human resource costs arising. In addition, they would be responsible for discharging employers' PRSI liability amounting to some €4,000, in respect of the worker, out of this fee. The breakdown of fees paid each year, including VAT, is as follows:

Year	€
2012	€12.45k
2013	€12.51k
2014 (to date)	€9.6k

Separately, I have asked all Agencies under the aegis of my Department to advise me of fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies and I will communicate this information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

93. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the single farm payment and disadvantage area based payment for 2014 will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42491/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2014, declaring a total of 61.03 hectares, 24.92 hectares of which is in respect of Commonage land. This commonage is the subject of a review and on completion

of this review the application will be further processed. An official from my Department has been in direct contact with the person named to clarify the situation.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

94. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a single farm payment will be issued in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42507/14]

95. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area payment will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Clare [42537/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 95 together.

An application under the 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 30 April 2014. Processing of this application has recently been finalised and payment will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Consultancy Contracts Data

96. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of reports from external consultants commissioned by his Department in the years 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; the costs incurred by his Department to commission these reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42587/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the table below. Many of the reports commissioned are a compulsory element of the Department's participation in EU funded programmes.

2012

Consultant	Title of Report	Cost €
Drima Marketing Ltd	Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (JSFO) 2011	12,792
	Joint Wood Energy Enquiry (JWEE) 2011	
	Market Report for Ireland for the Timber Committee 2011	
Indecon	Review of certain aspects of the Irish Horse Racing Industry	59,225
CMG Crime Management Ltd	ISPS Port Security Plan-Castleownbere Fishery Harbour Centre	3,198
Philip Farrelly & Co. Ltd	Food Harvest 2020 – Environmental Analysis Report	114,805 *

Questions - Written Answers

Consultant	Title of Report	Cost €
Team BDS	Lean Review of the Meat Inspection Service	98,597
TMS Environment Ltd	Risk assessment and Occupational Monitoring of Department's office, Records Branch, Portlaoise for yeasts, moulds and dust containments.	4,428
TMS Environment Ltd	Risk assessment and Occupational Monitoring of staff health at Department's office, Records Branch, Portlaoise arising from possible mould contaminants.	1,845
IRS Solutions	Bi-annual legislation update on Health and Safety legislation – 1st report	1,471
IRS Solutions	Bi-annual legislation update on Health and Safety legislation – 2nd report	1,471
Deloitte Ireland	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine – Annual Accounts Certification	514,169
NTA Monitor Limited	Independent assessments of the Department's IT security measures and security review of the Department's infrastructure	16,162
Espion	Independent assessments of the Department's IT security measures and security review of the Department's infrastructure	32,133

2013

Consultant	Title of Report	Cost €
Drima Marketing Ltd	Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (JSFO) 2012	11,400
	Joint Wood Energy Enquiry (JWEE) 2012	
	Market Report for Ireland for the UNECE Timber Committee 2012	
Indecon	Review of certain matters relating to Bord na gCon	60,885

Consultant	Title of Report	Cost €
Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants	Ex Ante Evaluation, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment of the 2014 – 2020 Rural Development Programme	48,400
Philip Farrelly & Co. Ltd	Food Harvest 2020 – Environmental Analysis Report	57,403*
Norfolk Marine Ltd	Survey works report to Killybegs FHC	10,828
IRS Solutions	Bi- annual legislation update on Health and Safety legislation – 1st report	1,471
IRS Solutions	Bi-annual legislation update on Health and Safety legislation – 2nd report	923
Brian Scott	Port Facility Review Killybegs	1,200
Compass Informatics	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine – Independent Review of GIS Applications	23,418
Deloitte Ireland	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine – Annual Accounts Certification	468,277
Forest Solutions	NPV and IRR analysis for New afforestation scheme	1,968
Judith A Annett Countryside Consultancy	Irish Deer Management Policy Vision	2,500

2014: January- October

Consultant	Title of Report	Cost €
Crime Management Services Ltd	ISPS Port Security Assessment Castletownbere	4,735
Crime Management Services Ltd	ISPS Port Security Assessment Killybegs	4,735
IRS Solutions	Bi-annual legislation update on Health and Safety legislation	923
Philip Farrelly & Co. Ltd	Food Harvest 2020 – Environmental Analysis Report	57,403*
Deloitte Ireland	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine – Annual Accounts Certification	271,602
Dr. Sean Brady	The Dairy Expansion Activation Group Report (2011-2014)	17,000

Consultant	Title of Report	Cost €
RSM McClure Watters (Consulting)	Ex Ante Evaluation, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment of the 2014 – 2020 Forestry programme	97,508
Forest Solutions	NPV and IRR analysis for New forestry for Fibre scheme	2,214
Drima Marketing Ltd	Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (JSFO) 201 3	11,780
	Joint Wood Energy Enquiry (JWEE) 201 3	
	Market Report for Ireland for the UNECE Timber Committee 2013	

* Part of the same contract.

Scéim Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste

97. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoin Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair agus faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste do 2014 le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo); cén fáth a bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [42611/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rinne an duine ainmnithe iarratas faoi Scéim na hAoníocaíochta/na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste an 7 Bealtaine 2014. Próiseáladh an t-iarratas le déanaí agus eiseofar an íocaíocht dhlite go gairid, díreach chuig cuntas bainc ainmnithe an duine ainmnithe.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

98. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the single farm payment scheme and the disadvantaged area based scheme for 2014 and any other agriculture payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing these payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42612/14]

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/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes revealed that a number of the land parcels declared by the person named contained ineligible features. Following an appeal from the person named, a visit by a Department official to verify the position was necessary to progress the matter. The outcome of this check resulted in an over-claim in area of greater than 20% being recorded on the lands claimed by the person named. Under the Terms and Conditions of the Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes such an over-claim results in no payment being due in respect of 2014.

TAMS Payments

99. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when TAMS 2 will be introduced, as a number of farmers are awaiting the introduction of same to enable them to proceed with intended investment in these areas and the introduction of same may be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42614/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Rural Development Programme for the 2014-2020 period was submitted to the EU Commission for approval in July 2014. The following investments have been identified as priority areas which will be targeted in the initial stages:- (i) dairy equipment, (ii) low emission spreading equipment, (iii) animal welfare and farm safety (specifically beef and sheep handling facilities), (iv) pig and poultry investments in energy, water meters and medicine dispensers, (v) organic capital investment, and (vi) a young farmer capital investment scheme. TAMS II will subsequently be expanded to cover farm nutrient storage and animal housing. The new schemes can only be opened when EU Commission approval for the Programme has been received. That process is well underway at this stage but it is not possible at this stage to fix definitive dates for their introduction.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

100. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their disadvantaged area aid payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42626/14]

101. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42627/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 101 together.

The person named submitted a 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas scheme application on 1 April 2014. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on-farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection has been completed and the results are now being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

GLAS Payments

102. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the GLAS+ top-up payment will be automatically paid to GLAS participants whose land is designated SPA, SAC or NHA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42637/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The agri-environment scheme GLAS is one of the schemes included in Ireland's draft Rural Development Programme which is currently being considered by the European Commission. The proposal is that applicants for GLAS with designated SAC and SPA lands, which form part of the Natura 2000 Network (but does not include NHA land), will get priority access to the Scheme

under Tier 1. The proposed 'top-up' GLAS+ payment of up to €2,000 extra will be available to a limited number of farmers who commit to measures of exceptionally high environmental benefit. The initial targeting of this GLAS+ payment will be at farmers who have to undertake a number of mandatory actions under Tier 1. Where GLAS+ is approved, the payment will be made automatically.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

103. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the disadvantaged area aid payment in respect of a person (details supplied) will be processed without delay. [42641/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 9 May 2014. Payment has not yet issued to the person named as, at this stage, the holding concerned 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 issuing to the person named at the earliest possible date thereafter, provided all other Scheme requirements have been satisfied.

Milk Quota Cessation

104. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposals he has put to the new EU Agricultural Commissioner to deal with the serious difficulties facing many dairy farmers due to impending super levy penalties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42660/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy is aware, the superlevy fine is set by milk quota Regulations agreed at EU level. Given that fact, it is not possible for me on a unilateral basis to change that rate without the agreement of both the Commission and all other Member States. At each Agriculture Council over the last year the issue of additional measures to ensure a 'soft landing' to milk quota abolition in 2015 was discussed. I, and some other like-minded Ministers, consistently called on the Commission to take action to ease the burden of the super levy in the final year of the quota regime but such an agreement was not forthcoming at the time and this remains the case. As there is no common position at the Council of Agriculture Ministers such an improvement looks unlikely to be achieved. It must be clearly noted that a number of other countries are opposed to any action on this and have sought to link the issue to possible measures to regulate supply after quotas are gone. I am obviously resolutely opposed to any talk of supply controls after quota abolition next April on the basis that these quotas have only served to shackle Irish farmers over the last 30 years. The resultant stalemate means there is insufficient support for any change to the regulations and no agreement has been possible. The current Italian presidency agreed to consider the issue at their first Council meeting in July, it was again discussed in October and I fully expect that the issue will remain high on the agenda for discussion at future Councils where I will continue to seek to have the matter progressed in a way that is fair to both Irish and EU dairy farmers.

In preparing their enterprises for the post quota era, I have at all times urged that farmers have regard for the fact that milk quotas would remain in place until April 2015, along with the associated superlevy regime, and I would take this opportunity today to reiterate this call. I

would again urge farmers to use the time period between now and the removal of milk quotas to identify, with their dairy adviser, steps to manage both their milk supply and their dairy herds so that they have an efficient herd as they enter the post quota era. In this regard, I am organising a major dairy conference on November 19 next to assess our readiness for quota abolition and to take stock of the current challenges and opportunities facing the sector.

GLAS Payments

105. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, further to Parliamentary Question No. 248 of 30 September 2014, if the additional costs associated with the preparation of a single commonage management plan justify the variance between GLAS rates applicable to privately-owned Natura and commonage, given that non-commonage landowners also require the services of a planner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42676/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The agri-environment scheme GLAS is one of the schemes included in Ireland's draft Rural Development Programme which is currently being considered by the European Commission. The costings for all GLAS actions are based on income forgone, the cost of compliance and transaction costs. A higher rate of payment per hectare for commonage land has been proposed in order to cover the additional costs associated with both the preparation and implementation of a single Commonage Management Plan. This plan has to be drawn up for the entire commonage, by a single agricultural advisor, and it requires the shareholders grazing the commonage to work together to deliver its objectives over a five year period. The extra effort involved, and additional overhead in terms of planning, is reflected in the proposed commonage payment rate.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

106. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the disadvantaged area aid payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath will be processed without delay. [42677/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' scheme application on 15 April 2014. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on-farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue. The application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection has been completed and the results are now being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Aquaculture Licences

107. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of aquaculture licences fully granted or determined by him in 2014 versus the targets he set for determinations at the beginning of the year; the reasons for any shortfall; where the bottlenecks still exist in dealing with the backlog of processing aquaculture licences; the agency responsible for any delays in processing determinations and the solutions being put in place to deal with the problem; if the agency causing the problem is one under his control or the re-

sponsibility of another Department; if it is outside of his remit, the steps he has taken with the Department involved to resolve the issue; the list of bays and number of aquaculture licence determinations which he committed to achieve during a speech at the recent national shellfish conference organised by the IFA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42687/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is not possible, as yet, to confirm the outturn for 2014 in relation to aquaculture licence determinations. I can confirm, however, that the number will be less than the projected outturn due primarily to the delay in the provision of final Appropriate Assessments in respect of which there is broad consensus between the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, on the scientific inputs. This delay reflects the ongoing complexity inherent in the overall process. Following discussions with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, I am confident that, notwithstanding the complexities involved, 2015 will see a significant and sustained increase in licence determinations. In the order of 120 determinations are projected for Quarter 1, 2015 alone.

Based on information currently available, it is expected to achieve licence determinations in respect of the following bays in the first half of 2015:

- Donegal Bay;
- Dungarvan Harbour;
- Clew Bay;
- Valentia/Portmagee Channel;
- Lough Swilly;
- Galway Bay.

My Department prioritises bays based on the number of aquaculture sites, the ready availability of scientific data and other factors. The prioritised list of bays is kept under continuous review so as to facilitate the use of scientific and other resources on a flexible basis across the full range of bays.

Departmental Expenditure

108. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the details of average amounts paid by his Department and those bodies under its aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is, the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies which is received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42701/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department's recruitment is done through the Public Service Appointment Service (PAS), apart from two current contracts in respect of the provision of security staff in one of the Department's Regional Offices. Details of the fees paid to agencies in respect of the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 are outlined in the following table.

Agency	Techskills	FRS Farm Relief Service
2011	€77,713	Nil
2012	€69,555	€5,366

Agency	Techskills	FRS Farm Relief Service
2013	€52,876	€27,959
2014 to date	€32,328	€ 32,067

The use of recruitment and employment agencies by the State Bodies under my Department's aegis is an operational matter for the State Bodies themselves.

Departmental Expenditure

109. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those agencies under its aegis. [42714/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department's recruitment is done through the Public Service Appointment Service (PAS), apart from two current contracts in respect of the provision of security staff in one of the Department's Regional Offices. The details requested by the Deputy are outlined in the following table.

Agency	Techskills	FRS Farm Relief Service
2011	€77,713	Nil
2012	€69,555	€5,366
2013	€52,876	€27,959
2014 to date	€32,328	€32,067

The use of recruitment and employment agencies by the State Bodies under my Department's aegis is an operational matter for the State Bodies themselves.

Defence Forces Ombudsman Complaints

110. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Defence the current number of cases being processed by the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces; the number of cases in respect of which decisions have not yet been made for a period of six months, one year, two years or three years; the reason for these delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42524/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Office of the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces was established as an independent statutory office, under the Ombudsman (Defence Forces) Act 2004. The Ombudsman has full independence and autonomy in the discharge of his statutory functions, including the processing and administration of cases referred to his Office for investigation. I understand from the Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2012, which is the latest available, that at the end of that year some 55 cases were on hand, 14 of which had already received a Preliminary Report. I am advised that the Ombudsman's Annual Report 2013 will be published before the end of the year. As the Deputy will be aware, there was some delay in bringing cases forward due to a case being before the courts challenging the appointment of the current Ombudsman. I am happy that matter is now closed and that the Ombudsman is proceeding to deal with the caseload as quickly as possible.

