

Written Answers.

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

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

Action Plan for Jobs

11. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in the establishment of a national health innovation hub as promised under the Action Plan for Jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48140/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2014 the National Project Team for the National Health Innovation Hub finalised recommendations on the optimum arrangements for establishing the national Hub. These arrangements were arrived at by taking into consideration the experience to date of the (pilot) Demonstrator Project in Cork, and the outcome of an independent evaluation of the Demonstrator Project carried out by consultants during 2014. The consultants concluded that the Health Innovation Hub has potential to be a vital component of national innovation infrastructure and its value has been recognised by the relevant stakeholders in the healthcare sector and industry. The recommendations of the National Project Team formed the basis of proposals to Government which considered the next steps for establishing the National Health Innovation Hub.

In July 2014, Government agreed to the establishment of a National Health Innovation Hub that would be tasked with proactively developing, managing, and progressing relationships and connections with industry and the health system. A Joint Agency Project Team, chaired by Enterprise Ireland and comprising representatives from my Department, the Department of Health, the HSE, IDA Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and the Health Research Board, has been established and is designing a competitive call for hosting the National Health Innovation Hub. It is intended that the competitive call will be launched in early 2015. Ministers Bruton and Varadkar can confirm that Mr Dave Shanahan an Industry Partner will chair the new implementation body.

Regional Development

12. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the timelines and targets in relation to rolling out his Department's regional enterprise strategy for the midlands region in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48116/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government recognises the need to place a greater emphasis on supporting enterprise growth and job creation at regional level. Employment has increased in all regions - and nationally by 80,000

- since the start of the Action Plan for Jobs process in 2012.

Employment in the Midlands region increased by 8,000 since the start of 2012 and the unemployment rate for the Midlands region has decreased from 18.7% to 14.5%.

The 2014 Action Plan for Jobs contained a number of commitments to support competitive regions, including, within my own Department, developing a framework for new Regional Enterprise Strategies. This framework will provide a model for co-ordinated action across public bodies and other stakeholders to support enterprise development and jobs growth, based on the strengths and assets of each region.

Consultation with regional stakeholders is an essential part of developing the Regional Enterprise Strategies. Over the past number of months, officials from Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and my Department have been involved in a series of engagements with stakeholder groups in the Midlands to discuss the strengths and opportunities that can be built upon to support enterprise and jobs growth. This consultation process will continue with a Regional Enterprise Forum in Athlone on the 19th December.

Following on from this consultation process, I expect to publish the Regional Enterprise Strategy for the Midlands in early 2015. The Strategy will include specific actions and targets on the part of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices, and other public bodies active in the region, to promote enterprise growth and job creation. The Regional Enterprise Strategies will need to be dynamic and flexible and capable of capturing any new ideas or opportunities that emerge over their life span.

Similar strategies for the other regions will be developed over the course of next year, on a phased basis.

Regional Development

13. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide an update on the launch of distinct employment strategies for the regions as envisaged in the Action Plan for Jobs. [48148/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am encouraged by the level of interest the House is showing in the delivery of the new Regional Enterprise Strategies which my Department is leading on. As I have mentioned previously, the Government recognises the need to put a greater emphasis on supporting enterprise growth and job creation at regional level.

While employment has increased nationally by approximately 80,000 since the start of the Action Plan for Jobs process in 2012 regions of the country which have faced difficulty in recent years are now showing strong employment growth— with the Border, West, Mid West, South West and South East showing the strongest jobs results in the past quarter. The pace of progress in the regions – and especially those with the highest unemployment levels - needs to be accelerated through targeted supports for enterprise growth and job creation.

Vibrant and competitive regions are important, not just from an economic perspective, but also from a societal point of view. Growing the economic base of regions will support social cohesion and provide opportunities for young people, in particular, to continue to live and work in their local communities.

My Department has developed a framework for Regional Enterprise Strategies which will

be applied to produce action-oriented plans to support enterprise growth and jobs in the regions, commencing with the Midlands in the New Year, followed by the South East region. Similar strategies for the other regions will be developed over the course of the year, on a phased basis.

Developing the jobs potential of the regions can best be achieved through better coordination and collaboration by all stakeholders operating within the region, including the enterprise agencies, other public bodies, education and skills providers, and enterprise itself. Consultation with regional stakeholders is a fundamental part of developing the Regional Enterprise Strategies.

My officials have also been working closely with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to ensure that the Regional Enterprise Strategies will dovetail with, and contribute to, the Local Economic and Community Plans to be developed over the coming year by the Local Authorities, and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to be prepared by the Regional Assemblies.

The aim of the Action Plan for Jobs is to help enterprises to create employment in all regions of the country. If we are to do this successfully, it is important that each region builds on its particular strengths and assets to provide an environment that stimulates entrepreneurship and attracts both indigenous and foreign investment. The 2015 Action Plan for Jobs, which I am currently finalising on behalf of the Government, will build on the work we have commenced in 2014 and place a strong emphasis on enterprise and jobs at regional level.

Regional Development

14. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the stakeholders who have been involved in the consultative process to date for the regional enterprise strategy for the midlands region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48117/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): As I have outlined previously, the new Regional Enterprise Strategies which my Department is leading on will be underpinned by consultation with the key stakeholders in each region. These stakeholders include public sector bodies, business people, industry representatives, educational institutions and other parties who have a role to play in the economic development of the regions.

Over the past number of months, officials from my Department, along with Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland have been involved in a series of engagements with stakeholder groups in the Midlands region.

“Brainstorming” sessions have been held with three groups of stakeholders to identify initial areas of opportunity for enterprise growth and job creation. These consultations involved:

- a Public Agencies group,
- an Industry group, and
- a Skills/HR group.

The Public Sector Group included representatives from Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, the Regional Assembly, Local Enterprise Offices, Local Authorities and Athlone Institute of Technology.

A number of key IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland client companies operating in the re-

gion were invited to participate on the Industry Group.

The Skills/HR Group comprised representatives from a number of IDA and EI client companies, Athlone Institute of Technology, the National University of Ireland Maynooth, and the Education and Training Boards from within the region.

My Department and the enterprise agencies also attended an event organised by the Midlands Gateway Chamber in Glasson, Athlone, on 20th November.

The consultation process will continue with a Midlands Regional Enterprise Forum in Athlone on the 19th December, which will bring together a wider range of stakeholders, including representatives from the Retail Sector, LEO clients, community-based enterprises, Commercial State Bodies and Fáilte Ireland, to discuss the strengths and opportunities that can be built upon to support enterprise and jobs growth in the region. Members of the Oireachtas representing the Midlands region have also been invited to the event.

The consultation process will inform the Regional Enterprise Strategy for the Midlands which will be published early in the New Year.

Action Plan for Jobs

15. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the level of engagement with stakeholders in the preparation of the 2015 Action Plan for Jobs; the organisations and persons involved in the consultation process; the mechanism to determine which measures are included; and when it is anticipated that the new plan will be launched. [48151/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I and my Department formally began the process of developing Action Plan for Jobs 2015 in July this year. The next Action Plan will be informed by the work of the National Competitiveness Council but we are also continuing the process of previous years whereby direct input from industry and wider stakeholders is sought and considered. One of the factors that has made the APJ process such a success has been the input, support and partnership with business and others in developing and progressing the Plans.

To supplement the ongoing research undertaken by my Department, its agencies and across the government system, as well as the feedback I receive via my many engagements with business and other groups, I met formally with stakeholders in the interim. I have held meetings dedicated to APJ2015 with representatives from IBEC, American Chambers, SFA, Chambers Ireland, ISME, ICTU, SIPTU, IMPACT, UNITE and the INOU, seeking their views on the shape and content of APJ2015. At these meetings I hear directly from groups about the competitiveness issues to be addressed, the priorities within those, and suggested actions to be taken across Government. I also held a roundtable discussion with a small group of entrepreneurs to garner their views on how best we can continue to support start-up activity in Ireland. In many cases these face-to-face discussions were followed-up with formal written submissions to my Department from stakeholders. A written request for submissions was also issued to stakeholders to accompany the open-call for submissions on my Department's website. Engagement across the government system on Action Plan for Jobs 2015 has also been ongoing with Departments and Agencies since the summer.

In addition, we have taken on board suggestions made by the OECD in their preliminary review of the APJ process. That OECD review will inform the development of APJ2015 in a way that helps maximise the impact of actions on our competitiveness.

As is the case every year, all submissions are collated and analysed by my Department and considered by individual Departments and by government via the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs. Intensive work on the content of APJ2015 is continuing, and drafting is expected to be completed early in the New Year with publication shortly thereafter.

Job Creation

16. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide an update on the work of the consultative committee on jobs in the green economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48141/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Consultative Committee on Jobs in the Green Economy was established in 2013 arising from a commitment in *Delivering our Green Potential*, the Government's Policy Statement on Growth and Employment in the Green Economy. The Committee was established to help identify emerging opportunities for Ireland in the Green Economy and any enablers or barriers to seizing those opportunities. The Committee, which I chair, involves representatives from the enterprise sector as well as relevant Government Departments and agencies.

The Committee met on three occasions in 2013 and twice this year, and has considered range of issues including:

- the potential for waste reduction, as well as for the re-use and re-cycling of waste, to support enterprise competitiveness and jobs;
- access to Finance for companies in the cleantech sector;
- Research, Development and Innovation in the Green Economy;
- areas of potential market growth for green products and services; and
- the potential for better use of Green Public Procurement to support innovative companies based in Ireland.

The Committee has also provided input to the Action Plan for Jobs process.

The Green Economy presents a major economic opportunity for employment creation in Ireland. We have significant strengths and advantages which we can leverage to exploit business opportunities at home and in overseas markets in sectors such as sustainable food production, tourism, green financial services, green products and services, waste management, water and waste water management, renewable energy, smart grids and energy efficiency.

The demand for green products and services is likely to increase over the coming years on foot of the EU's Climate and Energy targets to 2030 and the prospect of an international agreement on Climate Change at the end of 2015. Our objective is to ensure that Irish companies are well prepared to benefit from these new market opportunities as they arise.

Exports Growth

17. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views that an accurate reflection of Irish economic activity that exports Irish-resident companies manufactured abroad are now counted as Irish exports; and his views that this increase in exports

will benefit job creation here. [48146/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the Deputy's question refers to contract manufacturing. The national accounts show that exports grew by 13.0 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of this year, with goods exports up nearly 16 per cent. This was not matched by proportionate import growth, despite the growth in domestic demand in the same period. As a result net exports increased by 11.0 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter to stand at €11.2 billion, or 24 per cent of GDP.

Part of the strong performance in goods exports, shown in the national accounts, can be put down to what is known as contracted manufacturing. This contracted production occurs when an Irish-resident (though not necessarily Irish-owned) enterprise contracts a plant abroad to produce a good for supply to a third country. The sale of the good is recorded as an Irish export, as the economic ownership of the good prior to sale is regarded as belonging to the Irish-resident enterprise. Imports used in the production process are also recorded as Irish imports. Neither these exports nor imports associated with contracted production are recorded in the monthly trade series which is based on measurement of when goods physically cross the Irish border.

Contracted production involves very little employment effect or second-round impact on the wider economy and complicates the task of forecasting net exports. Developments in contract production are sector-specific and product-specific and have little relationship with concurrent indicators of export performance. As such, they have the potential to unwind or accelerate with potentially large impacts on measured GDP.

Notwithstanding these developments, there is no doubt that economic recovery has gained momentum this year and that it has broadened to include a recovery in domestic demand. High-frequency data such as retail sales, industrial production and purchasing managers' indices (PMIs) are all in strong positive territory. Employment growth resumed in 2012 and the Live Register continues to fall month-on-month

As stated above, contract manufacturing is not included in the CSO Monthly trade statistics. The latest goods exports statistics released by the CSO shows that exports of goods in October 2014 increased by 4% compared to October 2013, while, for the 10 months period to October 2014, exports of goods increased by 2%, compared to the same period for 2013. Sustainable broad based export-led growth is essential to rebuilding our economy and growing employment. The Government's Action Plan for Jobs places a specific emphasis on growing opportunities in overseas market.

International Agreements

18. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide an update on the latest round of talks between the EU and the US on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership scheduled for December 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48150/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The last round of negotiations between the EU and the US on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership took place during the week beginning 29 September last, the report of which can be found on the EU Commission's website at: <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1158&title=EU-US-trade---7th-round-of-talks-on-transatlantic-trade-pact-ends-in-the-US>.

I understand that the eighth round is scheduled to take place during the week of 2 February

2015.

Employment Rights

19. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps he will take to end the practice of some employers using subcontracting to lower the cost of labour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48143/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ireland's robust suite of employment rights legislation is underpinned by a proactive labour inspectorate. The National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) has a team of inspectors, and in 2013 NERA carried out over 5,500 inspections. Where NERA encounter the sub-contractor model, the question may arise as to whether individuals are employees or self-employed. NERA Inspectors are not in a position to make a final determination regarding employment status. Rather, this is a matter for both the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Revenue Commissioners. Where NERA inspectors encounter situations in which there is a question over the employment status of an individual, they refer the matter to the relevant authority. Where either the Department of Social Protection or the Revenue Commissioners makes a determination on these issues NERA, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Determining Employment or Self-Employment Status of Individuals will generally accept their decisions on the issue. Finally, the matter can also be determined by the courts.

NERA has statutory authority to share information with the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection. In addition, NERA is a member of the Hidden Economy Monitoring Group, a non-statutory multi-agency group comprising of representatives from business groups, trade unions and State agencies, including the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners, who have a common commitment to tackle the shadow economy. Publicly funded construction projects are subject to ongoing supervision and inspection by the enforcement agencies of the State (i.e. Revenue, DSP and NERA - acting as Joint Inspection Units).

Workers who consider they are not receiving the National Minimum Wage can make a complaint to NERA, or a Rights Commissioner. Complaints in relation to non-payment of wages, or a deficiency in the wage rate can also be made to a Rights Commissioner. The proposed Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill will provide for a new statutory framework to replace the former sectoral Registered Employment Agreement (REA) system. The new framework will enable the establishment of minimum rates of remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment in specific sectors, including the construction sector. The Heads of the proposed Bill provide for a definition of "worker" based on section 23 of the Industrial Relations Act 1990. In this context, it is proposed that the term "worker" will include a person who has entered into or works under a contract with an employer to personally execute any work or labour. The High Court has interpreted the term "worker" in section 23 as including a subcontractor providing services personally under a contract for service. In addition, the Labour Court had found in a number of cases that self-employed subcontractors in the construction sector were covered by the terms of the REAs for the Construction Industry.