Defence Forces Deployment

111. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Defence if Irish Defence Forces person-

nel are still working in Afghanistan; and whether, considering the British decision to remove its troops from the country, he has plans to withdraw Irish troops from the country. [42644/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland has participated in the NATO-led UN mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan since 5 July 2002. Since then, the Government has reviewed and approved, on an annual basis, the continued participation by seven (7) members of the Permanent Defence Force in ISAF.

On 25 June 2013, the Government agreed to continue to provide seven members of the Permanent Defence Force for service with ISAF for a further period from July 2013, subject to ongoing review by the Minister for Defence. The seven (7) personnel currently serving with the force are all located in ISAF HQ, Kabul and work in staff appointments in planning and administrative roles.

In March 2011, the transition process whereby the Afghan security forces would gradually take on more security responsibility from ISAF was launched. On 18 June 2013, the final phase of the transition was instigated. This process is due to be completed at the end of December 2014, when ISAF's mission will end. NATO will then lead a follow on training and support operation called Resolute Support Mission with effect from 01 January 2015.

Defence Forces participation in all overseas missions is reviewed on an ongoing basis. The overall drawdown of ISAF personnel is currently underway and the withdrawal of the Defence Forces personnel will be coordinated in this context. Irish personnel will complete their service with the mission in December 2014.

The proposed NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, post 2014, will be a follow on training advisory and assistance mission in support of the Afghan National Security Forces capacity. The question of Ireland contributing to the follow on mission in Afghanistan is currently being considered in the context of what other contributing countries are planning. Any participation by Ireland in the follow on training mission will be subject to Government approval.

Army Personnel

112. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence his plans for the future use of Columb Barracks, Mullingar, County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42690/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): As I have previously outlined in the House the former barracks in Mullingar is currently used by Westmeath GAA Board under a short term licence. The former barracks is also currently used by An Garda Síochána and the Customs Service for training purposes and it is intended that these arrangements will remain in place. A number of other organisations and individuals have also made enquiries/suggestions in the recent past as to the possible use of the barracks and these are being looked at in the context of an overall plan for the barracks under a long term lease with Westmeath GAA Board. I expect that these arrangements will be finalised over the coming weeks.

Departmental Expenditure

113. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide the details of average cuts paid by his Department and those under his aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies

received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42705/14]

114. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under his aegis. [42718/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 114 together.

My Department uses employment agencies to provide agency nursing staff when required, to provide cover for army nurses at military installations. The costs on an annual basis in the period 2011 to date are as follows:

Year	Total Payment
2011	€133,850
2012	€283,685
2013	€286,261
2014 (to date)	€226,238

The payments to these agencies include the following elements:

- Gross Nurse Pay;
- Employer PRSI payment (10.75 % of gross nurse pay);
- Administration Fee (10 % of the total of gross nurse pay and employer PRSI);
- VAT at 23 % of the total fee charged by the employment agency.

Agency staff are only employed where there are compelling reasons to engage a person on either an urgent or temporary basis.

My Department does not have any contractual arrangements with recruitment or employment agencies in respect of recruitment to Civil Service posts. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is an independent body established under the Public Service Management Act 2004 to provide recruitment, assessment and selection services for the Civil Service. My Department engages with PAS when required to recruit administrative staff for the Department and to facilitate the provision of the Psychometric Testing for General Service Recruitment campaigns for the Defence Forces.

The Defence Forces engage the services of companies to carry out specialist psychometric and psychomotor testing for Army, Naval Service and Air Corps Cadetship Competitions as the expertise in these areas of testing is not available in the Defence Forces or in PAS. Amongst the companies engaged to provide these services was CAE PARC Aviation, a specialist aviation recruitment company. The breakdown of fees paid to this recruitment company is set out in the table below:

Year	CAE PARC Aviation €
2011	52,169
2012	53,031
2013	Nil
2014 (to date)	Nil

In reply to Dáil Question Number 207 on the Order Paper for answer on 26 September 2013, a figure of €52,000 was provided in respect of payments to CAE PARC Aviation in 2012. Fur-

ther examination of payments to this company show that the actual payments to the company were €53,031.

Charities Regulation

115. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the impact that the establishment of the charities regulator will have on schools and specifically if the boards of management of all schools with charitable status have to register with the regulator by April 2014; the level of registration fee; the documentation and information they will be required to provide; her plans to ensure that the new arrangements do not place an excessive burden on schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42542/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) was established on the 16th October 2014 under the terms of the Charities Act 2009. One of the statutory functions of the CRA is to establish and maintain a public register of all charities operating in the State.

The advancement of education is recognised as a charitable purpose in Section 3 of the Act. Charities established for the furtherance of that purpose will be required to register with the CRA. Under Section 40 of the Act, any organisation holding a valid charitable tax exemption (CHY number) from the Revenue Commissioners on the 15th October 2014 was deemed to be registered with the CRA. Schools and other education bodies that had a valid CHY number from Revenue on 15th October 2014 are therefore deemed registered with the CRA by virtue of this provision. These charities do not have to register with the CRA as they are already registered, but they will be asked by the CRA to supply certain information.

The CRA has begun a process of writing to all deemed charities, including schools and education bodies, to invite them to provide additional information for inclusion in the Register of Charities. These charities do not need to contact the CRA until they receive a letter from the CRA. The information that will be required is set out in the letters being issued to charities by the CRA and may also be viewed on its website, www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie.

Education charities that did not have a CHY number on 15th October 2014 are not automatically registered and will need to apply to the CRA before 16 April 2015.

I am advised that the CRA is not yet inviting applications from such education charities. Further information and guidance on the registration process for these charities will be provided before they are invited to apply. Registration and annual filing fees have not yet been put in place.

Immigration Status

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42550/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status does not arise at this time in the case of the persons whose details were supplied. If the persons concerned have made applications for asylum or subsidiary protection, the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process.

Naturalisation Applications

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current position in the matter of residency status-eligibility to apply for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath whose spouse is an Irish citizen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42551/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application having been received for residency in the State arising from marriage to an Irish citizen in respect of the person concerned based on the information supplied in the Deputy's question.

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

Immigration Status

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when stamp 4 status will issue to facilitate their employment in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42554/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question made an application for Long-Term Residence on 27 February 2013.

By letter dated 2 August 2013, the person in question was advised by INIS that they did not qualify for long-term residence on the basis that they did not have the necessary 60 months reckonable residence required, as evidenced by the appropriate Stamp 1 and/or Stamp 4 endorsements on their passport. At the time of their application, the person in question had not renewed their permission to remain since 16 August 2011. It is a requirement of the Long-Term Residency scheme that an applicant be in employment at the time of applying and that they keep their permission to remain up-to-date at all times.

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 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.

Naturalisation Applications

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; if their next application for naturalisation has been received by the relevant authorities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42555/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to in the Deputy's question, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 14 June 2017.

The application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation. It is a statutory requirement that, inter alia, applicants for naturalisation be of good character. In some instances that can be established relatively quickly and in other cases completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

The 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.

Naturalisation Applications

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow, who has been employed here on foot of work permit for several years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42556/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that this application is being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

Immigration Status

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position

regarding residency or entitlement to naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow who is anxious to have their residency upgraded to stamp 4 status in view of the fact that they are still a dependant of their father, who has been in legal employment here for several years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42557/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy should be advised to make an application to INIS if they wish to change their immigration status.

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 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.

Deportation Orders

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, having regard to the circumstances in the case, if she will consider revoking the deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42558/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned, together with other family members are the subject of Deportation Orders.

However, if new information or circumstances have come to light, which has a direct bearing on her case, and which have arisen since the original Deportation Order was made, there remains the option of a request that I use my discretion, pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended) to revoke the Deportation Order. However I wish to make clear that such a request would require substantial grounds to be successful. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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.

Immigration Status

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 133 of 25 September 2014, if a further copy of the letter of 21 August 2014 may issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42559/14]

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

replied to INIS' letter of 21 August 2014 and that INIS is in correspondence with the applicant at a different address than that given by the Deputy.

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

Immigration Status

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current position in regard to naturalisation or updated stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42560/14]

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 5 August 2014, and therefore has no entitlement to naturalisation.

The Deputy might wish to note that the person concerned has never held a right of residency in this State of a nature that would have allowed them to take up a position of paid employment.

The effect of the Deportation Order is that the person concerned must leave the State and remain thereafter outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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.

Immigration Status

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if provision may be made to upgrade or update from stamp 2 to stamp 4 residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42562/14]

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 referred to by the Deputy does not have an application with INIS. This person should be advised to write to the INIS Residence Division on the matter raised by the Deputy.

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

Immigration Status

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency status or leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Laois. [42570/14]

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 arrived in the State on 24 April, 2008 and made an application for asylum on 25 April, 2008. The Refugee Applications Commissioner refused a declaration of refugee status by letter dated 24 September, 2008. This decision was subsequently upheld by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal on 18 February, 2011.

On 16 March, 2011 the person concerned was informed that it was proposed to make a Deportation Order and was invited to apply for Subsidiary Protection and to make representations under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999. The Subsidiary Protection application was refused and this was notified to the person concerned on 29th August 2011. Following consideration of the representations made pursuant to Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, a Deportation order was signed on 07 September, 2011. The person concerned was notified by letter dated 09 September, 2011.

The person concerned instituted Judicial Review proceedings on 21 March, 2013 challenging the refusal of Subsidiary Protection and seeking to quash the deportation order issued in respect of them and accordingly, as the matter is sub judice, I do not propose to comment further.

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

Immigration Status

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of residency status, leave to remain or subsidiary protection in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42571/14]

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

Garda Station Refurbishment

128. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the proposed upgrade of Dromad Garda station, County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42586/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda stations is based on accommodation priorities which are established by An Garda Síochána. The programme is advanced in close co-operation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

In that context, I am informed by the Garda authorities that refurbishment works on Dromad Garda Station will be progressed in the context of An Garda Síochána's identified accommodation priorities and in the light of available resources within the Vote of the Office of Public Works.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

129. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a Garda complaint in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42610/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It would appear from the correspondence submitted by the Deputy that the individual concerned has made a complaint to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.

As the Deputy is aware, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission is a statutory independent body which was set up to receive complaints made by members of the public concerning the conduct of members of the Garda Síochána. The Ombudsman Commission is independent in the exercise of its functions and I have no function in relation to the processing of individual complaints which are referred to it for investigation.

Immigration Status

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in the matter of residency status and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42656/14]

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

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

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

INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Legislative Measures

131. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an Act (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42678/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, there is an ongoing debate as to the approach to be adopted in tackling the exploitation associated with prostitution. There are a wide range of issues involved which require consideration and any proposals will be brought to Government in the usual way.

In terms of the trafficking of persons for prostitution and sexual exploitation, I would draw the Deputy's attention to the existing legislative provisions addressing the trafficking of persons for the purposes of exploitation (including sexual exploitation) which can attract significant penalties. The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 prohibits trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Any person found guilty of such an offence shall be liable to imprisonment for life or a lesser term, and at the discretion of the court, to a fine. It is also an offence for a person to solicit or importune a trafficked person for the purposes of prostitution with a potential penalty of imprisonment for up to 5 years and/or a fine.

There are also provisions in our criminal law directed at the public nuisances and exploitation associated with prostitution. Solicitation, by both the client and the prostitute, living on the earnings of prostitution, organising prostitution and running a brothel are all offences under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993.

Garda Recruitment

132. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who did not pass the verification tests that formed stage three of the Garda recruitment process; and the further plans in place to increase the recruitment numbers to An Garda Síochána. [42683/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested the information sought from the Garda authorities and I will revert to the Deputy in due course as soon as the information is to hand.

Residency Permits

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; if arrangements may be made on humanitarian grounds to expedite the process in the wake of a recent tragic experience; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42694/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons referred to by the Deputy were granted temporary permission to remain in the State, on a stamp 4 basis, on 21 July, 2010. This permission was subsequently renewed with the latest permission granted up to 20th July, 2017.

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

Departmental Expenditure

134. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide the details of average cuts paid by her Department and those under her aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42711/14]

135. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by her Department and those under her aegis. [42725/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 135 together.

As the Deputies have not specified the time frame of interest to them, the information provided below relates to 2013 and 2014. The Deputies should note that my Department and the Agencies under its remit use the services of the State's independent recruitment office, the Public Appointments Service, to the maximum extent possible. Where appropriate, that Service seeks reimbursement from its clients of certain costs which arise including advertising and interview board member expenses.

I am advised that my Department and Agencies under its remit do not ordinarily use the services of external recruitment or employment agencies. However, in respect of 2013 and 2014 the table below sets out the relevant expenditure as requested by the Deputies.

Department/ Agency	Year	Fees Paid	Recruitment/ Employment Agency	Service Pro- vided
Irish Human Rights Commis- sion	2013	€5,894	Premier Recruit- ment Ltd.	Clerical cover for staff on leave / events
	2014	€13,009	Premier Recruit- ment Ltd.	Provision of phonerecep- tion and clerical support in Jervis House
Office of the State Patholo- gist	2013	€80,293.15	TTM Healthcare	Lab Services - Locum Senior Scientist
	2014	€67,017.22	TTM Healthcare	Lab Services - Locum Senior Scientist

Family Support Services

136. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide in tabular form the funding that has been provided to the Family Support Agency for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42547/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The functions provided by the Family Support Agency transferred to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs upon its establishment in June 2011. Details of the funding provided to the Agency by my Department are set out in the following table.

Family Support Agency funding

Year	Amount
2011	€15.195m *
2012	€25.966m
2013	€23.599m

*The balance of the Agency funding of €16.042m was provided by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The Deputy might note that the Family Support Agency was dissolved on 31st December, 2013 and its services came under the remit of the new Child and Family Agency on 1st January, 2014.

Family Law Cases

137. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will introduce legislation to strengthen unmarried fathers' rights to obtain access to their children, for them to be consulted on the country of residence for their children, the rights they have if their children are taken out of the country without their consent by the mother; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42642/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The issue raised by the Deputy is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Adoption Legislation

138. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a response will issue to correspondence initially sent to his Department on 24 April 2014, further to a commitment given during a Topical Issue debate on 25 March 2014 regarding post-adoption services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42674/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): A response to the correspondence mentioned in the Deputy question has issued.

Under adoption legislation, when a child is registered on the Register of Intercountry Adoptions the child is deemed to be the fully legal child of the adoptive parent/couple, having the same legal status as any biological child of the couple born to them within their marriage. Accordingly, it is open to any adopted child to access Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services operated by the Tusla - the Child and Family Agency. The type of service provided is then dependent on the individual needs of the child and is resource dependent.

The Minister notes the comments made by his predecessor in relation to interaction with

Barnardos regarding post adoption service provision and training in that regard. As you are aware the Child and Family Agency has responsibility for service provision in this regard and the Minister has asked that your view on this matter be brought to the attention of the Agency.

Departmental Expenditure

139. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide the details of average cuts paid by his Department and those under his aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42703/14]

140. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under his aegis. [42716/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 140 together.

I presume the Deputies are enquiring about the use of agency staff to meet a short-term service need or where some flexibility in staffing a service is required. In that regard, I can confirm that my Department does not currently engage such services.

The information requested in respect of the agencies under my aegis is not normally held in my Department and I have asked my officials to arrange for the Child and Family Agency, The Adoption Authority of Ireland, The Ombudsman for Children's Office and the Children Detention Schools to supply this information directly to the Deputy.

Disability Support Services

141. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the reason the motorised transport scheme has still not been replaced; his plans for a replacement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42541/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Department is seeking a solution which would best meet the aim of supporting people with severe disabilities who require additional income to contribute towards the costs of their mobility needs, while remaining within the available budget and satisfying all legal and equality concerns.

Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of the Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance scheme, in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes on 26 February, 2013. In November 2013, the Government 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. The challenge is to provide these benefits to a wider cohort of people, while continuing to cater for the 4,700 people already in receipt of a monthly payment, within a limited budget.

Once policy proposals have been finalised and approved by Government, the time frame for the introduction of a new scheme will become clearer.

Mental Health Services Provision

142. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the action he has taken to address the welfare issues arising from the continuing practice of the Health Service Executive of admitting children to adult mental health facilities; the steps he has taken to ensure that all staff in such units have Garda vetting and that each unit has a child protection officer; if his Department has carried out any investigation or study into the welfare of such children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42575/14]

167. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health if all approved centres, under the meaning of the Mental Health Act 2001, including adult mental health units into which children have been admitted, are in compliance with section 17 of S.I. No. 551/2006 - Mental Health Act 2001 (Approved Centres) Regulations 2006; the action taken to ensure that all such centres are in compliance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42536/14]

173. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of every adult mental health facility or unit where children have been admitted in each year from 2011 to date in 2014 inclusive where Garda vetting of all staff who would have come into contact with said children has not taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42572/14]

174. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that the welfare of children is adequately protected in mental health care facilities where the staff of same do not have Garda vetting; the safeguards in place to secure the welfare of such children; if he has commissioned any reports into the welfare issues raised by this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42573/14]

175. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the continuing practice of admitting children to adult mental health units, if he will confirm that all such units or facilities where children have been admitted since 2011 have a designated child protection officer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42574/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142, 167 and 173 to 175, inclusive, together.

The principal functions of the Mental Health Commission are to promote, encourage and foster the establishment and maintenance of high standards in the delivery of mental health services and to take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of all persons, including children, in approved centres under the Mental Health Act 2001. The Commission also appoints the Inspector of Mental Health Services who, in accordance with the Act, is required to visit and inspect every approved centre annually and, as the Inspectorate thinks appropriate, to visit and inspect any other premises where mental health services are being provided.

Under the 2001 Act, the Commission has a number of powers in relation to approved centres. These include the attachment of any conditions it considers appropriate to the registration of such centres. Such conditions could include the requirement to introduce or to review specified policies, protocols and procedures relating to the care and welfare of residents. In addition, the Commission can prepare codes of practice for the guidance of persons working in the mental health services. As a consequence of the Commission carrying out its functions, I am satisfied that the rights of patients are regularly and appropriately reviewed in line with mental health legislation.

In regard to the temporary admissions of some children to adult units, this arises only where an appropriate placement is not available and the Mental Health Commission must be informed

outlining the circumstances of the admission. Services must outline what efforts have been made to admit the child to an age appropriate approved centre and what are the plans to place the child in an age appropriate approved centre in line with Section 33(3)(e) of the Mental Health Act 2001.

In regard to the specific service and welfare issues raised by the Deputy these are the statutory operational responsibility of the HSE and have been referred to the Executive for direct reply. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, I would ask him to please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

143. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine and expedite the application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42681/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

144. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a general practitioner card to all aged 65 and over. [42469/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

145. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a

general practitioner card to all aged 66 and over. [42470/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

146. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a general practitioner card to all aged 68 and over. [42471/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Administration

147. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card on the basis of the current criteria for the over 70s to all in the age group 65 to 69. [42472/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Administration

148. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card on the basis of the current criteria for the over 70s to all in the age group 66 to 69. [42473/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Administration

149. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card on the basis of the current criteria for the over 70s to all in the age group 68 to 69. [42474/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

150. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a general practitioner card to all aged ten and under. [42475/14]

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.

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If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

151. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card to all aged six and under. [42476/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

152. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card to all aged eight and under. [42477/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

153. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card to all aged ten and under. [42478/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

154. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card to all aged 12 and under. [42479/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

155. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card to all aged 14 and under. [42480/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

156. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card to all aged 16 and under. [42481/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

157. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing a medical card to all aged 18 and under. [42482/14]

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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Tobacco Control Measures

158. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has received any responses to its formal notification of the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2013 made to the World Trade Organisation under the technical barriers to trade agreement under the technical standards process; if so, if he will provide the names of the countries that responded and share the concerns of these WTO member states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42496/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Ireland has not received any written requests for consultations from World Trade Organisation (WTO) members following the notification of our proposals as set out in the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2014. The matter was the subject of discussion at the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade meeting on 18th June 2014 and at the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Council meeting on 29th October 2014. The reports of these discussions can be found at http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tbt_e/tbt_e.htm and at http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news14_e/trip_28oct14_e.htm. The matter is on the agenda for the Technical Barriers to Trade meeting scheduled for 6/7 November 2014.

Tobacco Control Measures

159. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of Irish persons aged over 15 years who were reported as smokers (details supplied); and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [42498/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The commissioning of this Ipsos MRBI omnipoll is the responsibility of the National Tobacco Control Office (NTCO), Health Service Executive. As such, I have requested the information from the NTCO, and I will get back to you as soon as I have received this information.

Hospital Waiting Lists

160. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive an appointment for eye surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42501/14]

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.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office which will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

161. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive an appointment for surgery; if the person is listed as urgent; the current waiting times for such surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42502/14]

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.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Transfers

162. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health to outline the progress being made regarding a transfer in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway to the Central Mental Hospital, Dublin from a hospital in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42505/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service issue this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days I would ask him to please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter.

Nursing Home Services

163. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health to detail the position regarding a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is in nursing home care for a period of ten years; if this person can be expelled from the particular nursing home on the grounds of having developed a dementia; if his Department will also consider the appropriateness of the fees and charges being applied to this patient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42527/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 provide that nursing home operators must agree a contract with each resident on admission. This contract must include the terms on which that resident shall reside in the home. It must include details of the services to be provided to the resident and the fees to be charged for such services. Residents should not be charged fees which are not set out in the contract.

In addition, the Health Information and Quality Authority has developed *National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People* which have been approved by the Minister for Health. Standard 7 requires that each resident has a written contract. The supporting criteria to the Standard indicate that the contract should include the terms and conditions relating to the period of occupancy, the period of notice to leave, and the circumstances in which the resident can be discharged or the contract terminated.

The HSE is not a party to such contracts, which are concluded between each resident and their nursing home.

National Dementia Strategy Publication

164. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health when he will publish the national strategy on dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42533/14]

165. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has considered the approach of the Scottish health authorities to the issue of dementia; if that approach will influence future fresh policy on dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42534/14]

166. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health if he will bring forward a charter of rights for persons with dementia and their carers here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42535/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 to 166, inclusive, together.

It is estimated that there are currently approximately 47,000 people with dementia in Ireland and that number is expected to increase threefold to approximately 132,000 by 2041. Accordingly, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to develop a 'National Alzheimer's and other Dementias' Strategy to increase awareness, ensure early diagnosis and intervention and, ensure development of enhanced community based services.

In developing the Strategy, a research review of national dementia plans from nine other countries, including Scotland, was undertaken, and their relevance to Ireland and to our evolving Dementia Strategy was considered and taken account of in framing a Strategy for Ireland. *Creating Excellence in Dementia Care: A Research Review for Ireland's National Dementia Strategy* was published on my Department's website in June 2012.

A public consultation process to further inform the development of the Strategy was conducted in 2012 and a report of this was published on my Department's website in February 2013. A Working Group, representative of key stakeholders from my Department, the HSE, the medical profession and the community and voluntary sector was convened to advise on the preparation of the Strategy. Preparation of the Strategy is now at an advanced stage and the Strategy will be published in the coming months.

The Strategy will have a very practical focus, will be action oriented and will focus on what can be done to make a difference to the lives of people with dementia. Implementation will commence immediately after publication, with the initial emphasis being on actions that can be progressed within existing resources. The Strategy does not envisage the introduction of a charter of rights for people with dementia or their carers, but as well as specific Actions, it will set out a number of Principles to inform the design and delivery of all services and supports for people with dementia.

Question No. 167 answered with Question No. 142.

Vaccination Programme

168. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to introduce a vaccination scheme for meningitis B; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42543/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health.

The NIAC has not made any recommendation in relation to the use of Meningitis B vaccine in the primary childhood immunisation programme in Ireland. However, NIAC has issued guidance in relation to the use of the Meningitis B vaccine in the control of clusters or outbreaks of Meningococcal B disease. Deliberation regarding the introduction of Meningococcal B into the primary immunisation schedule continues. New parameters as used by the UK Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) are being included.

Medical Card Applications

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42561/14]

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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a replacement medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare whose medical card was lost or stolen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42565/14]

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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointment Delays

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health notwithstanding previous correspondence in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is anxious to meet their consultant and is currently on a waiting list, if and when their request will be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42567/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the particular patient query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Prescription Charges

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the impact of prescription charges may be ameliorated in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42569/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): It was necessary to increase the prescription charge in 2014 due to the very difficult and challenging economic environment which requires the Government to achieve additional savings in health expenditure with €619 million of savings targeted in 2014. The increase in prescription charges will account for €43 million of this target. The Government is committed to achieving these savings while protecting front line services to the most vulnerable to the greatest extent possible.

I am pleased to announce that as part of the packet of health measures in Budget 2015 that the prescription charge is frozen at the level set in 2014.

Medical card holders are required to pay a prescription charge of €2.50 per item for medicines and other prescription items supplied to them by community pharmacists, subject to a cap of €25 per month for each person or family. Prescription charges do not apply to children in the care of the Health Service Executive or to methadone supplied to patients participating in the Methadone Treatment Scheme. There are no plans to amend the prescription charge.

Questions Nos. 173 to 175, inclusive, answered with Question No. 142.

Health Services Access

176. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied) in County Louth who requires associated equipment for a prosthesis; if he is aware that this constituent is not due for an appointment with his consultant for some months and if he will make alternative arrangements for this person to obtain the necessary equipment as soon as possible [42576/14]

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 (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Hospital Services

177. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health his views on the case of a person (details supplied) in County Louth who has been admitted to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital three times within the past year suffering from abdominal pain; and if he will examine and provide an update on this case. [42578/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): With regard to specific complaints in relation to experiences of individuals in our hospitals, there is a formal complaints policy, entitled "*Your Service Your Say*", details of which are on the HSE website, at <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/yourhealthservice/feedback/complaints/>. In accordance with this procedure, a complaint must be made in the first instance to the hospital in which the incident causing the complaint occurred.

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

HSE Director of Advocacy

Oak House

Millennium Park

Naas

Co Kildare

Tel 1890 424 555

Office of the Ombudsman

18, Lower Leeson Street

Dublin 2

Tel 1890 223 030

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Home Help Service Expenditure

178. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the necessary funding to Clarecare to increase its capacity to deliver additional home help hours as there are in excess of 220 persons currently on the waiting list for this vital support; if he will also address the historical funding issues in the mid-west region with regard to home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42585/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Reports

179. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the number of reports from external consultants commissioned by his Department in the years 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; the costs incurred by his Department to commission these reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42589/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy for the period January 2012 to March 2014 is set out below. The Department is collating relevant data from April 2014 to date and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Year	Number of Reports	Cost to Date €
2014	1	5,000
2013	12	519,951
2012	12	226,116

Health Services Access

180. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Laois will have hip replacement surgery as their mobility is very restricted and they are in severe pain. [42598/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the particular patient query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

National Lottery Funding Applications

181. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the application for lottery funding by Mayfield CDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42599/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has received an application for funding from the 2014 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number of applications currently being assessed by my Department. The organisation will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision has been made.

Hospital Appointment Delays

182. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim will receive a date for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42600/14]

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.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointment Delays

183. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an early appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [42603/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling of appointments is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. If a patient's GP considers that an earlier appointment is required, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Eligibility

184. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry does not qualify for an EU medical card considering that they previously qualified for an EU medical card; if legislation has been introduced in recent years which disqualifies the person from qualifying for an EU medical card; and if he considers the refusal to award this person an EU medical card is in contravention of Article 24 of Regulation (EC)

No 883/2004 of the European Parliament and the Council of 29 April 2004. [42605/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible regarding this individual's particular case. 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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

The legislation on EU medical cards has not changed in recent years. The HSE aims to ensure that every person who is entitled to a medical card is given the opportunity to avail of his or her entitlement and makes the relevant assessments in line with the EU Regulations.