Departmental Bodies

20. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the way he plans to deal with the anticipated substantial extra workload on Labour Court-LRC staff arising

from the Workplace Relations Bill and his plans to increase staff numbers to ensure an efficient, accessible and timely service is delivered. [47998/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Workplace Relations Bill provides for the establishment of a statutory Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) with a full range of functions formerly carried out by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC), including Rights Commissioner Service, the Equality Tribunal, the Employment Appeals Tribunal and the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA). The Bill will also provide for the Labour Court to be the appellate body to determine, among other matters, appeals against decisions of WRC Adjudication Officers.

A Staffing and Structures Plan for the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and the Labour Court has been drawn up. Compliance, inspection, enforcement, conciliation, advisory and other services currently provided by NERA, the LRC and the Equality Tribunal will be incorporated into the WRC. Certain elements of this Plan, including the establishment of shared services units to deal with the receipt, validation, registration and scheduling of complaints, have already been put in place. These and other synergies and efficiencies, underpinned by significant investment in new technology and enhanced business processes, will reduce the cost of service delivery.

Within this context, however, I remain committed to the delivery of a world-class workplace relations service which is simple to use, independent, effective, impartial, cost effective, provides for workable means of redress and enforcement within a reasonable period and reduces costs for businesses and employees. In this regard I am anxious to ensure that the Labour Court and the WRC have the resources necessary to meet this objective.

Six additional staff were assigned in order to facilitate the establishment under the Reform Programme of the Pilot Early Resolution Service currently operated within the Labour Relations Commission. This Service will be amalgamated with the Equality Mediation Service currently provided by the Equality Tribunal to form a dedicated Mediation Service to be operated by the WRC. The objective of this Service will be to resolve first instance complaints and disputes as early as possible and without recourse to adjudication, thus reducing pressures on the WRC's Adjudication Services.

All first instance complaints will be heard by WRC Adjudication Officers. On the establishment of the WRC the current cohort of Equality Officers together with the Labour Relations Commission's Rights Commissioners will be appointed as WRC adjudicators. They will be supplemented by a panel of external adjudicators appointed by me. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is currently undertaking the selection process for this panel which will comprise industrial relations and HR practitioners and employment lawyers with appropriate skills and experience.

It is estimated that the caseload of the Labour Court will increase significantly arising from the Court's assumption of responsibility for dealing with appeals which had previously been referred to the Employment Appeals Tribunal. The current strength of the Labour Court is nine comprising the Chairman, two Deputy Chairs and six members. Additional resources will be required for the Court to deal with an increase of this magnitude and arrangements to appoint an additional Division of the Court and two additional Deputy Chairs are currently being put in train.

Separately, it is intended that provision will be made to allow the Chairman and Deputy Chairs of the Court to sit alone in matters such as case management conferences, adjournment applications, examining the merits of certain appeals or other routine matters, thus allowing the Divisions to focus on contested cases. The provision of an additional Deputy Chair for the

Court will allow Divisions to continue to sit if a Chairman or Deputy Chair has to attend to drafting and related work.

I am confident that these changes will further enhance the efficiency and productivity of the Court and will allow it to cope with an increased caseload without a corresponding increase in its strength.

Job Creation

21. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which the economic climate here remains conducive to job retention and job creation, with particular reference to the use of innovation and technology; if he is satisfied with the extent to which this jurisdiction remains an attractive and competitive location for investment resulting in job creation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48136/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The importance of innovation and technology to Ireland's on-going and future economic recovery is well recognised by the Government as being crucial to growth in both our indigenous and FDI sectors. Evidence, from both the EU and internationally, shows that the Government's strategy of accelerating the economic and societal return on our STI investment is paying off. Globally, we are ranked:

- 11th in the Global Innovation Index 2014, out of 142 countries.
- 1st in the world for inward investment and quality, as per the IBM Global Location Trends Report of 2013.
- 1st in Europe and 2nd in the world for the number of investment jobs per capita, as per the same report.
- 3rd in the EU 'Indicator of Innovation Output', and
- 9th in the European Commission's 2014 Innovation Union Scoreboard.

Similarly, Ireland's international competitiveness continues to improve. Since 2011, Ireland's international competitiveness rankings in both the IMD and WEF competitiveness reports has improved – from 24th to 15th in the IMD's World Competitiveness Yearbook and from 29th to 25th WEF Global Competitiveness Report.

All of these factors reflect Ireland's enduring strength as an investment location. Foreign direct investment has been buoyant so far this year, with IDA Ireland securing over 100 investments in the first half of 2014, up from 70 in the same period in 2013, with potential job creation of 8,000. Approximately 40% of these investments came from companies investing in Ireland for the first time, as Ireland's value proposition continues to resonate with new investors. The Government has recently published a Policy Statement on FDI designed to ensure that Ireland's inward investment offering continues to be attractive and competitive.

On the indigenous side, Enterprise Ireland had a record year for job creation, with 5,442 net new jobs, and exports in 2013 and the outlook is for continued strong export growth for 2014. Furthermore, in 2013 Science Foundation Ireland had links to 65% (2,018 jobs) of the 3,085 jobs announced by the IDA in all fields covered by SFI's legal remit. International companies supported by IDA Ireland added a net 7,071 jobs in 2013 overall, the highest level of job creation in over a decade. Indeed, every job created in one of IDA's client company's results in the

creation of 0.7 of a “spin-off” job in the Irish economy. Indications are that 2014 will be another excellent year for net job creation by IDA and Enterprise Ireland, with significant reliance on innovation.

The recently published National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland has as its aim to support the creation of an additional 93,000 jobs from start-up companies in the next five years. In addition, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015, which is currently under development, provides further opportunity to design actions to enhance Ireland’s competitiveness, which will provide the underpinning from a continued strong investment performance.

Elsewhere, ‘Knowledge Transfer Ireland’, our central Technology Transfer Office, has recently been set up as a central reference point for entrepreneurs and industry, signposting them to the wealth of technology opportunities and academic talent that exist in our Research Performing Organisations.

In terms of European Union funding for research and innovation, with a budget of almost €80 billion covering the next seven years, Horizon 2020 offers huge opportunities to researchers, research organisations and industry to engage in cutting edge research. These programmes provide international linkages and enhance the excellence of the Irish R&D system and we have set an ambitious target of drawing down up to €1.25bn in funding from Horizon 2020 over the period 2014-20.

Action Plan for Jobs

22. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress of the latest Action Plan for Jobs; the number of its objectives that have been achieved; and the number of jobs created which are directly linked to the plan. [48145/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 2014 Action Plan for Jobs was published last February and builds on the 2012 and 2013 Action Plans. This year’s Plan includes 385 actions for delivery across all Government Departments and 46 agencies. The 385 actions are broken down into quarterly milestones for delivery, and these are reported on every three months. The Quarterly Progress reports are published on my Department’s website, www.djei.ie. For the first three Quarters of this year, approximately 88% of the quarterly milestones had been delivered on schedule. This would suggest we are on target for an overall delivery in the order of 90% of all actions this year, consistent with the out-turn for the 2012 and 2013 Action Plans. Any actions that are delayed from this year’s Plan will be carried into next year.

Some of the key deliverables on the part of Government under the Action Plan this year include:

- the establishment of 31 Local Enterprise Offices,
- publication of a national Entrepreneurship Policy Statement,
- recruitment of additional resources for IDA Ireland in strategic locations overseas,
- the National roll-out of the Trading On-Line Voucher scheme,
- publication of the Construction 2020 strategy,
- funding of €245 million for the establishment of 5 new world-class SFI Research Centres,

- publication of the Further Education and Training Strategy,
- upskilling for those who are unemployed is being provided for through courses such as Springboard and Momentum,
- the establishment of a €35 million Energy Efficiency Fund to support improved energy efficiency in the public and commercial sectors.

The overall objective of the Action Plan for Jobs process is to support the creation of an extra 100,000 jobs in the economy by 2016, compared to the start of 2012.

The latest Quarterly National Household Survey published by the CSO shows that, on a seasonally adjusted basis, around 80,000 new jobs have been created since the start of the Action Plan process in 2012, net of a reduction of 19,000 in public sector numbers.

Employment has increased in 10 of the 14 economic sectors, including Construction, Tourism, and Professional and Scientific activities – all areas of focus for the Action Plan for Jobs.

All regions have seen employment increase and unemployment decrease since the launch of the first Action Plan for Jobs.

We are on track to achieve the target of having an extra 100,000 people at work by 2016. However, there are still many areas where there is scope to improve the environment to support job creation. I am currently preparing the 2015 Action Plan for Jobs on behalf of the Government and we will be publishing this Plan early in the New Year.

International Agreements

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions he has had with his European counterparts on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47999/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was discussed at the last EU Council of Trade Ministers on 21 November which I attended. The Council was briefed by Commissioner Malmström and took stock of the current state of play. The Council adopted a set of policy conclusions that give clear, unambiguous and reasoned political support for the TTIP negotiations. The conclusions which were agreed at Council highlight sustainable growth and jobs as a key priority for the EU, the importance of an ambitious Agreement in that context, and the importance of better communicating the scope and the benefits of the Agreement to all our stakeholders. I recalled the importance of these negotiations for jobs and economic growth, and that we needed to vigorously pursue this. I also pointed to the importance of transparency, the provision of information and communication. In this regard, I welcomed the Commissioner's plans to improve transparency and openness in these negotiations.

Action Plan for Jobs

24. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress achieved in respect of the target under the Action Plan for Jobs to reduce the regulatory burden by delivering an integrated licensing application service for the retail sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48137/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The introduction of an Integrated Licence Application Service was a disruptive reform in the Action Plan for Jobs 2013 with the delivery of such a service to the retail sector by Q4 2013. A Steering Group, chaired by the Minister for Business and Employment, with membership from the key licensing authorities, including Revenue, Local Authorities, Inland Fisheries, Irish Film Classification Office, and the Office of Tobacco Control, with a remit for retail licensing was established to oversee the process. The Steering Group considered delivering this service either through an extension of an existing platform within the State sector or an outsourced provision of the solution. The Steering Group agreed to progress the option of an outsourced provision, through a finance-design-build-operate model.

In 2014 a number of steps were taken to advance the action. Firstly a Statutory Instrument (S.I. No. 83 of 2014) was signed by the Minister of the Environment, Community and Local Government in February 2014 to extend the powers of the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) so that they could act as the Contracting Authority for this Service on behalf of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

A Request for Tender for a Single Supplier Framework Agreement for the provision of an Integrated Licensing Application Service, signed-off by the Chief State Solicitor's Office, was issued through etenders and in the EU Official Journal on 21st February 2014 with a closing date of 17th April 2014.

A contract has been awarded and the LGMA, as contracting authority, has written to the successful tenderer to inform them of the outcome of the competition and an award notice has been published in the EU Official Journal. The contract has been awarded to An Post with Escher as their technology partner.

Contract conclusions have commenced and are scheduled to be completed by the end of December 2014, subject to advice received from the Attorney General's Office. I intend then to bring a Memorandum to Government on this issue before the contract is signed.

Job Creation

25. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views on whether there may be an over-emphasis on multinationals with regard to job creation, in view of the fact that according to Forfás only 4,520 jobs were added by foreign-owned State-assisted companies in the decade between 2004 and 2013. [48147/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Foreign Direct Investment has been and continues to be an integral part of Ireland's economic development strategy. Foreign owned firms contribute substantially to Ireland's exports, jobs, expenditure in the Irish economy and to Exchequer funds. FDI plays a key role in the development of "new" sectors in Ireland, in enhancing our research, development and innovation performance and in accelerating the achievement of critical mass within sectors. In addition every 10 jobs in an IDA Ireland client company supports 7 jobs in the wider economy. IDA Ireland client companies spent €22.4bn in the Irish economy during 2013, of which €8.5bn was on payroll, and €2.6bn was on Irish sourced goods and €11.3bn was on Irish services.

The figures quoted by the Deputy in his question do not reflect the fact that in the period from 2004 to 2009, the worst year for job losses in recent years, the number of foreign owned agency supported jobs fell by 14,707 from 167,806 to 153,099. Since this Government took office, the number of foreign owned agency supported jobs rose by 18,415, from 153,911 at the

end of 2010 to 172,326 at the end of 2013.

As regards the Deputy's view that there may be an over dependence on foreign owned agency supported jobs, I would like to point out that at the end of 2013, the latest date for which we have data, the numbers employed in indigenous agency supported employment stood at 176,996, which is roughly on a par with the numbers employed in foreign owned agency supported firms, with the total numbers steadily increasing.

The Government's Action Plan for Jobs is centred on rebuilding a sustainable economy based on enterprise and exports. Exporting companies supported by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation through its agencies have recorded three strong years of employment growth, both in the creation of new jobs and in the terms of overall net change in employment when account is taken of job losses in the enterprise base.

Since the start of the Action Plan for Jobs process in 2012, employment nationally has increased by approximately 80,000 to Quarter 3 2014. Live Register figures published last week show that the number of people signing on the Register continues to decrease and the Seasonally Adjusted Standardised Unemployment Rate of 10.7% is at its lowest level since February 2009. Nonetheless, our unemployment rate is still too high and we must maintain our focus on creating a supportive environment for employment growth through the continued delivery of the Action Plan for Jobs.

Pension Provisions

26. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation as pay and pensions in payment are now processed separately in the public service, if he will introduce legislation to give the Alliance of Retired Public Servants a statutory right to access to the Labour Court and Labour Relations Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48118/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand the Alliance of Retired Public Servants was set up in the recent past to oppose cuts to Pensions. I fully appreciate the concerns of retired and deferred members of pension schemes whose schemes are being restructured, particularly where such restructuring may impact on existing or potential pension benefits. The question of whether it is appropriate that pensioner groups have access to the State's industrial relations machinery in pursuing pension scheme grievances has been raised for consideration.

It should be pointed out that the Trustees of a particular pension scheme are already required by law to act in the best interests of all the members. On that basis the trustees have to take account of the interests of the deferred and pensioner members in any proposals they make.

This is an issue to which I have given careful consideration, particularly in light of representations made to me in this regard.

In addition, my Department also consulted with the industrial relations bodies under the auspices of my Department on the issues that arise in the context of collective representation of retired and deferred members of pension schemes in such circumstances.

In this context, it is important to stress that the industrial relations system in Ireland is voluntary in nature both as regards access to the Labour Relations Commission and the Labour Court. Any change to that principle which would put in place a mandated right to be part of the process would alter fundamentally the conduct of industrial relations.

As it stands, active members of pension schemes (through their Trade Unions) regularly engage with the employer to attempt to reach a common position as regards changes to pension schemes whether as a result of a crisis in the scheme or otherwise. In all such cases the outcome of that engagement can only be a collective agreement which cannot, of itself, change the pension scheme. Any proposed changes to the scheme are effected via the mechanisms set out in the trust deeds and rules of the scheme and are at the discretion of the parties so designated in the rules/deeds of the scheme. It may be that it is within this framework that a collective approach could be most effective.

Pension Provisions

27. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a pension fund and the role of employers (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48489/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Defined Benefit pension schemes in Ireland are set up and maintained by employers on a voluntary basis. There has never been a statutory obligation on employers under Irish law to contribute to their pension scheme. Rather, when a defined benefits scheme is set up, the level of employer and employee contributions is agreed and established in contract in the scheme Trust Deeds and Rules. The Trust Deeds and Rules differ from scheme to scheme, and as with any contractual situation, contain the bounds on the level of obligation of the parties involved.

In the case of the Waterford Crystal Pension Schemes, these schemes were wound up in a situation where both the employer and the scheme were insolvent. As part of the wind-up process the assets in these schemes were distributed to meet the liabilities of the scheme to the extent that the assets were sufficient to meet these liabilities. You will be aware that the Government has approved a set of recommendations from the mediator to settle funding issues arising from the wind up of these schemes.

The costs associated with the mediated settlement will be drawn from the Central Fund. In Budget 2014 the Minister for Finance confirmed the introduction of an additional levy on pension funds at 0.15% for 2014 and 2015 to help fund the Jobs Initiative and to make provision for potential State liabilities emerging from pre-existing or future pension fund difficulties.

Carer's Allowance Applications

28. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a date for an oral hearing regarding a claim for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48504/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the appellant will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

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.

Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme

29. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons attending the part-time job incentive in September 2014. [48512/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): At the end of September 2014 there were 335 recipients of a payment under the Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme.

Pension Provisions

30. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the case of a person (details supplied) to ascertain if she is receiving full entitlements regarding pension payments. [48513/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In order to qualify for a maximum rate contributory pension, in addition to having at least 520 paid contribution weeks since first entry into insurance, an applicant must have a yearly average of 48 paid and/or credited contributions.

According to the records of the Department, the person concerned first entered insurable employment in 1963 and reached 65 years of age in November 2012. The assessment period for calculating her yearly average contributions for state pension (transition) eligibility is from 1963 to 2012 (49 years). She has a total of 1,555 reckonable paid and credited contributions over that period, giving her a yearly average of 32.

On reaching 66 years of age, the person concerned automatically transferred to state pension (contributory) at her correct weekly rate of entitlement.

Exceptional Needs Payments

31. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48521/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has no record of a claim for an exceptional needs payment from this person. Applications can be made through the local Community Welfare service.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

32. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will examine and allow payment of a domiciliary care allowance application and carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48565/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 27th November 2014. This application has been forwarded to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion. Following receipt of this opinion, a decision will be made by a Deciding Officer and notified to the person concerned. It can currently take 10 weeks to process

an application for DCA.

The department has also received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on the 28th November 2014. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

International Agreements

33. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the actions her Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if her Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48578/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Officials in the Department have engaged with COSC, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence in relation to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

In terms of income support, the Department provides a range of income supports including the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme which is considered the "safety net" within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need. Entitlement to SWA is conditional on satisfying the habitual residence condition with some exceptions. The Government has provided approximately €561 million for the various SWA schemes in 2014.

Where a claimant's safety and well-being are at risk due to domestic violence Department officials administering the SWA scheme have discretionary powers to expedite the award of a payment to the person in question.

Under the SWA scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The scheme also provides for the payment of urgent needs payments. Exceptional and urgent needs payments, unlike other payments under SWA, are not subject to the habitual residence condition. There is no automatic entitlement to an exceptional or urgent needs payment which are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

Questions Nos. 34 and 35 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

36. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry as all relevant documentation has been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48590/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare

Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 14th October 2014. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 15th December 2014 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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.

Disability Allowance Appeals

37. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry as all relevant documentation has been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48592/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 11th December 2014. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Social Welfare Code

38. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will confirm if section 27(f)(iv) of Statutory Instrument No. 312 of 1996 or any other provision exempts a person (details supplied) from having to pay PRSI on the portion of income that comes from the person's workers' director fee in CIE. [48623/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Article 27 of Statutory Instrument 312 of 1996 provides for the exemption of certain forms of income from the charge of PRSI. Article 27(f)(iv) of the Statutory Instrument exempts income received in respect of "Public Offices under the State". As the portion of income that comes from worker director fees in CIE comes within the scope of this provision, the individual is exempt from having to pay PRSI on this income.

Community Employment Schemes Funding

39. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 45 of 11 December 2014, if she will provide a table including the overall training budget of each division in her Department; the number of community

employment schemes and participants in each division in her Department; and the number of participants with respect to whom the budget allocated was exceeded in each division in her Department. [48628/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The training budget for Community Employment (CE) in 2014 is €5.896m. The budget for each Division is set out in Table 1.

Table 1: CE Training Budget by Division

Division	Training Budget 2014 (€)
Dublin Central	644,045
Dublin North	489,362
Dublin South	405,473
Mid-Leinster	395,029
Midlands North	407,158
Mid-West	435,696
North-East	385,903
North-West	434,282
West	539,340
Cork-Central	414,653
South-West	379,824
Midlands South	509,714
South East	455,839
Total	5,896,319

The number of CE schemes and the number of participants in each Division (as at the end of November 2014) is set out in Table 2.

Table 2: The number of CE Schemes, and number of participants by Division

Division	No. of CE Schemes	No. of CE Participants
Dublin Central	109	2,711
Dublin North	67	1,708
Dublin South	71	1,511
Mid-Leinster	68	1,656
Midlands North	66	1,609
Mid-West	87	1,694
North-East	51	1,501
North-West	84	1,734
West	106	2,163
Cork-Central	67	1,517
South-West	69	1,528
Midlands South	101	1,855
South East	93	1,848
Total	1,039	23,035

The training budget is based on a notional per capita allocation of €250 per CE place and

this budget is held within the DSP region. Flexibility can be applied to exceed the average rate per place within a scheme - and between schemes - once the overall Divisional budget is not exceeded. In allocating the budget to schemes, DSP Officers also take into consideration whether the training can be accessed at no cost or at a low cost from the Education and Training Boards.

Further details on the training grant and conditions are available in the CE Operation Procedures.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

40. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when rent allowance thresholds in County Meath will be brought in line with rental market values in the country; and the action she will take to ensure no person or family will be left homeless over Christmas. [48630/14]

41. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, over the past five years of the number of persons in receipt of rent supplement by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48665/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 40 and 41 together.

The Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness published in May 2014 is the Government's Strategy to bring about an end to involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. My colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government recently announced the provision of 260 additional emergency beds in Dublin to be available before Christmas to ensure that any person sleeping rough between now and Christmas will have a bed available should they choose to avail of it. Arrangements are also being made to provide the necessary accommodation in other urban areas, including Cork where an additional 20 beds are being provided.

In terms of the rent supplement scheme, the Department is currently reviewing the maximum rent limits, which will be finalised shortly. I am acutely aware of the difficulties people are experiencing in maintaining affordable rented accommodation in areas of high demand in the current market, including areas of county Meath. However, raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and could impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on many lower income workers and students. I am keeping the matter under close review.

There are approximately 71,800 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €344 million for 2014. A breakdown of recipients per county since 2008 is provided in the following tabular statement. There are currently over 1,700 rent supplement recipients in Meath, of which 520 were awarded this year, which represents over 30% of the total awarded.

Emergency actions are being undertaken in the Department through the increased use of flexibility in relation to the administration of the rent limits, including under the Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol operating in Dublin. A notice reminding all Community Welfare Service staff of their statutory discretionary power to award a supplement for rental purposes, for example, when dealing with applicants who are at risk of losing their tenancy was circulated in July 2014 and a further instruction issued last week.

Staff are increasing rent supplement payments as necessary and are actively engaging with

the relevant local authorities and local various organisations involved in homelessness. The Department is reviewing the local arrangements in place to strengthen the existing framework to ensure that the necessary supports continue to be provided in a consistent manner.

I advise that where a person in receipt of rent supplement is at risk of losing their tenancy they should make contact with the Tenancy Protection Service provided by Threshold in Dublin on 1800 454 454 or their local Community Welfare Service throughout the country.

Tabular Statement - Rent Supplement End of Year Recipient Numbers per County:

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	End Nov. 2014
Dublin	24,119	31,261	33,818	34,423	32,584	29,541	26,640
Cork	8,538	10,603	10,988	10,732	9,878	9,020	8,319
Kildare	3,275	4,161	4,409	4,447	4,338	4,135	3,703
Galway	3,733	4,989	4,829	4,615	4,134	3,983	3,591
Wexford	2,870	3,763	4,055	4,102	3,700	3,179	2,665
Limerick	2,942	3,669	3,896	3,833	3,323	2,984	2,507
Louth	1,887	2,426	2,563	2,734	2,549	2,422	2,242
Wicklow	2,066	2,699	2,613	2,719	2,495	2,381	2,115
Tipperary	2,082	2,572	2,680	2,609	2,199	2,094	1,937
Donegal	3,282	3,470	3,194	2,977	2,411	2,047	1,790
Meath	1,453	2,213	2,552	2,723	2,143	1,941	1,742
Kerry	2,252	2,398	2,339	2,278	2,037	1,888	1,726
Mayo	2,585	3,077	3,012	2,928	2,435	1,900	1,622
Westmeath	1,275	1,521	1,623	1,671	1,592	1,588	1,529
Waterford	2,126	2,267	2,332	2,098	1,773	1,556	1,437
Clare	1,441	1,780	1,937	1,961	1,722	1,547	1,359
Kilkenny	1,092	1,472	1,577	1,619	1,365	1,210	1,076
Carlow	1,161	1,498	1,484	1,440	1,239	1,108	1,074
Offaly	833	1,053	1,273	1,349	1,240	1,124	1,042
Laois	706	979	1,151	1,178	1,097	1,085	1,020
Roscommon	1,042	1,286	1,276	1,275	997	802	685
Longford	706	789	715	623	511	507	466
Sligo	733	822	787	698	591	542	457
Cavan	874	1,115	1,029	843	519	455	400
Monaghan	509	640	598	488	438	395	358
Leitrim	456	507	530	440	374	354	329
Total	74,038	93,030	97,260	96,803	87,684	79,788	71,831

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

42. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a breakdown, by location, of the current waiting times for an appointment with the Money Advice and Budgeting Service; the number of staff in each branch over the past five years; the number of full-time staff who have been recruited to the service over the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48667/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board (CIB), assists people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems, in particular those on low incomes and people living on social welfare payments. In 2014 funding of some €18.6 million was provided to MABS.

Information on the waiting times in each MABS office is compiled on a quarterly basis and posted to the www.mabs.ie website. The most recent statistics available, compiled to end of September 2014, record that the average waiting time from first point of contact to first appointment with a money adviser is some 2.53 weeks. This is a national average and can vary between offices.

In 2013, 15 additional temporary staff were assigned to MABS local services for the establishment of the Approved Intermediary Service for the purpose of processing Debt Relief Notices as part of the new insolvency service arrangements.

The following table shows the average waiting times at MABS local offices, together with the staffing compliment in each office for the period 2010 – 2014 inclusive.

Company	Waiting time 2014 Average (end Sept 2014)	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
	Weeks	wte*	wte	wte	wte	Wte
Arklow and District	2	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Athlone	1	2.25	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Ballymun	3.4	5.92	5.92	5.9	5.9	5.4
Blanchardstown	3.2	5.09	5	5.25	5.25	5
Bray	0.8	5	5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Carlow	1	5.1	5.02	5.2	5.2	5.7
Cavan	1.2	4	4	4	4	4
Charleville	2	4	3	3	3	3
Clare	2.2	4	4	4	4	4
Clondalkin	3.8	5	5	4	4	5
Cork City	1.8	9.8	7.8	6.8	6.8	7.3
Cork North	2.8	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4
Cork West	2.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Donegal North	9.8	5.5	5	5	5	5
Donegal South	4.4	2	2	2	2	2
Donegal West	0.4	2	2	2	2	2
Drogheda	2.2	3	3	3	3	3
Dublin 10 + 20	2	5.25	5.4	5.5	5.5	5.9
Dublin 12 Area	2.2	4.2	4.3	5.1	5.1	4.2
Dublin North City	5.6	4	4	4	4	4
Dublin North East	2.8	4	4	3	3	4
Dublin South East	2	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	4
Dún Laoghaire	0.8	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
Dundalk	0.8	3	3	3	3	3
Dundrum/Rathfarnham	2.4	4.7	4.1	4	4	4.1
Fingal	3.2	4.5	5	4	4	4.5

Questions - Written Answers

Company	Waiting time 2014 Average (end Sept 2014)	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Finglas Cabra	1	5	5	5	5	4.9
Galway North	1.8	4.5	3.5	3.2	3.2	3.2
Galway South	2.4	7	7.5	7	7	7
Kerry	1.8	7	7	7	7	7
Kildare	3.6	6.85	6.85	6.85	6.85	6.85
Kilkenny	1.4	4	4	4	4	4
Laois	1.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Leitrim	3.8	2.7	2.5	3.1	3.1	2.6
Liffey South West	1	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	5
Limerick	9.4	6	6	6	6	6
Longford	0.8	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Mayo North	3.6	3	3	3	3	3
Mayo South	6	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.3	3
Meath	2.4	4	4	5	5	4
Monaghan	1.8	3	3	3	3	3
Mullingar	1.4	4	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.8
Offaly	2.4	3	3	3	3	3
Roscommon	2.4	3	3	3	3	3
Sligo	3.8	4.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3
Tallaght	3	4	5	5	5	5
Tipperary North	2.4	3.5	3.5	4.5	4.5	3.5
Tipperary South	1.2	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.7
Waterford	0.8	9	5.9	5.9	5.9	6.7
Waterford West	1.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2
Wexford	1.4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
Total	(average) 2.53	222.6	214.29	213.6	213.6	213.75

*wte - whole time equivalents

Community Work Initiatives

43. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on amending the Tús scheme so that participants have the option of continuing with their placement beyond the initial 12-month period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48746/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Tús, the community work placement initiative introduced during 2011, was set up to provide short-term, work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. This initiative is being delivered through the network of local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Tús is designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness thereby improving a person's opportunity to return to the labour market. To date, over 23,000 jobseekers have participated on this initiative.

The duration of the Tús contract was set to reflect a number of inter-related elements. These

include the need to ensure that the 8,000 or so placements available remain open to those on the live register for more than 12 month, which currently number in excess of 170,000; that weaknesses in other work programmes resulting from long duration placements are not replicated in Tús and that scarce resources are optimised to the benefit of jobseekers. In addition, Tús fulfils the objectives set out in the Government's activation policies in Pathways to Work. Regular rotation of placements also ensures that the opportunities provided by Tús remain accessible to a greater number of jobseekers.