Medical Card Reviews

185. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that a medical card is issued to a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath which has been subject to a review and this person has submitted all information required and, in any event, is entitled to retain their medical card as they are participating in a community employment scheme of which details have been furnished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42613/14]

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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Disability Services Funding

186. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the specific value for money reason a facility (details supplied) in County Westmeath had its funding cut from 1 July 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42628/14]

187. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the specific value for money reason a facility (details supplied) in County Roscommon had its funding cut from 1 July 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42629/14]

188. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the specific value for money reason a facility (details supplied) in County Galway had its funding cut from 1 July 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42630/14]

189. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the specific value for money

reason a facility (details supplied) in County Longford had its funding cut from 1 July 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42631/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 to 189, inclusive, together.

The Value For Money (VFM) Review identified fundamental issues that need to be addressed in the way in which HSE-funded disability services are managed and operated, and lays the groundwork for the introduction of a significant restructuring of the Disability Services Programme.

VFM efficiency targets of €5 million were identified this year in the National Service Plan. In order to arrive at a fair and equitable allocation of these efficiency targets, the Social Care Division of the HSE has been assessing the capability of the voluntary disability providers to implement the necessary measures.

In recognition of the time required to complete this work I understand that only 50% of the 2014 requirement, i.e. €2.5 million, is being assigned to disability providers this year.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with the HSE.

Nursing Home Services

190. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently on the waiting list for the fair deal scheme in County Waterford; the average waiting time currently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41204/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

191. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the reason the grant available for cancer patients to recoup monies paid for wigs varies so radically from county to county with the maximum grant, as per the Health Service Executive website, available being €635 per year and the HSE in Waterford only granting a maximum of €220 twice per year with a six month interim period between claims; his views on whether the grant available for such items should be standard throughout the country; if he will review the inconsistencies within the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41387/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A national group has been established in the HSE to review practices in the area of aids and appliances. As part of this work, the Group will develop a national policy on the provision of hairpieces, as well as prosthesis bras, for cancer patients. It is anticipated that the Group will complete its work by year end.

Medical Card Data

192. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the full list of non-medical benefits given to persons who hold a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42696/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): A range of health services are provided to persons with full eligibility. The non-health benefits afforded to holders of medical cards are not a matter for the Minister for Health.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Expenditure

193. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the total cost of nursing home provision in each year from 2011 to 2013; the amount of this which is funded by the State and the amount which is paid by residents based on 80% of their income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42697/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The budget for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme for 2011, 2012 and 2013 is as follows:

Year	€
2011	€1,011m
2012	€994m
2013	€974m

As the HSE is responsible for the administration of the Scheme, the issue of resident contribution has been passed to the Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my private office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Provision

194. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding supports (details supplied) for families availing of fertility treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42700/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment is not provided by the Irish public health system. Patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and approved by the HSE 'High Tech Liaison Officers'. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme.

Departmental Expenditure

195. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the details of average cuts paid by his Department and those under his aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies

is received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42709/14]

196. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under his aegis. [42723/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 196 together.

My Department does not use recruitment or employment agencies to recruit Departmental staff. All such Departmental recruitment is carried out by or in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service. With regard to the HSE, and to non-commercial semi-state agencies under the remit of the Department, this information is being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy on completion.

Military Aircraft Landings

197. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views that US military aircraft that operate as refuelling tankers were recently sighted at Shannon airport; if they are connected to the mid-air refuelling of any US military aircraft in Irish airspace; and if so if this indicates that some or all of these aircraft were involved in military operations while there were on Irish territory or in Irish airspace. [42643/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Arrangements under which permission is granted for US military aircraft to land at Irish airports are governed by strict conditions. These include stipulations that the aircraft must be unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives and must not engage in intelligence gathering, and that the flights in question must not form part of military exercises or operations. Requests to permit the landing of military aircraft, including aircraft that can operate as refuelling tankers, are considered by my Department on the basis of the conditions outlined above. Permission is not granted for the conduct of military operations in Irish airspace.

Departmental Expenditure

198. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide the details of average cuts paid by his Department and those under his aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies is received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42708/14]

199. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under his aegis. [42722/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 199 together.

For the years in question, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has not engaged the services of any recruitment and employment agencies in Ireland. However, we have engaged the services of such agencies abroad and the figures requested by the Deputies in respect of the Department's two Votes (Vote 27 and Vote 28) are set out as follows:

Vote 27	2011	2012	2013	2014 to date
Agency Fees	€24,571.80	€24,292.15	€14,103.96	€7,145.00

All expenditure under Vote 27 related to sourcing staff for vacancies. Upon hiring, the recruited staff are paid directly by those missions and no further payments are made to the agency.

Vote 28	2011	2012	2013	2014 to date
Agency Fees	€48,002.64	€56,173.34	€77,983.63	€55,115.38
Salary Paid to Employees at relevant missions	€268,357.39	€274,417.19	€277,500.18	€229,778.52

In the case of Vote 28, expenditure is in respect of 15 missions over the 4 year period. Given the number of jurisdictions in which our missions operate, agencies may be engaged to provide a range of services including assistance with recruitment, HR management, and facilitating our missions meeting their obligations under local labour law, including in respect of taxation, social insurance contributions etc. Agency staff have been hired to assist with the opening of our new Missions this year, with permanent recruitment scheduled to take place once the Mission is established.

In the case of two of our missions (Atlanta and Warsaw), the arrangements between the employee and the agency are covered by confidentiality agreements and the Mission does not have access to these arrangements. In these two cases, the total figure paid to the agency is included in the "Agency Fees" figure above.

Home Tuition Scheme Provision

200. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pregnant teenagers who availed of the home tuition scheme during each of the past five years; the number of these students who applied scheme having been asked to not attend their school by principals or teaching staff. [42484/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. I have asked my officials to compile the information and to forward it to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Home Tuition Scheme Provision

201. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students who availed of the home tuition scheme during each of the past five years. [42485/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the purpose of the Home Tuition Scheme administered by the Special Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills is to provide a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs awaiting a suitable educational placement and for early intervention for children with autism.

The Home Tuition Scheme administered by the Schools Division of the Department of

Education and Skills provides for children who do not have a school place, and are without the offer of a school place in a recognised school, and for whom a school place is being actively sought in a recognised school, or on whose behalf an appeal has been lodged and where a determination is awaited in respect of an expulsion or refusal to enrol taken under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998.

Home tuition is also provided under this scheme to students who are enrolled in a recognised school at post-primary level studying at junior or senior cycle and whose education may be disrupted due to pregnancy.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of children who availed of the home tuition schemes during each of the past five years is not readily available. However, my officials are currently compiling this information, which will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Minor Works Scheme Restoration

202. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will be providing a grant for minor works to national schools for 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42486/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Circular Letter 0062/2013, which was published as the minor works grant for the school year 2013/2014 issued last November, stated that the grant will only be paid in future years as funding permits. Under my Department’s Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme 2012-2016 the primary focus is on meeting demands for additional school places.

My Department’s capital allocation for 2015 was agreed as part of the budgetary process. Expenditure commitments arising on projects under construction and schemes / initiatives under delivery have a first call on this allocation. Funding is also required for new projects and schemes/initiatives that will be advanced during 2015. Accordingly no decisions can be taken regarding a minor works grant for 2015/2016 at this time.

I am aware that whenever my Department is in a position to issue a minor works grant to primary schools with permanent recognition it is welcomed as a valuable contribution towards the cost of maintaining school infrastructure.

Schools Site Acquisitions

203. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of sites or properties acquired by her Department or with assistance from her Department from the National Asset Management Agency; their locations and cost to the Exchequer. [42490/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that in light of the scale of demand for additional school places forecast to arise over the coming years, my Department has held meetings with a number of relevant state bodies, including the National Asset Management Agency, in order to discuss the need for suitable sites for educational purposes in the coming years.

With regard to the request for details of individual sites, I am not in a position to release the information requested by the Deputy due to commercial sensitivities and confidentiality considerations.

Schools Site Acquisitions

204. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of sites that remain to be transferred to her Department under the 2002 indemnity agreement with the religious orders; the locations of these sites; the dates on which the transfers will take place. [42495/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement the Department agreed in principle with CORI that a total of 64 properties would be accepted subject to good and marketable title and agreed valuations. This number has reduced to 61 as the Department has accepted and received a cash sum in lieu of three properties where good and marketable title could not be established. 44 Properties have been fully transferred and there are no outstanding issues.

A list of the remaining 17 properties which have not fully transferred and where arrangements are being finalised is attached. As it was likely that some properties would not meet the standard of good and marketable title required by the 2002 Agreement, the Government agreed last year that such properties could be accepted. Where the qualification is technical and does not materially affect the valuation of the property it is proposed to accept same. The acceptance of these properties is currently being considered and work is continuing to finalise the arrangements in relation to the other properties.

Properties which have not fully transferred under the Indemnity Agreement and where arrangements are being finalised

No.	Sites	-
1	The Vineyard Child Centre	Health Service Executive
2	St Patrick's Upton, Cork	Health Service Executive
3	Respite Centre, Garretstown, Cork	Health Service Executive
4	5 Avondale Drive, Bandon, Cork	Health Service Executive
5	Kildron, Roundhill, Old Chapel, Bandon, Cork	Health Service Executive
6	Benvon, 5 Bishopstown Road, Bishopstown, Cork	Health Service Executive
7	10 The Priory, Old Chapel, Cork	Health Service Executive
8	Former Old Schoolhouse, Garretstown, Co Cork	Health Service Executive
9	Mounthawke, Tralee, Co Kerry	Department of Education & Skills
10	Waterpark, Newtown Road, Waterford	Department of Education & Skills
11	Lands at Mullaghmonaghan, Co Monaghan	Department of Education & Skills
12	Cork Street, Dublin 8	Sophia Housing
13	Coisceim Cappoquin Waterford	Health Service Executive

No.	Sites	-
14	Emohruo, Cappoquin Waterford	Health Service Executive
15	Sacred Heart Centre Waterford	Health Service Executive
16	Lands & Buildings at Lota Glanmire	Health Service Executive
17	Moate National School, Aghanargit, Westmeath	Department of Education & Skills

Value for Money Reviews

205. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the value for money report on small primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42499/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I am reviewing the Value for Money Report for small schools along with my Government Colleagues. I intend to publish the Report as soon as those considerations have been finalised.

School Patronage

206. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the school patron register. [42500/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I have requested my Department to forward this information directly to the Deputy.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

207. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied that children admitted to approved centres, under the meaning of the Mental Health Act 2001, including adult mental health units into which children have been admitted, are having their rights under Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland upheld; the actions she has taken; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42503/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department provides a range of supports for pupils with special educational needs arising from mental health difficulties such as Emotional Behavioural Disorder (EBD) or Severe Emotional Behavioural Disorder (SEBD). Where children with mental health difficulties attending school have consequential care or learning support needs, additional Resource Teaching and/ or care support is provided to schools to support their needs in school.

For pupils who require more specialised supports, special school and special class placements are also available. Schools may seek advice from the National Educational Psychological Service, their Special Educational Needs Organiser, or from the National Behavioural Support Service, on how children with such needs can best be supported in schools.

Further support for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties is supplied by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which fall within the remit of

the Health Service Executive (HSE). CAMHS units works to promote mental health and well-being and to ameliorate mental health issues in children and young people. My Department makes provision for education to be provided in CAMHS facilities in order to support pupils who are admitted to such units. Education provision is also made, through the Education and Training Boards, for adult mental health units.

My Department also provides for compensatory education provision to be made through the Home Tuition scheme for pupils who have missed time from school due to illness. This may include, for example, pupils who miss time in school while attending CAMHS or other mental health facilities.

The Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency, TUSLA, can provide assistance to parents or guardians in relation to identification of educational placements for children who are out of school or without a school placement.

In addition, the National Council for Special Education Special Education Needs Organisers can provide information to parents or guardians in relation to the educational services which are available for children with special educational needs.

Public Private Partnerships Data

208. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will investigate matters relating to a school (details supplied) in County Kildare under public private partnership; if she will take the necessary action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42530/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department is aware of the situation referred to by the Deputy and is working with all relevant stakeholders to address the matter.

Suicide Prevention

209. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the training on suicide prevention available for teachers during training and as CPD; the number of teachers currently employed who have undergone suicide prevention training. [42540/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Teaching Council, the State's regulatory body for the Teaching Profession, sets out clear standards for entry to the profession including standards of practice that relate to the personal well-being and development of students. The teacher's role in the holistic development of all students is clearly threaded throughout the Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers. Initial teacher education providers aim to prepare teachers for all aspects of students' education, that is subject and curricular education as well as students' holistic development. Course curriculum in the colleges of education and the education department of universities include studies that underpin the student teachers' understanding of the broader emotional, environmental and temporal contexts that affect the students in their charge. Prospective teachers are made aware of their responsibilities in relation to children's well-being - physical, mental and emotional - and to their roles and responsibilities regarding the appropriate and timely referral of children to external support agencies. The Deputy may also be aware that guidelines for primary schools on promoting pupil well-being and mental health are currently being developed by my Department. It is expected that the guidelines will be available later this year or early in 2015.

These guidelines will complement ‘Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention’ which were published by my Department in 2013. These guidelines were developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive. They provide practical guidance to schools on how they can promote mental health and well-being in an integrated school-wide way and they also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk of suicidal behaviour.

The Guidelines build on the significant work already taking place in schools, including the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the whole-school guidance plan, and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continuum of support model. Information is also provided on how to access support from the Professional Development Service for Teachers, the HSE, Health Promotion Officers and other external agencies and support services. This support is available to all schools.

The new Framework for Junior Cycle also places a clear emphasis on overall student health and well-being. This Framework is underpinned by eight principles, one of which is “Well-being”. It also has eight key skills which are to be embedded in every new Junior Cycle subject and short course including the key skills of “Managing Myself” and “Staying Well”. In addition, the 24 ‘Statements of Learning’ that a student should experience during their Junior Cycle programme involve the student taking action to safeguard and promote their own well-being and that of others.

One of the innovative features of the Junior Cycle Framework is the introduction of short courses that schools can choose to implement. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a new short course in SPHE, which may be delivered for certification purposes and will involve an increase in the time allocation for SPHE at Junior Cycle up to 100 hours over the three year cycle. The new short course is now available to implement in post-primary schools, should they wish to do so, as part of their Junior Cycle programme. It includes strands such as “Minding Myself and Others” and “My Mental Health”, and deals with issues such as mental health and mental ill-health, dealing with tough times, loss and bereavement.