As with all programmes and schemes funded and managed by the Department, the operation of Tús will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that it reflects changes in underlying activation policies and the recovery in the overall labour market.

Pension Provisions

44. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 54 of 10 December 2014, the reply to which states that to qualify for a full contributory pension the person must have at least 520 paid contributions and satisfy a yearly average of 48 contributions, if where time has been taken off in certain years for maternity leave or where a person has been let go from employment due to a decline in business, resulting in a gap in weekly contributions, this will be taken into account when the person reaches pension age when calculating their pension contributions; and in the event that a person takes early retirement at the age of 53 or 54, what he or she must do to ensure they will continue to get credited up until their pension age at 66 years. [48757/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The State pension (contributory) is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. This is particularly important given the challenges to the future sustainability of the State pension, with increased numbers of older people living longer.

When assessing whether an individual is entitled to a State pension (contributory), and to ensure that they can maximise such entitlement, all contributions (whether paid or credited) from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account.

To qualify for a state pension (contributory) a person must:

- have at least 520 paid contributions and
- satisfy a yearly average condition (a yearly average of 48 contributions paid or credited is required for a full rate State pension (contributory), and reduced rates of payment may be payable for pensioners with lower averages).

Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes.

In the case of mothers on maternity leave, credits are awarded to workers who go on maternity benefit. Furthermore, the homemaker's scheme was introduced in 1994 to make qualification for State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age or incapacitated persons to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes.

The State pension (contributory) is intended to reward those who have paid PRSI during

their working lives, and/or have remained engaged with the labour force when they were not in a position to make such paid contributions (e.g. due to unemployment or illness). If a worker becomes unemployed or incapable of work, s/he will generally be awarded credited contributions for the duration of their social welfare claim(s), or they may sign for jobseekers credits and these credited contributions are also used in the calculation of the yearly average for pension purposes.

If a person decides to retire at 53, and they do not qualify for a social protection payment nor sign for jobseekers credits, they may qualify for a lower rate of State pension (contributory) than a person who worked up to their 66th birthday. Alternatively, they may qualify for the means-tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum personal rate of rate of which is €219.

The yearly average test has been in existence since 1961 when contributory pensions were first introduced. As stated in reply to question no. 54 of 10 December 2014, it is planned to replace this method of calculating pension entitlements with a 'total contribution approach'. The proposed date for this reform is 2020, but this may be subject to change.

Departmental Investigations

45. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the breakdown of the savings of €64,000,000 that the 20-man Garda unit has saved her Department so far this year, of which €23,000,000 was attributed to fraud; if all this money has been recovered; if the Revenue Commissioners have examined the cases where moneys were recovered; if she will use this money to reinstate the benefits cut to those most in need; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48761/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The secondment of 20 Gardaí to the Department to assist the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) with fraud investigation work only took effect from last Friday, 5th December, having been agreed earlier this year with the Minister of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. In the circumstances, it is too early to predict with any certainty the precise additional financial savings that will arise from their secondment.

The figure of €64 million refers to savings generated by the SIU resulting from their investigations up to the end of November 2014. It includes a figure of €23 million relating to overpayments established in respect of 2,113 case investigations.

As of the end of November 2014, a total of 3,972 cases of fraud have been investigated resulting in the cessation of or a reduction in a social welfare payment. Control savings of €41 million have been generated from these case investigations. These savings represent the value of prevented expenditure over a future period that would have been incurred if this investigative and control work had not been carried out.

The Department's policy is to ensure that every effort is made to prevent overpayments but, where they occur through fraud, every effort is made to recover the amounts due. In 2013, there were a total of 84,702 overpayments with a value of €127 million while the total value of recoveries was €70.7 million. People who have been overpaid social welfare payments have a liability to refund that money as they have been in receipt of money to which they were not entitled.

A social welfare debt will not become statute barred for recovery. It remains with a debtor for all future entitlement payments and can be collected thereafter from any remaining estate.

Prize Bonds

46. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the prize bond company, when issuing prize bonds, requires proof in the form of photo identification and proof of PPSN; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48519/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Minister for Finance and the National Treasury Management Agency (“the NTMA”) are each a ‘specified body’ for the purposes of sections 262 to 270 and schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended. This provides the power to the NTMA, acting on behalf of the Minister for Finance, to request holders of State Savings products to provide their PPS Number for the purposes of verifying the identity of such holders and to serve as a unique identifier of such holders, who may hold multiple State Savings products, including Prize Bonds, and/or multiple issues of such State Savings products.

The NTMA, acting on behalf of the Minister for Finance, and its agents, An Post and the Prize Bond Company, use the PPS Number for the sole purpose of the administration of State Savings products and accounts. Personal data provided by holders (including photo identification and PPSN) are processed for the purpose of the administration of State Savings products and accounts, including meeting EU Savings Directive obligations and anti-money laundering requirements under the Criminal Justice Act 2010 as amended.

Central Bank of Ireland Investigations

47. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a company (details supplied) was fined only €105,000 for breaching the Consumer Credit Act 1995, despite the fact that it has a turnover of €4.5 billion. [48552/14]

48. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the legal firm that advised the Central Bank of Ireland regarding their determination in relation to the breaches of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 by a company (details supplied); and if his attention has been drawn to conflicts of interest there. [48553/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 48 together.

The Central Bank has informed me that in any circumstance where it engages an external law firm to assist it, the Bank will ensure prior to the engagement of the firm that all appropriate checks are carried out, including a check to ensure that no concerns regarding conflicts of interest arise.

I have asked the Bank for further details in relation to these questions and it has not been able to respond in the time available. However, I will arrange for the information to be supplied to the Deputy when it becomes available.

Property Taxation Yield

49. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue raised annually in local property tax in County Cork and nationally since its introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48556/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that compliance data in relation to the Local Property Tax (LPT) is available broken down by city and county councils nationally and the most up to date figures for LPT collected in 2013 and 2014 are available on the Commissioners' website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/lpt-compliance.html>. Updates to these statistics will be published in due course.

The Commissioners have confirmed that by the end of December 2013, €318m had been transferred by Revenue to the Exchequer in respect of LPT and the 2014 LPT Exchequer receipts to 30 November 2014 are €449m. Exchequer receipts for LPT also include payments of Household Charge.

Tobacco Smuggling

50. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue that has been lost annually on illegal black market cigarettes since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48559/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will appreciate that estimating the scale of any illegal activity, and the tax loss to which it gives rise, is necessarily difficult and that estimates of such loss need to be viewed with caution. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the extent of the illegal trade in cigarettes is estimated through annual surveys of smokers that are carried out for them and for the National Tobacco Control Office of the Health Services Executive by Ipsos MRBI. The results of those surveys for 2011, 2012 and 2013 suggest that the losses to the exchequer in excise duty and VAT attributable to the illegal trade in cigarettes were €258 million, €240 million and €212 million respectively, assuming that the illegal cigarettes consumed displaced the equivalent full tax paid quantities of cigarettes.

A further survey in respect of 2014 is underway and it is expected that the results will be available towards the end of the first quarter of 2015.

VAT Exemptions

51. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a change to the EU VAT directive and relevant orders to allow for a zero VAT rate on defibrillators as a measure to increase their availability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48602/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The VAT rating of goods and services is constrained by the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. Defibrillators, other than implantable defibrillators, are liable to VAT at the standard rate of 23%. Parts or accessories and training are also liable to VAT at the standard rate.

There is no provision in the EU VAT Directive that would make it possible to exempt from VAT or apply a zero rate to the supply of defibrillators. Under the VAT (Refund of Tax) (No. 15) Order, 1981 it is possible for individuals to obtain repayment of VAT expended on certain goods and appliances which assist persons with a disability to overcome that disability. In this context, a defibrillator purchased by or on behalf of an individual may qualify for a VAT refund.

With regard to making changes at EU level to provide that other goods or services can apply at the zero rate, I would point out that zero-rating is an historical derogation from the normal

VAT rules, where the intention is that such VAT treatment is temporary, and should be removed over time. In addition, only a small number of Member States apply zero-rated VAT treatment and the EU Commission has actively been trying to simplify the VAT rating system to improve the efficiency of the Single Market. For these reasons, I do not consider that a proposal to seek a zero rate of VAT for the purchase of defibrillators for community and sporting organisations would succeed.

VAT Exemptions

52. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide for a change to the EU VAT directive and relevant orders to allow for a zero VAT rate on EPI pens as a measure to increase their availability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48603/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT rating of goods and services is constrained by the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. EPI pens, which provide injectable medicine, are subject to the standard rate of VAT rate of 23%. While Ireland is permitted to continue to apply a zero-rate to oral medicines it may not apply a zero rate to additional goods such as non-oral or injectable medicines.

With regard to making changes at EU level to provide that other goods or services can apply at the zero rate, I would point out that zero-rating is an historical derogation from the normal VAT rules, where the intention is that such VAT treatment is temporary, and should be removed over time. In addition, only a small number of Member States apply zero-rated VAT treatment and the EU Commission has actively been trying to simplify the VAT rating system to improve the efficiency of the Single Market. For these reasons, I do not consider that a proposal to seek a zero rate of VAT for the purchase of EPI pens would succeed.

National Payments Plan Implementation

53. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to abolish or phase out the use of personal cheques; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48605/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): While the Government does not plan to abolish the use of personal cheques, the National Payments Plan which I launched in April 2013 aims to reduce the overall reliance on cash and cheques and facilitate a movement to more efficient forms of electronic payments. The Plan analysed the extent of usage of personal cheques and recognised that elements of Irish society, such as the elderly, will continue to rely on cheques to ensure their participation in and access to the financial services framework. In that regard the Plan acknowledges that movement away from the usage of cheques by personal consumers will be encouraged by the availability of attractive alternative payment options from financial services providers. Some evidence is emerging of that transition through the increased availability of broader e-banking and mobile payment options but it is anticipated that this process will be ongoing for personal cheque users.

Credit Unions

54. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the consequences for the persons of Newbridge, County Kildare that arise from the closure of credit union services at the end of the current year; if his attention has been further drawn to the operations of the charities regulator that have caused the local parish savings club to cease operations; the type of support available to low income families; if he will further indicate the action he and his Department will take to facilitate the re-establishment of a credit union in Newbridge, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48618/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): While the Government is absolutely determined to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement and has highlighted its support for the return of credit union services to Newbridge, my role as Minister for Finance is to ensure the legal framework for credit unions is appropriate for the effective operation and supervision of credit unions. In line with the Credit Union Act, 1997 (as amended) the registration of a new credit union and the extension of a common bond of an existing credit union is the responsibility of the Registry of Credit Unions at the Central Bank.

As the Deputy is aware, under a High Court order dated 10 November 2013, the assets and liabilities of Newbridge Credit Union Limited (excluding the premises) were transferred to permanent tsb plc (ptsb). However, the commercial relationship between ptsb and the former members of Newbridge Credit Union is a matter for ptsb and those individuals.

The Central Bank has stated that it would be open to meeting any party interested in restoring credit union services to the Newbridge area and will consider any application in relation to the extension of an existing common bond to include all or part of the common bond of Newbridge. The Central Bank has further informed me that, to date they have not received any formal proposals from any local group in relation to the establishment of a new credit union, but have stated that they will consider any proposal received.

Responsibility for policy on the regulation of charities is a matter for the Department of Justice and Equality. I am advised by the Charities Regulatory Authority that it would not be appropriate to provide information on individual engagements with charities, given the potential for reputational damage to such charities in such circumstances.

VAT Exemptions

55. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the UK Chancellor who has announced measures to provide a VAT exemption for mountain rescue teams; his plans to introduce a similar measure in this State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48661/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. While we can maintain the zero rating on those goods and services which were zero-rated before 1 January 1991, the goods and services referred to by the Deputy do not fall within this category. Similarly, Member States may only apply a reduced VAT rate to those goods and services set out in Annex III of the EU VAT Directive (2006/112/EC). Safety equipment is not included in this annexe. Therefore, it is not possible to apply a zero or reduced VAT rate to these goods and services.

I note the statement from the UK Chancellor was to the effect that from April 2015 search and rescue charities will be able to have supplies of certain equipment zero rated by suppliers: this extends the existing UK treatment, which has existed since before 1991, whereby suppliers

can zero rate supplies of specified goods and services to charities in very specific circumstances. In Ireland, there are no provisions to allow a charity engaged in search and rescue operations to recover VAT on its inputs and there is no scope within the VAT Directive to introduce a zero rating scheme where none existed at 1 January 1991.

Universal Social Charge Exemptions

56. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if persons living here who are 80 years of age and whose only source of income is a pension from the UK, and where this amount is over €400 per week, are liable to universal social charge in respect of any portion of their income for 2013, 2014 and for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48721/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A UK pension that is similar to a social welfare pension in this State is not liable to USC. Other than such pensions, however, Irish resident individuals are liable to pay tax, including universal social charge (USC), on income arising from Irish and foreign sources, including occupational pensions.

Individuals aged 70 years or over, whose aggregate income for the year is €60,000 or less, will only pay USC at rates of 1.5% on the first €12,012 of income and a maximum rate of 3.5% on the balance in 2015. These rates were 2% on the first €10,036 of income, and a maximum rate of 4% on the balance in 2013 and 2014.

However, the UK and Ireland have a convention in place to eliminate double taxation on income arising in one State where the individual is resident in the other State. Irish tax, under the terms of the convention, includes income tax and USC. If the individual has paid UK tax on the income, a credit is allowed in computing the Irish income tax and USC liabilities to ensure that the income is not subject to double taxation. Further information on the USC is available from the Revenue website at:

<http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/usc/universal-social-charge-faqs.pdf>

Fuel Laundering

57. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints of petrol-stretching in Counties Westmeath and Longford, received by the Customs and Excise in each of the months since May 2014; the number which were investigated; the number which are ongoing in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48723/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners, who are responsible for tackling fuel fraud, that they are very aware of the risks posed to consumers' vehicles, legitimate businesses and the exchequer by all forms of such fraud.

Revenue has, over the recent past, received reports from a variety of locations around the country of problems relating to petrol quality, and suggestions that these problems are attributable to petrol stretching. Revenue investigates all complaints of this kind and Revenue officers have visited and taken samples from every filling station about which a complaint has been made about fuel contamination, and these samples have been referred to the State Laboratory for analysis.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the numbers of complaints of this kind received by Revenue relating to counties Westmeath and Longford in the period since May 2014 is 10, comprised of 2 in September, 3 in October and 5 in November. An analysis of the

complaints on a county basis is set out in the following table. Enquiries into these complaints are on-going.

Complaints Received in Relation to Petrol Stretching

County	May	June	July	August	Sept	October	November	December(to 12th)
West-meath	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	0
Long-ford	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0

Normally when ‘fraudsters’ attempt to stretch petrol, they add methanol, kerosene or other low excise duty agents. To date, 208 samples have been referred by Revenue to the State Laboratory for analysis. Despite extensive testing by the State Laboratory, no evidence of any prohibited stretching agent has been found in any of the samples, except two samples taken from one site. The conclusive results received in that particular case has resulted in the seizure of the product and a file is being prepared for prosecution.

Following a series of further tests conducted by the State Laboratory, results indicated the presence of traces of road diesel in several samples taken from a variety of locations. This could indicate that petrol was contaminated with road diesel at some point in time. There is no rational economic reason or fraudulent incentive for anyone to deliberately mix normal road diesel with petrol. This contamination could have taken place earlier in the summer, well ahead of the problems manifesting themselves in cars.

If the problems that have come to light were caused by an unintended contamination as a result of diesel being inadvertently mixed into petrol at some point along the supply chain, there would be no Revenue offence involved. However, the Deputy can be assured that the Revenue Commissioners are vigorously investigating the possibility of tax fraud being associated with the identified problems. In any instances where the analysis of petrol samples by the State Laboratory indicates the presence of illegal stretching agents, Revenue will take swift and robust action and pursue prosecutions against offenders where possible.

I am also advised by Revenue that they undertake, on an ongoing basis, an extensive programme of compliance and enforcement actions to ensure adherence to the legal requirements governing the supply and sale of mineral oil and to allow action to be taken against fraud. This involves, among other things, carrying out analysis of the monthly oil movement returns that oil traders are required to make, and of other supply chain data. In addition, Revenue officers conduct control or compliance visits to mineral oil traders, during which they examine transport and movement documentation and take samples of fuel for analysis.

In addition, the Revenue Commissioners are working closely with An Garda Síochána and share information and intelligence on this issue. Also, as part of Revenue’s normal operating procedures, fuel delivery tankers are challenged when encountered by enforcement officers, particularly throughout the Border Midlands West Region. No cases of contaminated petrol have been identified as a result of these checks from June 2014 to date.

I wish to assure the Deputy that I am satisfied the Revenue Commissioners are allocating resources to this issue and taking all possible actions to identify the problem and challenge any instances of identified fuel fraud including, where possible, pursuing prosecutions against offenders.

IBRC Liquidation

58. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an itemised list of all disposals made by the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation prior to the appointment of a special liquidator; the original value of the liability or loan concerned, in each case; the amount realised at disposal; the method the disposal was made through including examinership, receivership, direct sale or other; the date at which the disposal was made; if he will provide the same information in respect of the period IBRC has been in special liquidation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48755/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): With regards to the information requested on those transactions that have taken place both prior and since the appointment of the Special Liquidators, I am advised that this information is considered commercially sensitive and therefore will not be releasing the information.

However, the Special Liquidators prepared a progress report in June of this year which includes details in relation to the sales process concluded by the Special Liquidators up to the date of this report (6th June 2014). The progress report is published on the Department of Finance website (<http://www.finance.gov.ie/news-centre/press-releases/progress-report-update-successful-special-liquidation-ibrc>).

Furthermore, under Section 306 of the Companies Act, the Special Liquidators are required to send to the registrar of companies a statement containing the prescribed particulars about the proceedings in and position of the liquidation of IBRC after 2 years from the date IBRC was put into liquidation (6 February 2013).

Pension Provisions

59. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason an overpayment occurred in relation to a pension and gratuity in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48502/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): It would not be appropriate for me to comment publicly on the details of individual pensions cases.

Pensions overpayment cases are unusual but do sometimes arise where a case is particularly complex. Where the collation of relevant data has not been completed before an individual retires, every effort is made to ensure that the retiree is not left out of pocket, even if this may mean that an overpayment may need to be recouped in the future.

The payment of public service pensions is governed by well-established rules set out in published circulars and relevant legislation, including the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012. Section 52 of that Act is particularly important. It specifies that, with effect from 28 July 2012, any Civil or Public Servant who has the equivalent of 40 years service or more cannot accrue any further reckonable service from that date.

Property Valuations

60. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps being taken to expedite the process of property valuations where large new businesses, which should be subject to immediate rating but which will not have to pay rates as there is no facility

to retrospectively collect such rates in the absence of the immediate valuation process being carried out, are opening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48524/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Under section 28 (4) of the Valuation Act 2001, a Revision Officer appointed by the Commissioner of Valuation may carry out a revision of valuation in relation to a particular property only if a material change of circumstances has occurred such as the coming into being of a new building, a change in value due to structural alterations of an existing building, total or partial demolition of a building or a sub-division or amalgamation of relevant property. The Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the performance of his function under the Act.

I have been informed by the Valuation Office that when a request for revision of valuation is received, a revision officer is appointed to value the subject property and when valued a proposed valuation certificate is issued to the occupier of the property, in accordance with section 29 of the Act. The occupier will then have 28 days to make representations to the Revision Officer if dissatisfied with any material particular stated in the proposed valuation certificate. Having considered any representations received, the Revision Officer will issue a final certificate of valuation to the occupier of the property and to the local authority and the property is then entered on the relevant valuation list. A reasonable period of time must be allowed to carry out the valuation, for the periods provided for in the legislation to make representations, and for those representations to be considered. There are no significant delays to the valuation of new premises.

Where a newly constructed commercial property which is deemed to be a “new build” is entered on a valuation list it is liable for the ‘property entry levy’ charge under the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Act 2006 which is equivalent to rates and levied on all newly erected or newly constructed relevant properties in the year such properties are valued and entered on a valuation list.

International Agreements

61. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48577/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has no policy role in relation to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. The matter is primarily for the Minister for Justice and Equality and, I understand, a number of other Ministers whose policy remit is also relevant to the provisions of the Convention.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

62. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the next higher executive officer competition will be held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48587/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In Budget 2015, I was pleased to be able to announce that there will be a targeted programme of recruitment into the Civil Service to address service needs and a shortfall in key skills commencing in

late 2014 and continuing during 2015.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that a number of open competitions have already taken place or are in process including:

- Clerical Officer with an expectation of approximately 300 recruits;
- Executive Officer ICT Specialist;
- Executive Officer General Service;
- Administrative Officer - Graduate Economist and Graduate Recruit General Service.

I also expect competitions to take place in the first quarter of 2015 for Assistant Principal, both open and inter-departmental, and an open competition for Principal Officer.

Further consideration will be given in the New Year to resourcing and staffing needs for the Civil Service, including the timing of any competition for Higher Executive Officer.

Public Sector Staff Career Breaks

63. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding career breaks and leave of absence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48658/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The position is that where an individual has availed of a career break, that person is not guaranteed that s/he will return to the same position as s/he previously held.

I refer the Deputy to my previous reply to his similar question regarding career break schemes and the return to work provisions of such schemes. (Reply No. 86 dated 4 December, 2014). The return to work provisions are similar in the cases of Circular 18/1998 and Circular 4/2013.

The Deputy should note that in this instance, I am referring to the Civil Service Career Break Schemes for civil servants. The career break scheme does not apply to elected members of the Oireachtas. Other career break schemes in the wider public service are a matter for other Ministers with responsibility for those sectors.

Work Permit Applications

64. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if Ireland will be accepting applications for work permits from Filipino nurses next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48550/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Nursing is an eligible occupation for consideration for an employment permit, and is currently included on the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List in Regulations pursuant to the Employment Permits (Amendment) Act 2014. Occupations on this list are those deemed to be highly skilled, in short supply, and necessary for economic or social development in the State. The Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List is subject to regular review to ensure that the occupations included on it reflect the current skills needs of the economy; such a review will take place during 2015, so applicants should be aware that the list is subject to change with changing circumstances.

With regard to applicants from the Philippines, applications for employment permits are considered on the basis of the requirement for particular skills and on the basis of the criteria for a particular type of employment permit, rather than the nationality of the prospective employee.

International Agreements

65. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter [48576/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. My Department was represented at the July 2014 meeting of the Council of Europe Inter-Departmental Group at which the Department of Justice and Equality gave an update on the status of Ireland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention. I am not aware of any matters within my area of responsibility that impact implementation of the Convention.

Employment Rights

66. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the new compliance and enforcement measures he proposes to introduce to provide a more proportionate, efficient and effective enforcement of employment law; if this will include payments due under the Payment of Wages Act 1991 where an employer ceases operating but does not go into liquidation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48648/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Work which I am currently undertaking on the reform of the State's employment rights and industrial relations structures is at an advanced stage. Provision has been made in the Workplace Relations Bill 2014 for a range of enhanced compliance measures, including the use of Compliance Notices and Fixed Payment Notices. The Bill also makes provision for the introduction of a more effective and streamlined system for the enforcement of awards from WRC Adjudicators and-or the Labour Court under employment rights legislation via the District Court. I am satisfied that these new compliance and enforcement measures will provide for more proportionate, efficient and effective enforcement of employment law, including the Payment of Wages Act 1991. As the Deputy is aware, my colleague, An Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, has responsibility for the Insolvency Payments Scheme, which operates under the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Acts. The purpose of the scheme is to protect certain outstanding pay-related entitlements due to employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer. These entitlements include wages, holiday pay, sick pay, payment in lieu of minimum notice due under the Minimum Notice & Terms of Employment Acts, 1973-2001, and certain pension contributions. Various other statutory awards made by the Employment Appeals Tribunal, Rights Commissioners, etc., are also covered by the scheme.

Where a person's former employer was a limited company, the company must be in liquidation or receivership in order for the person to be eligible to claim under the insolvency payments scheme. In such circumstances, the liquidator or receiver becomes the relevant officer for submitting claims as he or she has access to the company records and can certify that the amounts claimed are in order.

There are companies which cease trading without engaging in a formal winding-up process

and in some such cases those employers may owe monies to their employees. Such employees are not eligible for payments under the insolvency payments scheme. I am informed that the Department of Social Protection is currently reviewing the position to establish what, if anything, can be done to progress payments to individuals in these situations. The Department of Social Protection is not in a position to indicate when this review will be completed.

IDA Site Visits

67. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Industrial Development Agency Ireland-sponsored visits by entrepreneurs and other companies to counties Westmeath and Longford to date in 2014; the attempts made by his Department and IDA Ireland to secure industry for the large IDA site at Mailinstown, Mullingar, County Westmeath; the success rate that has been scheduled in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48653/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that during 2014 there have been 8 site visits to Westmeath and no site visits to Longford. Longford and Westmeath are marketed as part of IDA Ireland's Midlands Region, which also includes the counties of Roscommon, Laois and Offaly. The Region is marketed as having a strong cluster in Medical Technology and Life Sciences and is home to key clients such as Ark Consulting in Longford and Abbott, Covidien, Integra, GeneMedix elsewhere in the region generally.

In addition, the region is home to International Business Services companies such as Teleflex, AXA, NPD Group and PPD. All of these companies are an attraction for potential IDA Ireland clients to locate in the Midlands and to provide employment opportunities for people living in both Westmeath and Longford.

Counties Longford and Westmeath are home to 24 IDA Ireland client companies employing almost 3,000 people.

As well as the FDI sector, there are over 4,000 people employed in Enterprise Ireland-supported jobs in Westmeath and Longford with over 600 employed in the medical technology-related industries in the indigenous sector, in areas such as manufacturing to delivery of elements of the supply chain.

The arrival of Jazz Pharmaceuticals to Athlone combined with the announcement of investment by Alexion Pharma and the existing presence of Alkermes, identifies a new cluster in the Midlands in biopharmaceuticals employing in the region of 400 staff and this will be presented to potential new name companies in the market place.

The IDA Mullingar Business and Technology Park is an essential infrastructure to provide for FDI clients and also for indigenous companies interested in developing their business in the Midlands. For example, Patterson Pumps acquired a 1.62 hectare site from IDA under leasehold title in the Mullingar Business and Technology Park and are currently on site. IDA Ireland continues to market the Park through its network of overseas offices and present it to its client base should the facility be suitable to locational and business requirements.

IDA Ireland recognises the challenges for Ireland and its regions in attracting FDI and, with this in mind, a new IDA strategy will be launched early in the New Year, detailing goals and the broad direction IDA will take to accomplish them over the next five years.

I have been working with my Department on the development of a framework for the for-

mulation of Regional Enterprise Strategies that will enable us to identify the sustainable competitive strengths of each region and to better integrate the efforts of the enterprise development agencies and other regional stakeholders in supporting enterprise growth and jobs in areas of potential. It is my intention that this framework will be applied initially to produce action-oriented plans to support enterprise growth and jobs in the Midlands region and the South East region. Learning in these regions will inform any adaptations that might need to be made prior to the framework being applied to other regions in the course of 2015.

Science and Technology Groups

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he expects industry here to avail of technology and innovation as a means of enhancing productivity in the manufacturing and services sectors in the future based on the trend over the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48692/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Damien English): My Department, and the relevant State Agencies under its remit, have a clear focus on the role of innovation as a key driver of business success and growth. Enterprise Ireland, IDA and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), provide a range of innovation and technology development programmes that deliver financial, technical and experiential support. These programmes help companies become more innovative and encourage and support competitiveness. They help grow sales and exports which in turn will lead to sustainable employment. Innovation is a key characteristic of growing companies in both the Manufacturing and Services sectors. By way of illustration, in 2013 SFI had links to 65 per cent of the jobs announced by IDA in fields covered by SFI's legal remit. The importance of innovation and technology to Ireland's on-going and future economic recovery is well recognised by the Government as being crucial to growth in both our indigenous and FDI sectors. Evidence, from both the EU and internationally, shows that the Government's strategy of accelerating the economic and societal return on our Science Technology and Innovation investment is paying off. While it is not possible to fully disaggregate the contribution of Innovation and Technology to job creation, all the evidence is that it is very significant, as Ireland moves up the value chain and exploits our competitive position in knowledge based activity. We have actively pursued the availability of EU funding for Research and Innovation and, in particular, we will ensure that we will access significant funding from both the new EU *Horizon 2020* and the new *EU INTERREG V Programmes*, to further enhance Irish business capability.

Measures designed to support industrial growth were pursued in the *Action Plan for Jobs 2013 and 2014* and included encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting start-up activity, further improving our skills base, assisting our businesses to grow, improved access to finance by SMEs and developing and deepening opportunities from global investment. Work is currently underway to draft our *2015 Action Plan for Jobs*, which will continue to drive this agenda.