My Department is also working with the Department of Health to promote participation by primary and post-primary schools in the ‘Health Promoting Schools’ initiative, which is supported by the Department of Health. This European-wide programme aims to strengthen schools’ capacity to be a healthy setting for learning and working by focusing at whole-school level on all the conditions that affect health and well-being.

Consultancy Contracts Data

210. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of reports from external consultants commissioned by her Department in the years 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; the costs incurred by her Department to commission these reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42588/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Details in relation to consultants engaged by my department are compiled annually in respect of the previous year and in this regard I have set out details in respect of the years 2012 and 2013 inclusive. Details in respect of consultants engaged in 2014 will not be compiled until January 2015.

Total amounts paid by the Department of Education and Skills to Consultants in 2012

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Status of Report	Purpose	Total Cost
Analysys Mason	*	Commercial, financial and technical advice on the procurement of broadband services for schools	€52,040.42
Goodbody Economic Consultants	Published	Evaluation of the Initial Implementation of Síolta, the National Quality framework for Early Childhood Education	€16,747.68
Mazars	*	IT Security Audit of the EUSF IT Database	€5,063.91
Mazars	*	Audit of Labour Market Activation Fund (LMAF)	€9,839.14
Version 1	No Report	Provision of Oracle Financials training support along with training documentation in the implementation of Performance Budgeting	€2,070.00
Mokum Change Management Ltd	No Report	Provision of Oracle Financials training support along with training documentation in the implementation of Performance Budgeting	€17,302.88
Seamus O'Dwyer-Consulting and Training	No Report	Training and expert advice relating to the Public Service Pensions Bill and training and advice in relation to the Legal Framework and Family Law	€2,700.00
Sydney Blain	*	Review of an appeal against an inspection under section 13(9) of the Education Act	€718.75

Questions - Written Answers

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Status of Report	Purpose	Total Cost
Mokum Change Management Ltd	No Report	Provision of Oracle Financials functional & accounting advice in moving from a four vote operating unit to a single operating unit	€11,606.90
Sir Jim Rose	No Report	Provision of international expertise on Literacy & Numeracy to the Literacy & Numeracy Implementation Advisory Committee	€3,870.13
Gartner	No Report	Subscription for provision of ICT research, advice, guidance & related services	€36,788.67
Sion Quality Healthcare Solutions	*	Completion of a workplace assessment for staff member with a disability and resulting report	€370.00
Pat McLoughlin	No Report	Costs relating to recommendations to the Minister on the preferred proposal for designation of a single awarding authority together with recommendations considered necessary in relation to modification or development of the preferred proposal for implementation purposes which were paid in 2012	€83.66
The Centre for Cross Border Studies	*	2012 annual review paper on Northern Ireland Post Graduate courses	€1,845.00

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Status of Report	Purpose	Total Cost
Deloitte	*	Audits of the national agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland to serve as the basis for the submission of Declarations of Assurance from International Section to the European Commission	€16,568.10
-	-	2012 Total:	€177,615.24

* Internal reports - not for publication

Total amounts paid by the Department of Education and Skills to Consultants in 2013

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Status of Report	Purpose	Total Cost
Dr Tony Crooks	**	Review of an inspection report under Section 13(9) of the Education Act 1998.	€460.00
The Centre for Cross Border Studies	No Report	2013 annual review paper on Northern Ireland postgraduate courses	€1,845.00
Accenture	No Report	Consulting services in relation to the Management Framework Agreement between City of Dublin Education & Training Board and the Department of Education & Skills for the centralised Administration of Student Grants	€5,904.00
University of Birmingham on behalf of Dr Mike Linden	Date of publication to be decided	Review of Visiting Teachers for children with hearing & Visual Impairment (VTHVI) Service, Ireland	€10,947.00

Questions - Written Answers

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Status of Report	Purpose	Total Cost
University of Manchester on behalf of Dr Wendy McCracken		Review of Visiting Teachers for children with hearing & Visual Impairment (VTHVI) Service, Ireland	€0.00*
Mokum Change Management Ltd (IT consultancy)	No Report	Post Performance Budgeting Support - consultancy	€2,169.14
Gartner (IT consultancy)	No Report	IT Leaders Advisor Subscription 07/2013 to 06/2014 including credit in respect of 07-08/2013. Provision of ICT Research, advice, guidance and related services	€41,061.50
Padraig McNamara	**	External Review of historic funding and financial arrangements for Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) centres funded by the Department	€0.00*
Deloitte	No Report	To assist the Department in devising a new organisational design for Education & Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS	€0.00*
Deloitte	**	Provision of external expert assistance for the development of a Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) & implementation roadmap for an integrated payroll shared service for the ETB/SOLAS sector in accordance with the shared services commitments set out in the Government's Public Service Reform Plan	€0.00*

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Status of Report	Purpose	Total Cost
Educational Research Centre	**	Consultancy Services to provide input to ICT Census of Primary, Post Primary and special schools and analysis of census data	€0.00*
Public Authority Pensions Services Ltd	No Report	Pensions Advisory work relating to the establishment of a pension scheme for the staff of the NCTE	€2,152.50
Fitzpatrick's Associates/AECON	1st report Apr' 14 final report Jun/Jul' 14	Ex-Ante Evaluation of the ESF Operational Programme in preparation for the period 2014-2020	€0.00*
Mazars	**	External Audit of EGF Talk Talk Programme	€0.00*
Deloitte	**	Audits of the national agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland to serve as the basis for the submission of Declarations of Assurance from International Section to the European Commission	€14,475.34
Seamus O'Dwyer Consulting & Training	No Report	Provision of training & advice relating to the Public Service Pensions Bill	€200.00
Stratigos Ltd	No Report	Provision of customised Business Process Improvement training to include coaching (with provision of advice) of relevant staff	€4,428.00

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Status of Report	Purpose	Total Cost
Version 1	No Report	Shared Financial Services Project - provision of Oracle Financials support to set up purchasing module	€7,595.25
Deloitte		Audits of the national agencies for the Erasmus + Programme in Ireland to serve as the basis for the submission of Declarations of Assurance from International Section to the European Commission	€0.00*
-	-	2013 Total:	€91,237.73

* Consultancies where work was done in 2013 but where no payment had been made by year end

** Internal reports not for publication

Property Ownership

211. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the up to date position of a building (details supplied) in County Kildare regarding its replacement; the timescale of such works; if she accepts responsibility for ownership of this building; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42592/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm to the Deputy that this building is not in my ownership. As previously advised in a reply to the Deputy in March 2014, prior to the surrender of the lease which was in place and following discussions between officials of my Department and representatives of the owners of the property to which he refers, an agreement was reached which provides that the owners of the building will restore the property to the satisfaction and requirements of the relevant planning authority.

Information and Communications Technology

212. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the implementation of the recommendations contained in the ICT skills action plan and the measures to increase the uptake of ICT courses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42634/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Earlier this year, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation launched a revised Government/Industry ICT Skills Action Plan. The aim of this Plan is to meet the objective set out in the Action Plan for Jobs to make Ireland the most

attractive location in the world for ICT Skills availability.

The Plan takes a comprehensive approach including increases in high-level graduate output, enhancing awareness of ICT in the education system, maintaining a strong talent pool and promoting Ireland as a destination for ICT talent. Implementation of the plan is being overseen by a high-level steering group shared by the two departments and including representatives from industry and the education system, and delivery teams have been set up to progress areas of work set out under the plan. In terms of uptake on ICT courses, 3,041 learners graduated from relevant ICT courses at levels 8,9 and 10 in 2013, an increase of over 50% from 2008 levels.

To complement this mainstream provision, in 2014/15 an additional 1,250 part-time Spring-board places on ICT programmes, 905 full-time ICT conversion places and over 660 incentivised additional places in full-time ICT programmes are being provided.

An additional 1,390 learners graduated from level 6 and 7 programmes in ICT higher education institutions, an increase of nearly 25% on 2008 levels.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

213. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will confirm where a child currently in primary school who has been assessed with a diagnosis of severe ADHD and is in receipt of an special needs assistant is progressing to secondary level, if a reassessment of the SNA requirements is necessary or will the provision of an SNA be automatic upon entry to second level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41479/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school. Where children have significant care needs whereby they may need additional support to be able to attend school, the NCSE may make an allocation of SNA support to the school to assist that child. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department’s Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department’s website at www.education.ie. I wish to explain that there is no automatic system of transfer of resources from one school to another. In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils’ needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionally is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. The deployment of SNAs within schools is then a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised. Schools that wish to apply for SNA support for pupils who are newly enrolling to a school should make such an application to the NCSE. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child’s special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Third Level Fees

214. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be liable for full international fees for each of their years in third level education; her views that this anomaly should be amended; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42659/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware the Exchequer funds tuition fees costs in respect of eligible students who are pursuing full-time undergraduate courses of study under my Department’s Free Fees Initiative. The main conditions of the scheme are that students must be first-time undergraduates, hold inter alia EU/EEA/Swiss nationality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course. Where students do not qualify for free fees they must pay the appropriate fee as determined by their third level institution. The institutions are autonomous and the level of fee payable by students who do not meet the requirements of the Free Fees Initiative is entirely a matter for the relevant institution.

Value for Money Reviews

215. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will confirm the existence of a report conducted on small rural schools recommending various options for a reduction in the number of one and two-teacher schools in rural areas; if she will publish the full findings of this report; the persons who conducted this report and when it was completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42669/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): A report of a value for money review of small primary schools was submitted to my predecessor in April 2013. This review was part of the normal review processes undertaken by all Departments on an annual basis on selected areas of expenditure. It was conducted by a Steering Committee, comprising civil servants from relevant Government Departments and was led by an independent external chairperson. I am considering the findings and recommendations of the report along with my Government colleagues. I intend to publish it as soon as those considerations have been finalised.

Third Level Staff Remuneration

216. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff in the third level sector currently earning more than €200,000; the number earning more than €175,000; the number earning more than €150,000; and the number earning more than €100,000. [42672/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Data are currently provided by institutions in the third-level sector for the following pay ranges: €100-125k, €125-150k, €150-200k and over €200k. In this regard, the following are the most recent data supplied:

- 67 staff earn in excess of €200k;
- 83 staff earn between €150-200k;
- 943 staff earn between €100-150k.

129 of those who earn more than €150k are Academic Medical Consultants whose remuneration falls in the main within the remit of the Minister for Health.

School Management

217. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the sole interim manager has been re-appointed to a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath; if so for what period; when a new board of management will be constituted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42692/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, it is the duty of the Patron to appoint, where practicable, a Board of Management. The Education Act 1998 also provides that the Patron may appoint a person or persons to manage the school in circumstances where the appointment of a Board is not practicable or where the Patron has dissolved the Board and pending the appointment of a new Board of Management. In the case of the school in question, the Patron has, in accordance with the provisions of section 14 (8) of the Education Act 1998 appointed a Single Manager to manage the school.

Student Grant Scheme Payments

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full amount of higher education grant awarded in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42693/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications. This service complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter. Enquiries, such as that raised by the Deputy, may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

Departmental Expenditure

219. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the details of average cuts paid by her Department and those under her aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42706/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy could not be compiled in the time available, but will be forwarded to the Deputy once available.

Departmental Expenditure

220. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by her Department and those under her aegis. [42719/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy could not be compiled in the time available, but will be forwarded to the Deputy once available.

Water Services Provision

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if consideration may be provided to a simplified water charge system which could be affordable, would reflect the consumer’s ability to pay, be less costly administratively and at the same time cost-effectively address the urgent need for investment in a vital part of infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42608/14]

229. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will consider developing a more effective local authority water service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42623/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 229 together.

The Government has embarked on a programme of ambitious reform of the water sector, as the traditional water services system was in need of fundamental change. Our public water infrastructure is deficient and inadequate as a consequence of decades of under-investment and the lack of a truly national approach that could maximise the impact of investment.

An Independent Assessment published in 2012 reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of the delivery of water services through 34 local authorities, and concluded that there was a fragmentation of leadership and co-ordination, difficulty in attaining economies of scale, difficulty in delivering projects of national importance and an aging and poor quality network. The report concluded that the best way of ensuring increasing efficiency and effectiveness of operations and capital investment and accessing new finances for the water sector, was to establish Irish Water as a public utility.

This was implemented through the Water Services Act 2013, which provided for the establishment of Irish Water, and the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 which provided for the transfer of responsibility for water services provision from the local authorities to Irish Water. The transfer of responsibility took effect on 1 January 2014.

The Independent Assessment also pointed to the particular strengths of the local authority system in relation to locally based teams, and this positive aspect is preserved through the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) put in place between Irish Water and local authorities which garner the knowledge and expertise of local authority staff combined with the network and utility management experience available to Irish Water, to provide for a more consistent and efficient service for customers.

Since its establishment, Irish Water has implemented key systems to provide for a more strategic approach to managing water services assets and underpinning priority investment. Capital investment in core infrastructure over the period ahead will be substantially more than in 2013 and operational savings of some €12 million have already been achieved in 2014 through a national approach to procurement.

Irish Water, like other utilities, will have the capacity to fund investment without adding to the Government Debt. It would not be possible to fund the same level of investment if the responsibility for water services had remained with local authorities. The independent regula-

tion of the sector, by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), will ensure that operational efficiency is achieved across the sector, in Irish Water's central services and in the Service Level Agreements. This will take account of international benchmarks and will be focused on ensuring that customers are only charged for an efficient service. The Water Services (No. 2) Act provided the CER with statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers.

The approach to charging was outlined by Irish Water in a water charges plan which it submitted to the CER in line with the provisions of the Act. The CER has now issued a determination on the water charges plan. Full details and associated documentation are available on the CER website at: www.cer.ie/document-detail/CER-Water-Charges-Plan-Consultation/979.

In making its determination on the water charges plan, the CER had to take account of the decisions made by the Government on the funding model for Irish Water and a direction made under Section 42 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act in July 2014. This policy direction addressed a number of matters relating to domestic water charges including the provision of a free allowance of 30,000 litres of water supplied and waste water treated per annum for a primary residence on a public supply and a free allowance to cover the normal usage of water services by every child in their primary residence based on the same qualifying conditions as the child benefit allowance while customers with specific medical conditions which require increased water consumption will have their charges capped.

Consideration is currently being given to measures to bring the necessary certainty and clarity to the charging structure to ensure water charges are modest and affordable.

Architectural Qualifications

222. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his proposals to facilitate the registration of grandfather architects in the new buildings regulations and architects registrations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42489/14]

232. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will facilitate the registration of persons with long experience as architects under a grandfather provision even if their qualifications do not fulfil the full requirements for newly qualified architects, in view of their proven track record and experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42638/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 and 232 together.

Part 3 of the Building Control Act 2007 sets out the statutory arrangements for the registration of architects. A variety of routes to registration are provided for in the Act, including specific provision (under section 22) for the registration of persons who had been performing duties commensurate with those of an architect for a period of 10 or more years in the State prior to the commencement of the Act. A review of the arrangements in place for the registration of architects was undertaken last year by Mr Garret Fennell, Solicitor, who is currently serving as the Chairperson of the Admissions Board relevant to the register of Architects. Mr Fennell's report on the matter, which was published last year, identified a number of recommendations which would improve the registration process for applicants. My Department, in conjunction with the RIAI as registration body, has liaised with interested parties such as the Architects Alliance of Ireland in relation to the implementation of these recommendations. A number of helpful revisions to the registration arrangements, including the technical assessment process,

have already been made. My Department will continue to work with all concerned in relation to the on-going development of registration arrangements in line with the recommendations made by Mr Fennell or in any other reasonable and appropriate way.

Local Authority Charges Application

223. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review downwards the fees and contributions charged by local authorities for planning permissions and change of use application for businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42494/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, prescribe the current planning application fees. Any proposed changes to the fees, which were last increased in 1998, would require the endorsement of the Oireachtas pursuant to section 262 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. While planning application fees are kept under regular review in my Department, I have no plans to reduce the fees at this time. With regard to development contributions, my role as Minister is to provide the necessary statutory and policy framework within which individual development contribution schemes are adopted by each local authority. The adoption of these schemes is a reserved function of the locally elected members of each planning authority. It is a matter for the members to determine the level of contribution and the types of development to which they will apply.

In January 2013, my Department issued updated guidance for local authorities on the issue of development contributions which recommended, inter alia, that development contribution schemes should endeavour to facilitate job creation through targeted support for specific development types. As part of the new guidance, planning authorities were asked to consider whether there were any measures open to them to support new or existing enterprises in their areas by, for example, reduced development contribution rates, deferred payment arrangements, etc.

In response to the request to review their schemes, all four Dublin Councils have since reduced their general development contribution rates by an average of 26% with other local authorities also lowering their rates.

One of the actions in the Government's Construction 2020 – A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector, which was published in May 2014 and is aimed at facilitating increased activity in the construction sector, is that developers be enabled to avail of reduced development contributions for existing planning permissions that have yet to be activated. Provision for this measure will be incorporated in the forthcoming Planning and Development Bill, the general scheme of which I propose to publish shortly. Under the proposed provisions, developers with planning permissions granted under previous development contribution schemes will be enabled to avail of the reduced development contribution charges being applied under the new development contribution schemes where their permissions have not yet been activated. This measure is intended to assist in making developments more economically viable and bringing them on-stream earlier than might otherwise be the case. It is intended that this Bill will be enacted in early 2015.

Irish Water Administration

224. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of revenue that Irish Water will collect next year net of all allowances.

[42523/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Domestic water charges commenced with effect from 1 October 2014 and Irish Water will issue the first bills to domestic customers from January 2015. The approach to charging was outlined by Irish Water in a Water Charges Plan (WCP) submitted to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) in line with the provisions of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013. The CER announced its decision on water charges on 30 September. The amount billed to domestic customers for the year 2015 based on the charging structure announced by the CER will be in the order of €300 million per annum and the amount billed to non-domestic customers will be some €230 million.

Irish Water Administration

225. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Irish Water has refused requests from local authorities to attend their meetings to brief county councillors on the processes and procedures being adopted by the company in their pursuit of the collection of charges for domestic water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42529/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. At the request of my Department, Irish Water put in place specific arrangements to address the queries which public representatives may have in relation to matters pertaining to the operation of water services under the new utility. Irish Water has acknowledged that the level of service it has provided to public representatives needs to be improved and has apologised for any shortcomings that have arisen to date in terms of the timelines and quality of responses. Irish Water is currently reviewing its communications procedures with regard to engagement with local representatives and will advise on additional measures shortly.

Irish Water has informed my Department that so far it has received just over 5,000 queries from public representatives:

- 2,400 from Oireachtas Members – 1,700 via oireachtasmembers@water.ie and 700 by phone.

- A further 2,600 queries have been received from Local Councillors by email and phone.

Irish Water has informed my Department that it has just completed nine regional briefings for councillors at eight different locations around Ireland. All of the councillors were notified of the briefing which was closest to their local authority. In addition, an invitation was extended to all councillors for the briefing in Carrick-on-Shannon on 29 October 2014.

Housing Issues

226. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 548 of 30 September 2014, the number of times the Dublin housing supply task force has met since its establishment; and if he will report on the work completed by the task force to date in progressing the Construction 2020 Strategy. [42594/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly)

ly): Action 2 of the Government's Construction 2020 Strategy commits to the establishment of a Housing Supply Coordination Taskforce for Dublin with an immediate focus on addressing supply-related issues. The Task Force has been tasked to work closely with industry and other parties, including those responsible for key infrastructure such as schools, to identify and address any obstacles to viable and appropriate development. The Task Force has met on six occasions since its establishment.

In line with its remit, the immediate focus of the Task Force has been to monitor trends in the supply of viable and market-ready approved developments and in its first report of the 30 June 2014, the Task Force reported the following:

(1) Across the four Dublin authorities, planning permission is in place for the immediate development of 12,785 houses and 7,925 apartments, which permissions are unconstrained from any short term infrastructure issues and which level of development would broadly equate to at least 3 years' supply of new homes if they were being built at a rate of 7,500 homes per annum, for Dublin.

(2) A further 25,507 new homes are deemed permissible in the immediate to short term on lands zoned and available for development but currently without the benefit of a planning permission.

(3) Together, the extent of permitted development and lands available for development are sufficient to meet Dublin's needs for at least the next 6 years, which suggests that wider economic conditions and structural and financial issues within the housing and development sector are more significant constraints on an uplift in activity than the availability of lands or planning permission.

The Task Force is preparing for a further end of year report monitoring trends in the levels of planning applications and decisions and also intends to publish information for the general public, including potential house purchasers and investors, about the location of the key residential development sites around Dublin and existing planning permissions and active developments. The Task Force will also advance a preliminary analysis of infrastructural delivery factors in preparing further zoned lands for housing delivery beyond the next six years.

Water Quality

227. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he or his Department has been provided with any reports or databases from Irish Water or formerly from the local authorities, including Dublin City Council and Fingal County Council on the extent and location of lead pipes in the water network. [42595/14]

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. I have no responsibility for, or role in relation to, the management, operation or maintenance of water services infrastructure. My Department has not been provided with any reports or databases from Irish Water or the local authorities referred to above on the extent and location of lead pipes in the water network. However, Irish Water has informed my Department that of its estimated 58,000 kilometres of distribution system, there is a very small proportion of lead piping, consisting of approximately 190 short lengths across 14 local authorities. Irish Water is working to achieve the replacement of these pipes as quickly as possible.

There are a significant number of lead public service pipes between the water mains and the

customer stopcock or water meter. Irish Water is identifying the location of such lead service connections during the meter installation programme. The numbers currently being identified represent about 5% of houses, but this is expected to be higher in town centre areas. Irish Water also estimates that there may be a further 30,000 to 40,000 houses with shared backyard lead service connections. Irish Water has informed my Department that it intends to invest in public lead pipe replacement schemes, primarily communications pipes, with a view to eliminating lead mains, including shared backyard service connections over the next ten years. Irish Water is also reviewing its water treatment processes to ensure that they can mitigate the risk in the short term.

Motor Tax Rates

228. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount he expects to raise from road tax on vintage vehicles in 2014; his views on reducing or abolishing the tax on vintage vehicles to be used only in community or charity fund raising events. [42596/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I expect that receipts from motor tax on vintage vehicles for 2014 will be of the order of €2.1m, though final figures will not be available until after the year end. I have no plans to reduce or abolish the current favourable motor tax rates applied to vintage vehicles. Concessionary rates of motor tax for vintage vehicles have been in place since 1991. The low rate of tax reflects the fact that vintage vehicles may be in limited use on the roads. The rates were initially set at £10 (€13) for motorcycles and £25 (€32) per annum for all other vintage vehicles. The current rates are €26 per annum for motor cycles and €56 for all other vehicles.

Question No. 229 answered with Question No. 221.

National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan

230. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will request all local authorities to comply with the Disability Act 2005 regarding making buildings an environment that is friendly for persons with a mobility impairment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42624/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Local authorities work on an ongoing basis toward making public spaces, public buildings and services owned and operated by them accessible. In accordance with my Department's commitments under the National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan, under the Disability Act 2005, local authorities must include accessibility as an objective throughout all new Local Authority corporate plans and development plans. Local Authority Implementation Plans must also commit to bring public areas of local authority buildings up to Buildings Regulations Part M (2000) standard by 2015 and up to Part M (2010) standard by 2022, or as soon as resources allow.

Road Signage

231. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the options available to residents of locations (details supplied) in County

Kerry, whose placenames no longer appear on signage bilingually as a result of the Official Placenames Act; if consideration will be given to changing this through local consensus; if so, what the process would be and the way local persons engage in this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42635/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 provides for the substitution of a new Part 18 of the Local Government Act 2001, revising and updating the procedures for the changing of placenames.

Under the new arrangements, a proposal to change a placename will, in the first instance, be a function of the relevant local authority. Any proposal adopted must specify the proposed new name in the Irish language only, or in both the Irish language and the English language, and must be approved by at least half of the members of the local authority or municipal district. Following consultation with certain prescribed persons and the public, local authority or municipal district members may by resolution (passed by not less than half the members) decide to hold or not to hold a ballot of the qualified electors in the place to which the proposed new placename applies. If a ballot takes place and the proposal is approved by a majority of the qualified electors, the Cathaoirleach of the local authority or the municipal district makes a declaration that the new placename shall apply from a specified date.

Where it is proposed to change the name of a place in a Gaeltacht area and that proposal is carried by a majority of the votes cast, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht must make an order declaring that the proposed new placename will become the placename in respect of the place concerned and any pre-existing provision of a placenames order made under section 32 of the Official Languages Act 2003 will stand revoked.

Certain elements of section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 relating specifically to Daingean Uí Chúis in County Kerry have been commenced. The remaining provisions, dealing with placename changes generally and the process described above, will be commenced as soon as the necessary regulations setting out procedures for the holding of a ballot and other related matters have been finalised.

I have no function in relation to road signage which comes within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Question No. 232 answered with Question No. 222.

Local and Community Development Programme Project Funding

233. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide funding through the SICAP or through any other programme under his Department to facilitate the continued operation of the development companies on the non-Gaeltacht islands of Bere, Sherkin, Clare, Inishturk and Inishbofin, which between them were allocated in excess of €460,000 this year through Comhar na nOileán; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42639/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The current Programme officially ended at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281m over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis for 2014 with a budget of €47m pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April 2015.

The SICAP is one of my key priorities. The Programme's target groups are:

- Children and Families from Disadvantaged Areas
- Lone Parents
- New Communities (including Refugees/Asylum Seekers)
- People living in Disadvantaged Communities
- People with Disabilities
- Roma
- The Unemployed (including those not on the Live Register)
- Travellers
- Young Unemployed People from Disadvantaged areas.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, the Programme is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. Stage one (Expression of Interest) has been completed. Stage two (Invitation to Tender), got underway on 20 October and involves the successful applicants from Stage one being invited to apply to one or more Local Community Development Committees, in Local Authority areas, to deliver the programme. Contracts for SICAP will be determined following the outcome of the procurement process.

The procurement process for SICAP is open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme.

In Stage one, joint applications were encouraged and organisations of varying sizes (for example smaller organisations working in consortia with larger organisations) were invited to submit joint applications.

The LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme will be available to Island communities in the 2014-2020 period in order to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas. I have identified 28 sub-regional areas for the purpose of the design of LEADER Local Development Strategies (LDS) and while it is not proposed to have a separate LDS for the Islands, any LDS which has an island community as part of its territory will be required to outline specifically the challenges faced by these communities and how it is proposed to address these challenges in the context of the delivery of LEADER. The process of both LDS and Local Action Group selection will begin in the coming weeks and I encourage the Islands communities outlined in the Question to engage with the process to ensure that their concerns are fully considered in the LDS for their areas.

Local Government Reform

234. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government due to local government changes throughout the country, his proposals for towns that have to make up substantial differences between their historical commercial rate and the county rate. [42650/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kel-

ly): One of the key elements of Putting People First, the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, was a refocusing and re-invigoration of local authorities in support of enterprise, business and job creation. The Action Programme indicated that, in the context of the reorganisation of local governance structures, the proposed new municipal districts would provide an opportunity to achieve a more coherent approach to rates and charges on a county-wide basis having regard to funding requirements and the need to support employment and business competitiveness. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for rates harmonisation to cater for differences between Annual Rates on Valuation (ARVs) of towns and counties. The approach taken to rates harmonisation was to seek to ensure, on the one hand, that harmonisation does not lead to a significant net loss of revenue in individual counties with consequential implications for services and, on the other hand, that increases in rates do not impact negatively on businesses and employment.

My Department consulted with local authorities and devised a 'Base Year Adjustment' (BYA) mechanism to phase in increases and decreases in the ARV over a maximum of 10 years. From 2015 onwards, ratepayers will receive a rates bill clearly indicating the new harmonised ARV for the area but the annual amount payable by the individual ratepayer will be modified by applying a credit or debit to that bill i.e. the BYA.