Job Losses

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs lost in the manufacturing sector in each of the past five years to date; the number of jobs created in the same period; the future expectations for the continuation of the trend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48694/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The informa-

tion requested by the Deputy, as ascertained from the Annual Employment Survey undertaken by Forfás (now incorporated into my Department), is given in the following table. As clearly illustrated, there were very significant net job losses in the Manufacturing Sector for the years 2009 and 2010, as had also been the case in the previous few years also. This negative trend was reversed in 2011 and a positive net position has continued in the last 2 years also. To address this decline, I initiated the development of a new Manufacturing Strategy (completed in 2013) and also an in-depth analysis of the Skills Needs of the sector, which was also finalised last year. Implementation of the key recommendations of both these reports is underway, especially through the *Action Plan for Jobs* process and I am confident that we can continue to enhance the development of Manufacturing in Ireland, thereby pursuing additional job creation in that sector.

Manufacturing jobs lost and gained 2009 – 2013

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Losses	-29,177	-14,494	-12,527	-8,599	-8,182
Gains	7,140	8,617	11,622	10,879	10,719
Net Change	-22,037	-5,877	-905	2,280	2,537

Job Losses

70. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of indigenous jobs lost and created in the manufacturing and services sectors in each of the past five years to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48695/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Enterprise Ireland's mission is to support indigenous industry, working with entrepreneurs, Irish businesses, and the research and investment communities to develop Ireland's international trade, innovation, and competitiveness. The ultimate objective is increased employment and prosperity in Ireland. Enterprise Ireland works with High Potential Start-ups (HPSUs) with a capability to start a business and sell in export markets, Small and Medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in manufacturing and internationally traded services, large companies employing 250 or more, and, Irish-based food and natural resource companies that are overseas owned or controlled. Every year my Department, in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland, conducts an Annual Employment survey. The results for the 2014 survey will be available in January 2015.

Table 1 refers to the full time indigenous job losses and gains for the Manufacturing and Services sectors for the last 5 years based on the 2013 Annual Employment Survey of Enterprise Ireland's clients.

The recently established Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) provide financial support to enterprises in the manufacturing or internationally traded services sector, which over time, can develop into strong export entities and graduate to the Enterprise Ireland portfolio.

Information in relation to the number of jobs created, jobs lost and net jobs by the LEOs – formerly County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) - for the years 2010-2013 are set out in Table 2. Statistical information for the LEOs/CEBs is collated on an annual basis so details in relation to 2014 are not yet available. Prior to 2010, CEBs reported jobs data on a different basis i.e. only on the number of jobs existing in CEB supported companies and the change in this figure since the previous year.

LEO data is not disaggregated between Manufacturing and Services sectors. The Deputy should note that the figure for the net number of jobs is determined by the sum of the number of

net full-time jobs and half of the number of part-time jobs for each year in question.

Table 1 : Enterprise Ireland

Services	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Full-time Gains	3018	2716	2506	5094	4750
Full-time Losses	4962	3297	2376	3035	2264
Net	-1944	-581	130	2059	2486
Manufacturing					
Full-time Gains	4425	5477	6570	7767	7782
Full-time Losses	21559	10251	6694	6488	6648
Net	-17134	-4774	-124	1279	1134

Table 2 : LEOs/CEBs

Years	Full Time Gains	Full Time Losses	Other Time Gains	Other Time Losses	Net Full Time	Net Other Time	Net (Full Time + (Other Time/2))
2013	5278	-3967	3542	-3292	1311	250	1436
2012	4858	-4602	3772	-3003	256	769	640.5
2011	5331	-5901	3844	-3071	-570	773	-183.5
2010	4510	-4958	2955	-2296	-448	659	-118.5

Foreign Direct Investment

71. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs lost and created through foreign direct investment in each of the past four years and to date in 2014; the future expectations in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48696/14]

72. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which Ireland remains an attractive location for foreign direct investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48698/14]

75. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which other European locations have been noted as serious competitors for foreign direct investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48701/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71, 72 and 75 together.

The Forfás Annual Employment survey reports on the job gains and losses in companies supported by the industrial development agencies. Data is gathered on an annualised basis and is aggregated at county level. Data for 2014 will not be available until early in 2015. Details of the number of jobs gained and lost in companies that are supported by IDA Ireland are set out in the following tabular statement.

Attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Ireland has been one of the key pillars of Ireland's industrial policy over the last 40 years. That policy has proved to be particularly successful as, at the end of 2013 there were 161,112 people employed in IDA client companies. At the beginning of January 2014 IDA Ireland assumed responsibility for companies that had been

clients of Shannon Development thereby increasing the number of people employed in IDA Ireland client companies to in excess of 166,000.

Ireland continues to compete very well in the international marketplace for investment. For example over 100 investments were secured by IDA Ireland in the first six months of 2014, compared to 70 at the same time in 2013. Of the investments secured, 40% came from companies investing in Ireland for the first time. Projects approved during the first half of 2014 will lead to the creation of 8,000 jobs during 2014 and over future years as the companies roll out their investment plans.

Ireland is very much the number one location of choice of companies that want to internationalise. US corporations are choosing Ireland as the location of choice for their global operations. Ireland is now a strong exporting nation, with particularly strong performances in sectors such as ICT, Med Tech and Pharma.

In recent days IBM's key Global Locations Report described Ireland as the "top performer in the world" in terms of the quality of the investments that are attracted here.

Ireland is a location which large multinationals know and trust. They have been coming to Ireland for decades, for our talent pool, competitive tax offering, technology infrastructure and track record. Forbes magazine named Ireland as the best country in the world to do business in December 2013.

Within Europe, Ireland's FDI performance positions us in absolute terms inside the top ten European locations for investment projects, with the UK, Germany and France the top locations. The range of countries competing for FDI in Europe demonstrates the intensity of the marketplace to secure investments for Ireland.

The economics of the past 5 years has changed Europe's FDI landscape. Over the period, the UK, Germany, Netherlands and Belgium have maintained investor confidence, confirming their position as safe havens for FDI, with low risk and sustainable profitability. Ireland successfully adapted to the demands of the international economy and cost competitiveness, talent availability and targeted sectoral focus were underpinned by the strong economic management and certainty on the 12.5% corporate tax rate.

The United States continues to be the largest single investor in Europe accounting for about 25% of all inward investment projects and job creation. While Ireland is a very significant recipient of US FDI, the competition is intense with the UK, Germany and France the major overall beneficiaries of US investment into Europe.

That having been said, IDA Ireland recognises the challenges for Ireland and its regions in attracting FDI and, with this in mind, a new IDA Ireland strategy will be launched early in the New Year, detailing goals and the broad direction IDA Ireland will take to accomplish them over the next five years.

Table showing the number of jobs gained and lost in IDA Ireland client companies in each of the 5 years, 2009 to 2013 inclusive

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No of Companies	1,087	1,083	1,088	1,127	1,153
Total Jobs	144,843	146,419	152,176	159,144	166,184
New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	6,322	14,279	14,494	15,209	13,552
Gross Losses	-21,316	-12,703	-8,737	-8,241	-6,512

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Net Change	-14,994	1,576	5,757	6,968	7,040

Economic Competitiveness

73. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he continues to monitor the cost base for Irish industry with particular reference to comparison with other adjoining and EU jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48699/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Cost competitiveness is an important aspect of Ireland's overall competitiveness. Substantial progress has been made in terms of improving Ireland's competitiveness in recent years.

The real Harmonised Competitiveness Indicator (HCI) is a measure of the trade-weighted exchange rate for Ireland, adjusted for relative price developments. In October 2014, Ireland's real HCI fell by 3.9 per cent year on year. A fall indicates an improvement in price competitiveness and leaves Irish-based firms better equipped to compete on the international market. Relatively low consumer price inflation over the last five years has meant that Irish price levels have fallen considerably relative to our euro area peers.

There has been a significant improvement in economy-wide cost competitiveness. The European Commission in its autumn forecasts estimate that real unit labour costs in Ireland will fall by 4.3 per cent annually in 2014 which is the largest decline across all EU Member States and compares with a fall of 1.2 per cent in the UK, and increases of 0.1 per cent in the EU, 0.2 per cent in the US and 0.3 per cent in the euro over the same time period. Competitiveness has been achieved through wage moderation vis-a-vis trading partners as well as productivity improvements.

We continue to monitor Ireland's cost competitiveness on a regular basis. This is specifically required under the Action Plan for Jobs 2014. Action 94 requires the National Competitiveness Council to "Benchmark key business costs and publish a report highlighting areas where Irish enterprise costs are out of line with key competitors".

The report concentrates on the costs that are largely domestically determined such as labour, property, energy, water, waste, communications and business services. The NCC note that Ireland's cost base has improved across a range of metrics over the last four or five years. This has made Irish firms more competitive internationally and made Ireland a more attractive location for firms to base their operations in. However, despite these improvements, the NCC note that it is essential that we continue to focus on reducing costs that comprise a significant percentage of business costs and that are out of line with those in competitor countries.

Addressing Ireland's international cost competitiveness, therefore, remains a key economic priority for Government.

Research and Development Supports

74. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which smaller indigenous companies may avail of assistance by way of support for research and innovation, with consequent improved job retention and creation prospects; the extent to which he sees such smaller companies being in a position to avail of such assistance

in the current and following years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48700/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Damien English): Investment in Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) is a key economic differentiator which can support Irish companies of all scales to adapt to, and excel in a global market which in turn leads to increased exports and jobs. As a result the Government considers that it is critical that Irish companies are supported to engage in RD&I. National statistics show that companies engaged in RD&I are gaining an increasing share of sales, export sales and are accounting for increasing shares of employment. RDI performing firms have also demonstrated better employment retention during recent years. Exports from R&D performing companies increased significantly during the 10 years to end 2013 while over the same period exports for non R&D performing companies decreased significantly.

Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland, provide a spectrum of science, technology and RD&I development programmes that deliver financial, technical and experiential support to help companies become more innovative, encourage and support competitiveness, and help them grow their sales and exports in order to create a climate in which sustainable employment will grow and expand.

Enterprise Ireland will support over 1,000 companies to engage in R&D in 2015. These supports will include in-company R&D projects via the R&D Fund, small to medium sized collaborative projects with researchers in higher level institutions under the Innovation Voucher and Innovation Partnership programmes and large consortium-based research via sector specific Technology Centres.

Evidence from the evaluation of the range of Enterprise Ireland RDI programmes shows the direct return on this investment by way of impact on turnover. For example, companies supported by Enterprise Ireland to engage in collaborative R&D via the Innovation Partnership scheme created €6.69 in company turnover for every €1 Enterprise Ireland invested in the scheme which illustrates the considerable growth potential of engaging in this economically advantageous activity.

Aligned with this suite of supports, which are suitable for and available to companies based in Ireland of all sizes and stages of development, is a strong promotional strategy which seeks to inform companies of these incentives while also encouraging them to apply and reap the economic benefits from this economically advantageous activity.

Enterprise Ireland's promotional approach seeks to have as broad a reach as possible. It ranges from "one to one" promotion between Enterprise Ireland client companies and their Development Advisors, to larger "one to many" promotional activities that include web based notifications, social media activity, national media and specific Enterprise Ireland events.

One such event, coordinated by Enterprise Ireland on behalf of my Department, was the National Innovation for Industry Showcase held on 2 December 2014 in the National Conference Centre which was the first convention, in one location, of all the Irish State-supported large scale research centres, technology centres and national research institutes and facilities. The event introduced industry of all sizes to the excellent scientific research and disruptive technologies being developed in these centres and institutes and which are delivering solutions for industry in key areas including energy, food, health and medical technologies, ICT, manufacturing and services. It also provided an excellent opportunity for these centres to engage with companies as potential collaborators and to raise the awareness of the range of complementary RD&I supports available to companies in Ireland.

Continued and intensified promotion such as this will continue during 2015 to ensure that

as many SMEs as possible avail of the RD&I supports available to gain competitive advantage. Within the constraints of our economic circumstances, the Government for its part is continuing to prioritise the funding available for research, development and innovation and critically, maximising the impact of this investment on jobs and the economy.

Finally, the Government also has in place the R&D Tax Credit. This relief provides a 25% tax credit for qualifying Research and Development expenditure for companies engaged in in-house qualifying research and development. This Tax Credit is also available to Irish SMEs. Arising from Budget 2015, the R&D tax credit is being placed on a full volume basis with the removal of the 2003 base year expenditure criterion from 1st January 2015.

Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 71.

Job Creation Data

76. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a breakdown of the level of employment and job creation in companies supported by Industrial Development Agency Ireland and Enterprise Ireland for each of the past five years in counties Westmeath and Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48751/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have been advised by IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland that in 2013, there were just under 3,000 IDA Ireland-supported positions and over 4,000 people employed in Enterprise Ireland-supported jobs in Westmeath and Longford. 2014 figures will not be published until early in the New Year. IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland have a strong presence in Co. Longford and Co. Westmeath. The breakdown of employment in the counties and by agency is outlined in the following tabular statement.

Longford and Westmeath are marketed as part of IDA Ireland's Midlands Region, which also includes the counties of Roscommon, Laois and Offaly. The Region is marketed as having a strong cluster in Medical Technology and Life Sciences and is home to key clients such as Ark Consulting in Longford and Abbott, Covidien, Integra, GeneMedix elsewhere in the region generally.

In addition, the region is home to International Business Services companies such as Teleflex, AXA, NPD Group and PPD. All of these companies are an attraction for potential IDA Ireland clients to locate in the Midlands and to provide employment opportunities for people living in both Westmeath and Longford.

The arrival of Jazz Pharmaceuticals to Athlone along with the announcement of investment by Alexion Pharma combined with the existing presence of Alkermes, employing in the region of 400 staff identifies a new cluster in the Midlands in biopharmaceuticals and this will be presented to potential new name companies in the market place.

In the indigenous sector, there are over 4,000 people employed in Enterprise Ireland-supported jobs in Westmeath and Longford. As recently as last month C&D Foods announced the opening of a new facility in Co. Longford creating 70 jobs.

Within this indigenous sector, over 600 are employed in the medical technology-related industries in the indigenous sector, in areas such as manufacturing to delivery of elements of

the supply chain.

I have been working with my Department on the development of a framework for the formulation of Regional Enterprise Strategies that will enable us to identify the sustainable competitive strengths of each region and to better integrate the efforts of the enterprise development agencies and other regional stakeholders in supporting enterprise growth and jobs in areas of potential. It is my intention that this framework will be applied initially to produce action-oriented plans to support enterprise growth and jobs in the Midlands region and the South East region. Learning in these regions will inform any adaptations that might need to be made prior to the framework being applied to other regions in the course of 2015.

Employment in IDA Ireland-supported companies in Longford and Westmeath 2009-2013

Longford	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total Jobs	823	719	658	696	701
New Jobs Gains	26	22	6	44	25
Westmeath	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total Jobs	1,859	2,038	2,132	2,270	2,225
New Jobs Gains	107	208	162	177	132

Employment in Enterprise Ireland-supported companies in Longford and Westmeath 2009 to 2013

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Longford					
Full Time Jobs	1,690	1,577	1,529	1,557	1,632
Contract/Part time jobs	124	131	121	120	188
Full time gains	120	64	86	116	147
Westmeath	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Full Time jobs	2,134	2,119	2,180	2,352	2,610
Contract/Part time jobs	286	255	231	240	244
Full time gains	77	126	339	275	313

Horse Racing Industry Funding

77. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of Horse Racing Ireland seeking to secure an adequate and consistent level of multi-annual funding from the Exchequer for Irish horse racing, the way he plans on increasing the tax contribution from the multi-million euro Irish thoroughbred breeding industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48494/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The funding mechanism for the provision of State support to the horse racing industry is set down in Section 12 of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001. This legislation will be updated in the forthcoming Horse Racing Ireland (Amendment) Bill which will be published early in 2015, after it is approved by Cabinet. The General Scheme of this Bill, published in June 2014, was examined by the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process. The basis of future funding to be provided to Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) will be linked to a number of variables including the strategic and business plans of the organisa-

tion, an assessment of the financial needs of HRI, income raised from excise duty on betting, the state of Exchequer finances and the decision of both Houses of the Oireachtas regarding the amount of funding to be allocated to the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, Section 12 (13) of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001, refers.

The Minister for Finance has published the Betting (Amendment) Bill 2013 which when enacted will ensure that all bookmakers taking bets from Ireland will pay 1% betting duty on those bets in the same way that betting shops currently do. Betting Exchanges will also be subject to tax under the new arrangements but the calculation of the tax will differ from that applying to bookmakers; they will be subject to 15% duty on their commission. These measures will ensure that the duty received from betting will be increased significantly. The latest update from the Department of Finance suggests that the Betting (Amendment) Bill 2013 is expected to pass all stages in the early part of 2015.

Against this background, I am pleased to have been able to increase the allocation under the Horse and Greyhound Fund from €54.22m (2014) to €68m (2015), and HRI's allocation increased from €43.4m (2014) to €54.4m (2015), representing a 25% increase.

Future allocations for the Horse and Greyhound Racing sector will be decided in the context of the annual budgetary process in accordance with the relevant legislation governing this expenditure.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

78. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2014 single farm payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48495/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received a Transfer of Entitlements application on 13th May 2014 to transfer 16.20 standard entitlements from the above herd number. As this application requested the sale of entitlements which the person named did not in fact own, this transfer application was rejected.

Payment will issue to the person named in the coming days in respect of the entitlements held by him.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

79. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal has not received their disadvantaged area payment or their single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48503/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas scheme application on 14 March 2014. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payments issued on 11 December 2014 under the Single Payment Scheme and is due to issue shortly in respect of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme.

Single Payment Scheme Administration

80. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he is taking to reduce the backlog in the number of farmers in County Donegal who are currently waiting on a field inspection to be carried out as part of having their applications for single farm payments processed due to unsuccessful remote sensing inspections having been previously carried out on their lands; if his attention has been drawn to the financial impact that this delay in receiving payments is having on farmers; if he will allow for a partial payment to be made to farmers who are currently waiting on a ground inspection to be carried out on their lands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48511/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): EU Regulations governing the administration of the Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' Schemes, and other area based schemes, requires my Department to carry out an annual round of inspections, both in the field and by means of Remote Sensing, to ensure the eligibility of land declared to drawdown payments. The basis of these inspections is governed by EU legislation and there are minimum numbers that must be conducted each year.

Land eligibility checks must be carried out on at least 5% of applicants. In response to concerns about the impact of on-the-ground inspections on farmers, 6,715 cases or some 85% of the required 2014 inspections are initially being carried out without the need for a farm visit as the information needed is acquired using the technique of remote sensing via satellite.

Of the 6,715 cases selected for a Remote Sensing inspection, 484 cases are in Co. Donegal, which equates to 7.2% of the overall number selected. To date, inspection results have been finalised in respect of 448 cases and any payment due has issued, or will issue shortly, in respect of these cases.

I am of course conscious of the financial impact of any delays in payments and I am prioritising the resolution of all outstanding cases. The outstanding 36 cases will continue to be processed by my Department on a daily basis with the intention of issuing any payments due as soon as possible.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

81. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2014 single farm payment will issue in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48516/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received a Transfer of Entitlements application on 30th April 2014 requesting a change to the registration details on the above herd number from the name of the second person named into the names of both persons named.

In order to execute this entitlements transfer it was necessary for the persons named to firstly change the herd number details in the Regional Veterinary Office and my Department notified the second named person to this effect. This process has now been completed and the transfer of entitlements application has also been processed. Payment will issue in the coming days.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

82. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in payment of disadvantaged scheme, single farm payment and REPS

for 2014, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if he will expedite the processing of their application and the issue of payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48527/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 8 May 2014. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payment under both schemes will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named. The person named commenced REPS 4 in July 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. These checks have now been completed in this case and the 2014 75% payment has been authorised for payment and will issue shortly. The remaining 2014 25% balancing payment will issue thereafter.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

83. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will examine an application for single farm payment and disadvantaged area aid payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48530/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Payment / Disadvantaged Areas scheme application on 11 April 2014. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payments are issuing, subject to an over-claim penalty being applied, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

International Agreements

84. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48566/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The implementation of the Istanbul Convention is not a matter for this Department. My Department has had no engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter.

Question No. 85 withdrawn.

Rural Development Programme Funding

86. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the CEDRA report will be costed and implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48583/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An exami-

nation of the 34 recommendations in the CEDRA report, in the following link, http://www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/lerc/CEDRA/List_of_Recommendations.pdf, will illustrate that, in the majority of instances, additional resources are not required to implement CEDRA proposals. Instead the major and consistent message of the report is that a more focused and integrated delivery of the existing services is required to energise rural economic development and to achieve more effective impacts from the funding already provided. In view of the nature of the recommendations, it is not practicable, ex ante, to cost them.

As mentioned in my reply to your recent Parliamentary Question No. 218 on 25 November 2014 (44996/14), implementation of the CEDRA report has commenced and is being directed through the CEDRA Interdepartmental Group established and chaired by Minister Phelan. This IDG, which involves all the departmental actors with statutory responsibility and funding for the CEDRA actions, is designed to achieve an integrated platform for implementation of the report. This IDG is finalising its multi-sectoral CEDRA work programme with specific actions and timelines as well as a priority programme.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

87. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will use its discretion to front-load the payments through CAP funding or, in principle, agree to front-loading the schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48584/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In July of 2013 I initiated a process of consultation with all farming organisations and other relevant stakeholders to ascertain their views on the most appropriate application of the Direct Payment Regulation in light of Ireland's unique agricultural profile and circumstances. The results of this consultation process were taken into account when formulating the final shape of direct payments in Ireland for the period 2015 to 2019. These decisions were notified to the EU Commission on the 1st August, 2014 as required under EU Regulations.

The implementation of the new regime of direct payments is underway and the process of accepting applications under the various Schemes will begin very early in the New Year.

Analysis of the impact of the Redistributive Payment Scheme indicated that it would not involve a simple transfer of funds from those who currently hold high value entitlements to those who hold low entitlements. In many cases the transfer of funds under that scheme would counteract the benefits that farmers will obtain from the process of Internal Convergence. I have decided therefore that the redistribution of funds in Ireland should be managed through the Internal Convergence Model, a stepped five year process. This methodology is clear, predictable and easily tracked and achieves the stated objective of a gradual, phased redistribution of funds in a fair and objective manner.

Beef Industry

88. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will appoint a regulator to oversee and control the virtual monopoly position that meat factories currently have here; if he will ensure that Irish livestock farmers receive a fair price for the excellent product they produce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48635/14]

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

relation to the beef sector is to create a policy and support environment that will allow it to flourish in line with normal market principles. As the Deputy will appreciate, questions of price are ultimately matters to be determined between the purchasers and the sellers of cattle. Cattle prices are determined by supply/demand dynamics which are in turn influenced by the seasonality of production, the length of the production lifecycle and market conditions such as retail promotions, consumer confidence, competition with other meats and the overall macro-economic situation. It is neither appropriate nor possible for me or any other Minister for Agriculture in the EU, to intervene directly on these issues. The State, through the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, already has a well established infrastructure for dealing with allegations of anti-competitive practices and I do not consider it appropriate to replicate that structure by establishing a beef regulator. Of course, if the Deputy is in possession of any information regarding uncompetitive practices in the beef sector, I would encourage him to bring this to the attention of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

I also believe it is important that the sector operates in a transparent manner and there is a wealth of information available to farmers under the Beef Pricewatch section on my Department's website, including the prices for Steers, Cows, and Heifers across the classification grid, for each DAFM approved factory. Improved transparency has also been delivered through the introduction of a Beef Pricewatch App which was developed by my Department. The App presents a range of up to date price information in a user-friendly fashion and is available free of charge to farmers and others interested in this information. The feedback from the users to date has been extremely positive and my Department is already looking at adding new features.

As regards current price levels, it should be noted that prices for R3 steers in Ireland have risen by 26 cents per kilo since the beginning of September. This is an increase of over 7% during this period and Irish prices are now at 101% of the EU15 average price. I should also note recent agreement on a number of outcomes through the Beef RoundTable process. This agreement addresses a range of the issues raised by farmers in recent months, particularly as regards market signals and product specifications. The RoundTable also endorsed the development of Producer Organisations which should, in my view, go a long way to addressing negotiating power along the supply chain and ensure a fair return to beef producers over the medium to long term.

Dairy Sector

89. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is actively seeking to develop new markets outside of the EU for Ireland's dairy exports on behalf of dairy farmers who are facing the prospect of a very challenging year ahead; if he will list the actions he has taken in this regard; the new markets he is targeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48636/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Whilst traditional markets such as the UK and the EU will naturally remain critically important for Irish dairy sector exports, it is abundantly clear that significant market opportunities also exist for the sector in new markets outside the EU in the medium to long term horizon. An examination of the export statistics in the sector gives a real sense of the emerging opportunities in new and exciting markets for Irish dairy produce. As Minister for Agriculture, I have recently witnessed first-hand the potential of the Chinese market in particular. Ireland's dairy offering resonates with Chinese and other third-market consumers who place safety, traceability and sustainability at the core of their value proposition. Companies based in Ireland exported almost €300m worth of dairy produce to China in 2013 and the expectation for 2014 is that the figure will run

approximately 25% ahead of last year.

In 2013 Irish dairy exports to Nigeria were broadly comparable to exports to the United States. Exports to Senegal outperformed exports to a number of Ireland's more traditional near-Europe trading partners. These are examples used to highlight some of the new and exciting frontiers for the Irish Dairy sector.

In 2013 we exported dairy produce across a range of commodities and other value added offerings to over 130 nations worldwide, and it is clear that Ireland's high standards of food safety and environmental sustainability are fundamental to that success.

As Minister, I obviously continue to have a role in providing a policy and operational framework to support the sector, which includes exploration and development of new markets. I have not relented in this respect during my tenure, including trade missions which achieved tangible benefits to the sector in markets such as China, as aforementioned, as well as the Middle East and Algeria, amongst others.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

90. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department recognises a FETAC level 8 course (details supplied); if not, the reason other courses are recognised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48639/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): EU Regulations governing the Direct Payment Schemes requires my Department to operate a Farm Advisory System (FAS) to provide advice to farmers on a range of issues relating to land and farm management. The regulations require that advisors are suitably qualified and regularly trained. In addition, in order to be approved as a GLAS Advisor, an advisor must also be an approved FAS advisor. In determining the level of educational qualifications required to be a FAS/GLAS advisor, my Department must ensure that such qualifications are of an appropriate standard to meet the objectives and the requirements of the various schemes, and the associated governing legislation, on which advice is being provided. Advisors must be qualified to interpret soil tests, understand the requirements of all schemes and understand constraints of land management imposed by various land designations. Furthermore, advisors must be in a position to translate this knowledge into detailed management plans and also advice for farmers not only on the schemes requirements but also on their farm operations.

In order to ensure that advisors meet the requirements outlined above, my Department requires that all advisors must have attained a FETAC Level 8 Bachelor Degree in Agricultural Science/Land Management in Agriculture and must have taken soil science and an animal or crop production subject to a level 8 degree standard.

My Department undertook a detailed examination of the course content of the level 7 BSc in Agriculture and Environment Management with the add-on level 8 BSc in Rural Enterprise and Environment Management provided by Mountbellew Agricultural College/GMIT and determined that this course does not meet the level 8 educational qualification standard required to be approved as a FAS/GLAS advisor.

Following a request to review this decision my Department is now undertaking a comprehensive review of the educational qualifications required to meet the standard necessary to be an approved FAS/GLAS advisor. On completion of this review all relevant parties will be notified of the decision.

GLAS Eligibility

91. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason he continues to persist in demanding the collective agreement requirement for participation of commonage farmers in GLAS; if he will confirm that this requirement is not a requirement of the EU but of his Department; if his attention has been drawn to the impracticality of such a requirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48640/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Firstly I would like to point out that my priority is to put in place requirements for commonages that will deliver real and measurable environmental benefits and will fit within the framework of the Rural Development Regulations, which require that farmers are only paid for actions which exceed the baseline for the Basic Payment Scheme. At recent meetings with the Commission it was made clear that it is incumbent on Member States to ensure that payments are above the baseline and that clear evidence of same must be shown in order to secure approval for the Rural Development Programme. There has been extensive consultation with the stakeholders concerned and I am well aware of the issues arising. There is general agreement amongst all that the key to managing these valuable habitats is a single Commonage Management Plan (CMP), covering all participating GLAS shareholders, and hill farmers have no difficulty with this. I am aware of the concerns raised by hill farmers in this regard.

I am very confident that we can deliver a successful implementation strategy for these commonages and I intend to contact the various representatives in the very near future to outline what I believe is achievable. My focus now is to secure Commission approval to the Rural Development Programme at the earliest possible date so that I can open GLAS to applications, and agreement by all stakeholders on the way forward in terms of commonages is crucial in this regard.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

92. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will examine the agri-environment options scheme application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will ensure that payment is made before Christmas 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48644/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2010 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 1) with effect from 1st September 2010 and full entitlements have issued in respect of the 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks in respect of the 2014 Scheme year it was discovered that two parcels of land included on the AEOS application of the person named were included on the SPS application of another herd owner.

The Species Rich Grassland and Traditional Hay Meadow actions claimed on these parcels on the AEOS application were therefore ineligible for payment under the AEOS scheme. As contracts under AEOS must run for at least five years, the payments which issued in respect of these parcels must now be recouped.