In 2015, this adjustment will effectively neutralise any increase or decrease for ratepayers that would otherwise take effect as a result of the difference in the new ARV for 2015 and that which applied in their rating authority in 2014. In other words, ratepayers will not pay any more (or less) in 2015 than they did in 2014, except in circumstances where there has been a change in the valuation of their premises or other circumstances affecting their liability. The BYA for 2015 will therefore be equal to the difference between the old ARV for that ratepayer and the new ARV. This credit or debit base year adjustment will reduce annually as harmonisation is achieved over a period of years.

The decision on the new ARV and the amount of adjustment to be applied each year, and consequently the number of years it will take to harmonise the ARV for the county, will be a decision for the elected members.

Local Authority Staff

235. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the amount of requests from Kildare County Council for more staff; and the areas they were for. [42651/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The moratorium on recruitment and promotion in the public service was introduced in March 2009 in response to the financial crisis. My Department operates a delegated sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for implementation of the moratorium in relation to local authorities, and any exceptions to the moratorium in local authorities require sanction from my Department. Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements, including staffing assignments, necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, it is a matter for Chief Executives, in the first instance, to ensure that the moratorium is implemented while appropriate service levels are maintained.

My Department examines all staffing sanction requests on a case by case basis having due regard to the continued delivery of key services in the context of staffing and budgetary constraints. In considering sanction requests public safety, maintaining key front line services, and

economic issues are given precedence.

The number of posts requested by Kildare County Council in 2014 to date is 60. These requested posts include posts to be filled internally by promotion or acting arrangements, and are spread across a wide range of Council activities, including planning, engineering, management/administration and fire services.

Water Pollution

236. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that chromium 6 is possibly being discharged into the River Barrow in the Athy area. [42652/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): No issues regarding Chromium VI discharges to the River Barrow have been brought to my attention.

Chromium VI and Chromium III are listed as specific substances in the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009. These Regulations contain Environmental Quality Standards (EQS) for substances discharged to waters. In accordance with these Regulations, monitoring of Irish surface waters is undertaken by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and by local authorities. Heavy metals, including total chromium in all its forms, are monitored in rivers on a monthly basis including at a number of sites on the River Barrow.

I am informed by the EPA that the mean total chromium concentration for the Barrow (2010-2014) is ca. 2.5 µg/l which is around half of the EQS for chromium as set out in the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009. This concentration is well below the threshold at which further analysis for the various forms of chromium is required.

Household Charge Exemptions

237. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the Catholic Church is exempt from paying household tax as it is a registered charity, which results in an estimated loss to the State of in the region of €1.5 million per year; if the Catholic Church's status as a charity would further exempt it from paying water charges; if so, the estimated loss to the State this would represent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42653/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011 provided the legislative basis for the Household Charge. Under the Act, an owner of a residential property on the liability date is liable to pay the Household Charge, unless otherwise exempted or entitled to claim a waiver. Section 4(1)(b) provides that bodies corporate that are accorded charitable status under tax law (section 848A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997) will not be required to pay the charge for residential properties that they own. The Household Charge was operational in respect of 2012 only, with arrears and penalties in respect of a 2012 liability being collected by local authorities assisted by the Local Government Management Agency on a shared services/agency basis up to and including 30 June 2013; at this point outstanding Household Charge liabilities became Local Property Tax liabilities and responsibility for collection transferred to the Revenue Com-

missioners. Household Charge operational matters are a matter for the relevant local authority or for the Agency, including the issuing of certificates of waiver or exemption and all associated queries.

As there is no requirement to register a property that is exempt from the Household Charge on the basis of being non-residential or having charitable status ownership or otherwise, it is not possible to state with any certainty the number of applicable exemptions and, accordingly, an accurate estimate of the associated revenue forfeited is not available.

The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 requires Irish Water to charge its customers in respect of the services provided. The Act defines the customer as the occupier of the premises in respect of which the water services are provided. There are no exemptions from water charges on the basis of charitable status.

Irish Water Administration

238. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Irish Water has been rated by credit rating institutions to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42665/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Irish Water is a non-consolidated subsidiary of Ervia and does not, at this point in time, have a separate credit rating. Ervia has an investment grade credit rating from each of Standard & Poor's and Moody's. Each of these ratings reflects the current relationship between Ervia and Irish Water. It is Ervia's intention to seek a stand alone credit rating for Irish Water at an appropriate time in the future.

Irish Water Establishment

239. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm the existence of any or all recommendations internally or externally held in the Department prior to the establishment of Irish Water that stated the transfer of staff and the terms of employment of its staff and services should be at the discretion of the newly established company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42670/14]

240. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm when he or his Department officials became aware of the pay progression mechanism agreed between Ervia and trade unions last year for Irish Water; the date upon which this agreement was secured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42671/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 and 240 together.

Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels.

A fundamental underpinning of the water reform programme is to ensure that the skills and experience built up over many years in local authorities are put to best use for the long-term benefit of the customer and that there is no negative impact on service to customers during the transition. The Water Services (No.2) Act 2013 transferred statutory responsibility for water services to Irish Water and provided for local authorities to act as agents for Irish Water, with

this relationship being expressed through Service Level Agreements (SLA). The SLA approach 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, www.environ.ie.

Irish Water is currently recruiting to build up the internal capabilities required within the organisation and the number of staff employed is an operational matter for Irish Water. 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 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.

The employment terms and conditions for Irish Water staff are a matter for the company and I understand that the pay model is something which was inherited from the parent company Ervia and therefore was not directly put in place by Irish Water. Like other commercial semi-state bodies, pay models are negotiated between management and unions and are then subject to a ballot as necessary, as occurred in Ervia's case. The issue of pay progression is not a matter that would have been raised with my Department as it does not arise at present, given that a pay freeze is in place until 2016. Pay progression thereafter is not automatic and will be dependent on, inter alia, affordability.

The Government will shortly consider proposals to establish a unified board arrangement for Ervia and Irish Water. One of the first actions that I will be asking the new Board to take will be to review the application and operation of the pay model outlined above in Irish Water, particularly in its start-up phase.

Irish Water Expenditure

241. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding expended by Irish Water to date and a breakdown of this; the amount of funding committed into the future by contract and a breakdown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42684/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As part of the conditions attaching to the funding being provided to Irish Water from the Local Government Fund in 2014 my Department receives overall cost reports on operational and capital expenditure. The most recent Operating and Capital Expenditure Report shows that some €502m was incurred by Irish Water in operational expenditure and some €373m was incurred on capital expenditure from January 2014 to end August 2014. The projections of expenditure from September to the end of December 2014 are €315m for operational expenditure and €235m for capital expenditure. Costs incurred by Irish Water are examined by the Commission for Energy Regulation as an integral element of the independent economic regulation of Irish Water.

Irish Water Administration

242. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government the cost of extending the free water allowance for children to dependent 18 and 19 year olds living with their parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42699/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The CER issued a determination on the water charges plan submitted to it by Irish Water. Full details are available on the CER website at www.cer.ie/document-detail/CER-Water-Charges-Plan-Consultation/979.

In making its determination on the water charges plan, the CER had to take account of the decisions made by the Government on the funding model for Irish Water and a direction made under Section 42 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act in July 2014. This policy direction addressed a number of matters relating to domestic water charges including the provision of a free allowance to cover the normal usage of water services by every child in their primary residence based on the same qualifying conditions as for child benefit.

Consideration is currently being given to measures to bring the necessary certainty and clarity to the charging structure to ensure that water charges are modest and affordable.

Departmental Expenditure

243. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under his aegis. [42720/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has not engaged recruitment or employment agencies in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. The information requested is not collected in respect of Agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Consultancy Contracts Data

244. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of reports from external consultants commissioned by his Department in the years 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; the costs incurred by his Department to commission these reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42591/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): My Department administers a very diverse, complex and extremely technical brief. It has a total complement of around 250 full time equivalent staff of whom a limited number are technical personnel. This reality necessarily requires my Department to procure specialist external professionals to assist in discharging its functions. In procuring these specialised services, my Department always seeks to ensure value for money and that these professional services contribute to project delivery and informed, robust and evidence based policy making. In total there have been 25 external reports commissioned by my Department, eight in 2012, ten in 2013 and seven to date in 2014. The bulk of the studies are technical and specialist in nature and were necessary to address specific issues as they arose and enable the Department to discharge its policy and project responsibilities in the areas concerned. The total cost of these reports is €867,999.

Broadband Service Provision

245. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 570 of 7 October 2014, the position regarding the provision and enabling of a fibre cable in an area (details supplied) in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42606/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan the Government aims to ensure that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses in Ireland, through a combination of commercial investment and a State-led intervention. Since the publication of the Plan, the commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5bn in network upgrades and at least 1.6m of the 2.3m addresses in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next number of years.

Under EU State Aid Guidelines Member States cannot intervene where commercial investors have plans to roll out services. A comprehensive mapping exercise is underway in my Department, to identify those areas that require a State intervention. An initial examination has already identified a significant number of areas throughout the country that will require State intervention. It includes 46 areas in Co Roscommon including Taghmconnell.

As part of the mapping process, a stakeholder consultation was launched in June. 32 submissions have been received and non-commercially sensitive versions of these responses were published by my Department last month.

I expect to publish the map shortly. Those accessing this map will be able to identify their own house or premises and see whether it is in the proposed intervention footprint. Where a house or premises is not in the proposed intervention area it means it either currently, or will in the near future, have access to commercial high speed broadband services. The map will be subject to change as new information becomes available or commercial investments are announced in the future.

A further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy will be launched in mid-2015. My Department is also working closely with the European Commission with a view to obtaining State Aid clearance for the programme.

A detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a potential preferred bidder or bidders towards the end of 2015.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland. Our goal is to ensure that quality broadband services are available to all citizens regardless of where they are located.

Fisheries Protection

246. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the powers Inland Fisheries Ireland have to enter private farm lands to access rivers and streams; if there are listed rivers and streams to which those powers apply and the legislation from which this power derives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42615/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am advised that section 296(1) of the Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 1959, as amended by Section 11 and Schedule 4 of the Fisheries Act 1980, provides powers to authorised officers of Inland Fisheries Ireland to enter onto any land for the purpose of protection of fisheries. This provision applies universally to fisheries for the purpose of

protection and therefore is not limited to a prescribed list of fisheries or rivers. I am also advised that Section 296(2) of the Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 1959, prohibits the entry to any enclosed garden or any dwelling house or the curtilage thereof without a warrant, except where the ordinary road or passage to any weir, dam or dyke is through such garden or curtilage.

Telecommunications Services Provision

247. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if responsibility for quality, coverage and reliability of the mobile telephone service rests with his Department, the regulator, or the service providers; if responsibility for any deficiencies requires a response from any of the aforementioned; the action proposed to tackle the number of unserved or poorly serviced black spots throughout the country; if the authorities' approval or the initiative of his Department is required to address such issues; if ongoing assessment leading to infrastructural investment is taking place in respect of the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42633/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): In order to provide mobile services, mobile operators must secure a licence from ComReg to get access to the required radio spectrum. These licences include terms and conditions on quality of service and coverage. ComReg monitors compliance with all such licence requirements. Compliance with quality and coverage conditions is carried out by means of bi-annual drive tests and I understand that the current tests are designed to cover all primary and secondary national routes, with measurements being performed on all Mobile Networks. In cases of non-compliance, ComReg has powers to enforce licence conditions, as appropriate, in accordance with the Authorisation Regulations (European Communities (Electronic Communications Networks and Services) (Authorisation) Regulations 2011. ComReg is independent in carrying out its statutory functions and I have no statutory role in this matter.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of fixed and mobile high speed broadband services. Part of this significant investment is facilitating the rollout of 3G and 4G mobile services nationwide and this will further improve the coverage and quality of mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

In terms of addressing blackspots in mobile coverage, while investment in communications infrastructure and services is primarily a matter for the private sector, Government recognises that it has a role in ensuring that barriers to investment are removed where possible. The National Broadband Plan commits to a range of actions that will facilitate the more efficient investment in the rollout of communications infrastructure, including addressing planning and road opening challenges.

Since publication of the Plan in 2012, a working group has been established to address infrastructure issues which were identified by industry as creating barriers to deployment of services. The group is chaired by the Department of Transport and includes representatives from my Department, the Local Government Management Agency, the National Roads Authority (NRA) and Local Authorities. The Group is currently reviewing issues relating to the location of telecommunications infrastructure on public roads, particularly motorways, with a view to reducing blackspots and enhancing services. Consultation between the NRA and industry is ongoing on a range of issues relating to the siting of telecommunications infrastructure.

Local Authorities also have an important role in assisting the rollout of supporting infrastructure. My Department has worked closely with the Department of Environment, Commu-

nity and Local Government to raise awareness of the role of the planning process in facilitating the delivery of telecommunications infrastructure and services.

My Department is also reviewing national spectrum policy, in line with another commitment in the National Broadband Plan and my officials are currently considering the outcome of a recent public consultation on spectrum policy. Current spectrum policy needs to be revisited as a matter of course and in light of the rapid technological changes and the increased demands on this limited and valuable resource. An important element of this review is to ensure that our legal and regulatory environment supports continued investment in mobile telecommunication infrastructure, which is dependent on access to radio spectrum. It is expected that this review will be completed in the first quarter of next year.

Electricity Generation

248. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to a recent announcement by Electric Ireland that it will no longer buy green electricity from residential properties generating electricity from renewable sources such as solar and wind; his views on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42662/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): While this is a matter in which I, as Minister, have no statutory function, I am aware that Electric Ireland has been offering a micro generation feed in tariff since February 2009. No other electricity supplier has chosen to provide such a tariff, to either domestic or commercial customers, though they have been invited to do so by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER). Responsibility for the regulation of the electricity and gas markets is a matter for the CER, which is an independent statutory body. I am aware of the need to give further policy consideration to the place of microgeneration in our energy mix. Analysis of the potential of microgeneration technologies such as small scale wind, solar and small scale hydro, has been carried out for my Department by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. The SEAI's findings, along with responses to the recent consultation on the Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland, will inform future policy on the provision of any market support for microgeneration.

Irish Water Staff

249. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he or his Department officials became aware of the pay progression mechanism included agreed between Ervia and trade unions last year for Irish Water; the date upon which this agreement was secured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42668/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The employment terms and conditions for Ervia employees, other than the Chief Executive, are an operational matter for the company and not a matter in which I, as Minister, have any role or function. The current pay model in place in Ervia was implemented as a result of the successful conclusion of a suite of cost improvement measures in Ervia, or BGE at that time, in early 2013. I understand that the pay model was adopted by Irish Water upon its establishment within the Ervia Group. Corporate governance and financial matters are discussed in the normal course of interaction between a commercial semi-state body and its parent department. Ervia, or BGE at that time, would have updated my officials on progress with regard to the cost improvement measures in the lead in to their conclusion.

Broadband Service Provision

250. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress to date in relation to the rural broadband strategy aimed at increasing access to high speed broadband to more than over 1,000 rural communities nationwide through fibre networks. [42679/14]

251. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if work in rolling out the fibre networks in any of the areas identified has commenced since the announcement of the strategy last May. [42680/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 and 251 together.

Through the National Broadband Plan (NBP), the Government aims to ensure that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses in Ireland, through a combination of commercial investment and a State-led intervention.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5bn in network upgrades and at least 1.6m of the 2.3m addresses in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next number of years. In the last week alone, two companies have announced projects to deliver direct fibre connectivity to approximately 500,000 homes and businesses in every county in Ireland. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

The purpose of the National Broadband Plan is to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of where they are located, benefits from a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments, such as those I have already mentioned, and a State-led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

Under EU State Aid Guidelines Member States cannot intervene where commercial investors have plans to roll out services. My Department is currently finalising a national map which will identify those areas that require a State intervention. An initial examination has already identified a significant number of areas that will require State intervention.

As part of the mapping process, a stakeholder consultation was launched in June. 32 submissions have been received and non-commercially sensitive versions of these responses were published by my Department last month.

I expect to publish the map shortly. Those accessing this map will be able to identify their own house or premises and see whether it is in the proposed intervention footprint. Where a house or premises is not in the proposed intervention area it means it either currently, or will in the near future, have access to commercial high speed broadband services. The map will be subject to change as new information becomes available or commercial investments are announced in the future.

A further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy will be launched in mid-2015. My Department is also working closely with the European Commission with a view to obtaining State Aid clearance for the programme.

A detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a potential preferred bidder or bidders towards the end of 2015.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclu-

sively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Electricity Transmission Network

252. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has seen the submission by ESB in relation to the sustainability of EirGrid's expansion plans; his views on the disjoint between the ESB and EirGrid; his further views on the view that the ESB submission indicates Grid25 is no longer a feasible or appropriate response to the State's energy needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42685/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The ESB submission referred to in the Question is one of over 1,240 received during the period of public consultation on the Energy Policy Green Paper. That submission, like all those received, is a useful contribution to the process of developing a definitive Energy Policy. ESB and EirGrid are fully in agreement on the need for critical energy transmission and distribution infrastructure. Both companies also acknowledge the need for Irish electricity networks to address citizen and community concerns, to take account of changes in the level of electricity demand due to changing economic circumstances, and to accommodate evolving European energy policy.

ESB and EirGrid work closely together on development and reinforcement of the transmission and distribution systems in order to ensure security of supply and to meet customer and stakeholder needs.

As a matter of course, EirGrid regularly reviews its strategies and projects. Grid 25 was originally developed in 2008 when the macro-economic climate was very different. In line with Eirgrid's review policy, Grid 25 was updated in 2011, when the scale and scope was reduced to reflect the change in circumstances. As a result the cost was revised downwards from €4 billion to €3.2 billion.

In May this year, EirGrid initiated a further update of Grid25 to take into account the most up-to-date information available, including technical feasibility, future economic and demand projections, and environmental impacts. Following discussions with my Department, this update also includes an independent review to verify the original strategies of Grid25 on the basis of changing circumstances since 2008. EirGrid expects this review to be completed and published early in 2015.

Wind Energy Generation

253. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the groups, companies or persons he has met since taking office in relation to wind energy issues, projects or proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42686/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Since taking up office as Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, I have met very many interested parties in connection with issues across the energy agenda, including on wind energy, in many different fora. Such interactions are a critical input to policy formation and development. I am keenly aware of the need for on-going communication with all stakeholders if we are to improve understanding of the benefits of realising the potential of our indigenous renewable energy resources. These resources, including wind, can deliver a more secure and sustainable energy supply and contribute to economic growth. This informs the ra-

tionale behind a range of public consultation processes on energy issues. Currently, the 1,200 responses received by my Department during the recent consultation on the Green Paper on Energy Policy are currently under consideration. A range of seminars are also being held with interested stakeholders. A consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment to be undertaken on the Bioenergy Plan will commence shortly as will the next phase of consultation on the Renewable Electricity Policy Framework. I am keenly aware of the need for balanced input from the full spectrum of interests on energy policy and my officials and I are available, subject to diary constraints, in this regard.

Departmental Expenditure

254. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide the details of average cuts in payments by his Department and those under its aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is, the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and by the agency. [42704/14]

255. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those under its aegis. [42717/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 255 together.

My Department does not engage the services of employment or recruitment agencies.

Information in respect of bodies and agencies under the aegis of my Department is a day to day matter for those organisations and my Department does not have the information sought by the Deputy. I will, however, request the relevant Agencies and bodies under the aegis of my Department to respond directly to the Deputy in the matter.

National Roads Authority Funding

256. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding provided by his Department to the National Roads Authority for accommodation works on the M9 near Kilcullen, County Kildare; if he will provide details of the procurement procedures which have been followed in respect of these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42525/14]

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

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects, such as the motorway service area project near Kilcullen is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NRA for direct re-

ply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Licence Applications

257. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, and when, a provisional or other driver's licence may issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Galway whose application has been refused on foot of their residency status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42563/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no power to intervene in individual cases.

I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

National Roads Authority Projects

258. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the progress of the proposed M20 Cork to Limerick motorway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42584/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Because of the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure over the past number of years. The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work which could be undertaken. For this reason it is not possible to progress a range of worthwhile projects and the main focus has to be on the maintenance and repair of roads and this will remain the position in the coming years.

In relation to projects of the scale of the M20, it is not feasible given current and future projections that the State would be in a position to build this from its own resources. Rather, it would have to be constructed through the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. While this model involves the private sector carrying the construction risk, it does require the State to meet the initial design, planning and land purchase costs. In the context of available road monies these costs are not affordable at present. For now NRA will have to work within its capital budget and assess and prioritise projects within that funding envelope.

The scope for progressing projects such as the M20 Cork to Limerick project will be very much dependent on the availability of funding in the future.

Smarter Transport

259. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the recent publication of the draft policy document, Investing in our Transport Future: A Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport, if the target of reducing the total share of car commuting from 65% to 45% in 2020, that is, 500,000 more persons taking alternative

means to commute to work, introduced in 2009 under the previous policy Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future, has now been formally abandoned as Government policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41829/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Smarter Travel Policy was developed in the context of the unsustainable levels of economic growth in the period to 2008. For example, it projected growth in car ownership from 1.92m in 2008 to 2.47m in 2020. The need for huge demand uptake within non-car modes was based on this scale of demand growth - which, following our economic difficulties, has not materialised, and is unlikely to do so in the period to 2020.

Although such rapid growth in demand is not likely to occur, it is recognised that with renewed economic growth challenges for the transport sector with regard to congestion and climate change are re-emerging. The draft Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport takes a realistic approach at assessing the appropriate level of investment in transport infrastructure, and to developing principles and priorities for future investment in land transport that will yield the best return on investment. Cost effective investment in walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure are clearly prioritised in the draft framework - which is consistent with the goal of ensuring a more sustainable transport system. While the objectives of the Smarter Travel Policy remain, the levels of investment suggested within the Policy are not now possible or realistic given today's economic realities. However, within the constraints of investment funding available, ensuring economically and environmentally sustainable investment in transport is a key aspect of the draft framework.

Road Projects

260. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated time for delivery of the southern distributor road in Athy, County Kildare. [42649/14]

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

Earlier this year the Government approved a €1m allocation to Kildare County Council to carry out design works on the Athy Bypass and prepare its submission to An Bord Pleanála. My predecessor Minister Varadkar gave a commitment (PQ 22498/14 of 27 May 2014) that once this work is done, funds will be made available to Kildare County Council to bring this project through An Bord Pleanála and to construction. These funds will be made available through my Department's Strategic Roads Grand fund.

Given the issues that are involved in the planning process, it is not possible for me to be definitive on timelines at this particular point. This is the case for all major road projects.

Departmental Information

261. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide information on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42673/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department does not have any information on the matter referred to by the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

262. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide the details of the average cut paid by his Department and those bodies under its aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fees paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and the proportion by the agency. [42713/14]

263. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by his Department and those bodies under its aegis. [42727/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 262 and 263 together.

The table below contains information in relation to accountancy services provided to my Department. These are total fees paid to the employment agency and the breakdown of these figures between the employee and the employment agency is a matter for those parties.

Year	Total paid (€)
2011	165,597
2012	184,864
2013	188,926
2014 to date	166,690

An additional €4,189 was paid in 2012 for temporary recruitment in relation to the Sports Capital programme. There was an approximate breakdown of 30% as a fee for recruitment services and 70% to the employee.

In relation to agencies under the remit of my Department, this is a matter for the agencies themselves. I will, however, forward the questions to agencies under my remit for direct reply to you. If you do not hear from them within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Natural Heritage Areas

264. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide an update on a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42492/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In July 2012, a Steering Group involving representatives of the key stakeholders in the Lough Leane trail project was convened and charged with the planning and development of the trail. The Group meets regularly and good progress is being made on bringing this complex multifaceted project to fruition. Most of this trail will be inside the boundary of Killarney National Park and because of the associated ecological issues, the task of delivering the project will require careful consideration and planning. To ensure that the project is delivered as efficiently and quickly as possible, it has been broken down into various modules which will allow the advancement of

some sections of the trail while the necessary consultations, assessments and planning and any land acquisitions as may be required for the more complicated aspects of the plan are moved along in parallel.

A planning application submitted by my Department for the provision of an access route and car park in connection with the section of the trail referred to by the Deputy is under consideration by Kerry County Council.

National Monuments

265. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the basis on which her officials suggested that the 1916 relatives commission a survey of Moore Street, Dublin 1; if she considers this indicated uncertainty about the structures on the street dating from before and after 1916; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42506/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to the replies to Questions Nos. 2 and 3 on 22 October 2014. The proposal that a further survey of the area would be commissioned was mooted by a delegation which met with me last week. I explained that I had no plans to commission a further survey and that I was satisfied with the quality of the research in relation to the surveys which have been carried out. It is not a matter for my Department if any other person wishes to carry out research into any particular issue.

Animal Welfare

266. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the National Parks and Wildlife Service may estimate the strength of the hare population in the country; if county or regional variations exist in the dispersal of the species; if there are discernible trends to be noticed in hare numbers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42531/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Irish Hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*) is the only hare present in the State and is found throughout the country. It is classified as a “protected species” under the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 as well as being listed in Annex V of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). Under Article 17 of the Directive Member States are obliged to report to the European Commission on the status of listed habitats and species every six years. Each species is assessed according to its range across Ireland, the population, the quality of its habitat and its future prospects. The Irish Hare was given a favourable conservation status in the Report on “The Status of European Union Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland” which was submitted to the EU in 2013. The full technical report is available on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department, www.npws.ie.

Population figures therein are based on the most recent national survey from 2007. These estimates suggest that the population hares in the Republic of Ireland was approximately 233,000 in early 2006 and 535,000 in early 2007. Such significant inter-annual fluctuations in species population are expected, based on hare reproduction patterns and these occur in other countries with hare species. In suitable weather conditions hares may have second litters, bringing significant population increases in good years whereas in poor years with low breeding success and high mortality, populations can fall significantly.

Animal Welfare

267. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the growth in the numbers of foxes in the country, not least in urban areas, if the National Parks and Wildlife section of her Department has assessed the situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42532/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The fox is one of the most common and widely distributed mammals in Ireland. It is not a protected species and no national census has been undertaken. Data collated on the National Biodiversity Data Centre's website, however, shows that it is found in every county of Ireland and has adapted to both rural and urban habitats. Like all wild animals, their populations will fluctuate naturally.

Commemorative Events

268. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will support a matter (details supplied) regarding relatives of those who took part in the 1916 Rising; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42580/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has been working to finalise the draft programme for 2016, which it is intended to publish shortly to allow for widespread public consultation. An announcement relating to this aspect will be made in the coming days, which will be of relevance to the relatives' groups. The overall programme is being brought forward in partnership with government departments, State agencies, local authorities and other key players.

I will be keen to encourage and facilitate the involvement of 'ground-up' initiatives to ensure local communities can put their own shape on the commemorations as we move towards 2016. This process will build on the contacts that have been made, as part of the ongoing commemorative programme since 2012, with a wide range of bodies and community groups throughout the country, who are already engaged in preparing their own projects and contributions to the 2016 commemorations.

These commemorations will acknowledge the service and achievements of the personnel involved with a special consideration to include their descendants and relatives. My Department is anxious to include all interested parties in this consultation around the draft programme for the commemoration of the 1916 Rising and the associated events, including 1916 Relatives' Groups.

Separately, in relation to requests to attend at Centenary commemorations, the Department of Defence has responsibility for the care and management of the service records and archives relating to the personnel of the Easter Rising. For many years, that Department has maintained a register in relation to invitations to commemorative events. Contact with the Department of Defence may be sent directly to it at the address below.

Executive Branch.

Department of Defence,

Station Road,

Newbridge,

Co. Kildare

executive@defence.ie

Relatives of those involved in that period may forward such requests to my own Department at the address below, which will be forwarded to the Department of Defence.

Commemorations Unit

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Kildare Street Dublin 2

commemorations@ahg.gov.ie

Departmental Contracts

269. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide the details of the average cut paid by her Department and those bodies under its aegis to recruitment and temporary employment agencies, that is the proportion of the fee paid from State funding to such agencies received by the worker and the proportion received by the agency. [42702/14]

270. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide an annual breakdown of the fees paid to recruitment and employment agencies by her Department and those bodies under its aegis. [42715/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 269 and 270 together.

My Department does not use the services of recruitment or employment agencies. The use of such services by the bodies and agencies funded from my Department's Vote Group, and any possible fees and changes in such fees, are administrative matters for the bodies and agencies themselves.