On the 25th November 2014, a letter issued to the person named setting out this decision

and providing the option to submit an appeal within 10 days. To date, there is no record of an appeal having been received by officials in my Department. The file will now be processed on this basis with the intention of issuing balancing payment for 2014 as soon as possible.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

93. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the system of payments for single farm payments, disadvantaged area payments and agri-environment options scheme and introduce a front-loading payment system to ensure that all farmers would receive a minimum payment which would be a reasonable amount to ensure the viability of small family holdings and those farmers currently in the low income bracket; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48650/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In July of 2013 I initiated a process of consultation with all farming organisations and other relevant stakeholders to ascertain their views on the most appropriate application of the Direct Payment Regulation in light of Ireland's unique agricultural profile and circumstances. The results of this consultation process were taken into account when formulating the final shape of direct payments in Ireland for the period 2015 to 2019. These decisions were notified to the EU Commission on the 1st August, 2014 as required under EU Regulations. The implementation of the new regime of direct payments is under way and the process of accepting applications under the various Schemes will begin very early in the New Year.

Analysis of the impact of the Redistributive Payment Scheme indicated that it would not involve a simple transfer of funds from those who currently hold high value entitlements to those who hold low entitlements. In many cases the transfer of funds under that scheme would counteract the benefits that farmers will obtain from the process of Internal Convergence. I have decided therefore that the redistribution of funds in Ireland should be managed through the Internal Convergence Model, a stepped five year process. This methodology is clear, predictable and easily tracked and achieves the stated objective of a gradual, phased redistribution of funds in a fair and objective manner.

Departmental Reports

94. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will have the CEDRA report costed and provide the money to implement the various proposals contained in the report in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48652/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The full list of the recommendation in the CEDRA report are set out at following link: http://www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/merc/CEDRA/List_of_Recommendations.pdf. An examination of these recommendations will illustrate that, in the majority of instances, additional resources are not required to implement CEDRA proposals. Instead the major and consistent message of the report is that a more focused and integrated delivery of the existing services is required to energise rural economic development and to achieve more effective impacts from the funding already provided. In view of the nature of the recommendations, it is not practicable, *ex ante*, to cost them.

While statutory responsibility and funding for the CEDRA actions remains with the relevant lead Departments, achieving its vision requires an integrated response from a wide variety of agencies. For that reason, in July this year, the Government appointed Ann Phelan, T.D, as Minister of State with specific responsibility for co-ordinating the CEDRA agenda. As

its effective implementation requires an integrated response from a wide variety of agencies, Minister Phelan has established and is chairing a high level Inter-Departmental Group (IDG), involving all the main departmental actors, to assist her in achieving an integrated platform for its implementation.

Organic Farming Scheme Applications

95. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the cost neutral proposals presented to him by the organic farmers representative body to front-load payments towards the first ten hectares, thereby securing the future viability of small-scale organic farming here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48654/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has given careful consideration to the proposal made by the above-named body to increase the payment rate for the first ten hectares under the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). I am advised that the proposals are not cost neutral. My Department already proposes increased rates of payment under the new OFS, including a significantly increased maintenance rate which will be payable to small farmers. My Department also proposes to extend these new higher rates to existing OFS participants.

In light of the number of existing participants and potential new entrants which the Department hopes to attract, it is not possible to accommodate the further increases proposed by the above-named body within the available budget.

Island Communities

96. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the setting up of an islands working group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48662/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The details provided with the Parliamentary Question include reference to a number of schemes and supports delivered by my Department via the Rural Development Programme. The new Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 will be a key support in enhancing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, achieving a more sustainable management of natural resources and ensuring a more balanced development of rural areas. These aims are of relevance to many of the issues raised in the submission of Comhar na nOileán which the Deputy has provided.

The new RDP has been developed following a substantial public consultation process in which Comhar na nOileán participated. The new RDP includes a range of supports which will be relevant to island communities, including

- a substantial new Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) and a number of other targeted environmental measures. The GLAS scheme is the successor to the recent REPS and AEOS schemes,
- continued strong support for Areas of Natural Constraint (formerly Disadvantaged Areas) incorporating a top up payment for island farmers,
- significant support for on farm capital investment,
- a range of knowledge transfer measures including support for European Innovation Part-

nerships,

- support for collaborative farming, and
- support for LEADER schemes.

Once the new RDP is formally adopted it will be supported by a number of implementation structures which will ensure direct stakeholder involvement in the effective implementation of the RDP. These include a Monitoring Committee and a National Rural Network. I have made arrangements in my Department to ensure that Comhar na nOileán is invited to participate in these structures.

Rural Development Plan

97. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to make the draft rural development plan submitted to the European Commission available to the public on his Department's website; if he has addressed the observations made by the European Commission; if he plans to make the observations of the Commission and his Department's response to same publicly available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48671/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland's draft Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014-2020 was submitted to the European Commission on 3rd July, 2014. The draft RDP has been available on my Department's website since that time. The formal observations of the EU Commission were received on 20th October, and a reply issued from my Department on 11th November. In relation to the observations received from the EU Commission, the release of this document would be a matter for the Commission. I understand, however, that the document is currently in the public domain. There have been intensive discussions between officials in my Department and the Commission in order to agree a RDP for formal adoption. These intensive negotiations are ongoing, and the process has involved the exchange of further information and clarifications on a very wide range of topics in recent weeks. I have committed to attend the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine at an early date to discuss the RDP and this will provide an opportunity to discuss relevant details of the RDP and the approval process.

GLAS Eligibility

98. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views of observation number 140 and 149 contained in the European Commission's observation document Ireland, rural development programme national (details supplied) in respect of the GLAS scheme; if the observations made by the European Commission suggest that there is a requirement for 50% agreement among commonage farmers in order to be eligible for payment under GLAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48672/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Firstly I would like to point out that my priority is to put in place requirements for commonages that will deliver real and measurable environmental benefits and will fit within the framework of the Rural Development Regulations, which require that farmers are only paid for actions which exceed the baseline for the Basic Payment Scheme. At recent meetings with the Commission it was made clear that it is incumbent on Member States to ensure that payments are above the baseline and that clear evidence of same must be shown in order to secure approval for the

Rural Development Programme. The questions raised by the Commission under observations 140 and 149, respectively, asked if Ireland was considering using other beneficiaries apart from farmers (e.g. land managers) and asked why we were specifically targeting commonages, and the reasons for the requirement for the 50% participation rate. To observation 140 my officials responded that traditionally we have only paid farmers under agri-environment schemes and intend to continue doing so and do not propose to extend payment to other land managers.

On observation 149, it was explained that commonages are being targeted in GLAS because they are hugely important environmental areas and include a very high proportion of Natura land. My officials pointed out that they are particularly vulnerable habitats and that joint management will deliver enhanced environmental dividends. On this point, there is general agreement amongst all stakeholders that the key to managing these valuable habitats is a single Commonage Management Plan (CMP). I am aware of the concerns raised by hill farmers in this regard.

I am very confident that we can deliver a successful implementation strategy for these commonages and I intend to contact the various representatives in the very near future to outline what I believe is achievable. My focus now is to secure Commission approval to the Rural Development Programme at the earliest possible date so that I can open GLAS to applications, and agreement by all stakeholders on the way forward in terms of commonages is crucial in this regard.

Question No. 99 withdrawn.

Sugar Industry

100. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide significant funding to assist the revival of Ireland's sugar beet industry in 2015; his 2015 plan for the restarting of what has previously been a very important industry here; the actions he has already taken to facilitate the return of sugar production to Ireland in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48709/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): By way of explanation I would like to give the Deputy a short note on the background to this issue. In 2011 I met with two separate groups which had conducted feasibility studies into the possibility of establishing a new sugar/bioethanol facility in the country. The figures published by the interested groups who are investigating the possibility of building a new facility, indicated that the overall capital costs involved could range from €250 million to €400 million, depending on what type of facility would be constructed. I informed both groups at the time, and many times since in the Dáil and through the media, that any venture to develop a combined sugar/bioethanol production facility in Ireland would have to be a viable commercial proposition and supported by a business case which is sufficiently robust to attract the funding from investors for the very substantial capital investment required. I clearly informed both groups at the time that it was my job to look for agreement at EU level to allow for the growing of sugar beet for the manufacture of sugar, at the earliest possible date.

In this connection, I secured agreement as part of the overall CAP reform package at the last EU Council of Agriculture Ministers, which I chaired in June 2013, to abolish all sugar quotas by 30 September 2017.

This agreement removes, with effect from 1 October 2017, the current EU quota barrier for operators in Ireland or other Member States, wishing to re-establish a sugar industry. At

the time, this agreement was welcomed by those parties who are interested in seeking to re-establish a sugar industry here. It is now up to those same entities to move the project forward and to garner sufficient commercial and financial support to turn their plans into a viable reality.

Animal Welfare

101. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the rules governing the vaccination and transportation of pet puppies to the UK are to be changed on 1 January 2015, in view of the fact that both islands are rabies free; the reason it will be necessary to wait until a pup is 12 weeks old for rabies vaccination and then wait a further 21 days before transportation to the UK; his views on the additional costs being placed on registered pet puppy breeders; his further views that puppies produced under the new regime will be too old for their target market in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48725/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While rabies is still very widespread in the world with two-thirds of all countries affected, there are thankfully very few cases of rabies in humans reported in the EU, and most EU Member States including Ireland, have not had any indigenous cases for decades. Cases of rabies in wildlife have reduced considerably with the help of EU co-funded control and eradication programmes and western EU Member States are now free of rabies. Recent rabies scares in mainland Europe have highlighted the need for ongoing vigilance. The considerable costs associated with containing a case of rabies are also something to take into account. In accordance with EU law, all pets entering and leaving Ireland must have a valid rabies vaccination evidenced by a pet passport or a veterinary health certificate. The special derogation from a rabies vaccination that was in place in respect of movement of pets between Ireland and the United Kingdom expired on 1 January 2012 and the rabies rules on pet movement within the EU are applied uniformly across the EU.

With effect from 29 December 2014, when Regulation (EU) No 576/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council will come into operation, dogs must be a minimum of 12 weeks old before a rabies vaccine can be administered. The immunity takes effect 21 days after vaccination, which means that, in fact, pups must be a minimum of 15 weeks of age before they are eligible to travel between Member States of the EU. This new minimum age requirement is based on the veterinary and scientific advice that an animal less than 3 months old may be too young to effectively vaccinate against rabies. A lower age limit would be difficult to justify scientifically and taking account of the risks attaching to greater freedom of movement within and into the Community.

Since the new requirement is applicable to all Member States, it should not disadvantage puppy breeders in Ireland.

Defence Forces Personnel

102. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Defence the reason there is no continuance in service for a person in the Defence Forces if they rank lower than sergeant level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48501/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): As I have outlined previously to the House, a claim has been received from the Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association (PDFORRA) in relation to this matter and it is being dealt with under the Con-

ciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force. Discussions have been taking place with the Representative Association, with regards to their claim, under a special Subcommittee of Conciliation Council. As discussions under the Scheme are confidential to the parties involved, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the matter at this time, other than to emphasise that in dealing with this issue the manpower and operational needs of the Defence Forces must be the primary consideration.

As Military life places unique physical and psychological demands on individuals it is necessary that its members be physically and mentally prepared to meet the challenges of all military operations and to undertake their duties on deployment overseas. It is vital the age and health profile of personnel be such as to ensure that operational capability and effectiveness are not compromised. As such, in order to maintain the age profile of the Permanent Defence Force to carry out the operational tasks required by Government, it is necessary to have a constant input of recruits into the PDF. The maximum age for personnel who have enlisted in the PDF post 1 January 1994 provides the mechanism through which a satisfactory age profile can be achieved.

While there was significant progress made in recent discussions between PDFORRA and Civil and Military Management on this issue, it was not possible to reach full agreement. As a result, the issue is being referred to third party adjudication for a ruling. It is expected that the adjudication hearing will take place as soon as possible following the exchange of submissions between the parties. In the meantime work is continuing on exit support measures to support those due to be discharged. A number of military courses and other skills courses are already accredited with various Third Level Institutions and Professional Bodies. In addition, a comprehensive training course to aid Transition to Civilian Life for these personnel, which involves a skills appraisal and review of a person's service history and training already provided, is currently being piloted.

International Agreements

103. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Defence the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48570/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): As I am sure that the Deputy is aware, the Istanbul Convention refers to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. My colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality announced, on 25th November 2014, her intention to publish draft heads of a consolidated and reformed Domestic Violence Bill in the New Year to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation. She explained that this new Bill, coupled with a new National Strategy on domestic violence, will pave the way for Ireland to ratify the Istanbul Convention. There has been no specific engagement between my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

Defence Forces Operations

104. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the number of suspect devices that the Army disposal unit has had to deal with to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48683/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order rests with An Garda Síochána. The Defence Forces, pursuant to their role of rendering Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP), assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Teams respond when a request is made by An Garda Síochána for assistance.

Up to the 15th December 2014, EOD teams were deployed on 136 occasions and viable devices accounted for 34 of these callouts.

Other types of callouts would include hoaxes, false alarms, post-blast analysis, and the removal of unstable chemicals in laboratories.

Defence Forces Operations

105. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the number of cash-in-transit escorts carried out by the Defence Forces to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48684/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order rests with An Garda Síochána. The Defence Forces, pursuant to their role of rendering Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP), assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. At the request of An Garda Síochána, to date in 2014 the Defence Forces have carried out 1,299 armed escorts for certain cash movements within the State.

Emergency Planning

106. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence when the next meeting of the national emergency co-ordination committee will take place; the number of meetings that have taken place thus far in 2014; the number he or his predecessor has chaired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48685/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I chair the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, which includes senior officials of Government Departments, senior officers of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces and officials of other key public authorities, which have a lead or support role in Government emergency planning. The Government Task Force on Emergency Planning meets on a regular basis. The next meeting will take place tomorrow Thursday, 18 December 2014 which I will chair. So far this year there have been six meetings of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning. The first meeting on 10 February was chaired by my predecessor Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D. I chaired the meetings on 2 October and 13 November. The meeting on 5 June was chaired by Mr. Paul Kehoe, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Defence while the meetings on 11 April and 23 July were chaired by Mr. Maurice Quinn, Secretary General of the Department of Defence. While the details of matters discussed at meetings of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning are confidential, I can confirm that the Task Force examines current risks and supports coordination arrangements for emergency planning across Government.

The Task Force is regularly briefed on such matters as the current security threat, which is provided by An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces, as well as receiving regular updates on cyber security and Ebola and on other matters from the relevant lead Government Departments. This includes the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, which chairs the National Steering Group under the Framework for Major Emergency Management,

along with having the lead Government Department role and responsibilities in eleven of the forty two emergency scenarios.

The Task Force regularly addresses other emergency planning issues ranging from risk assessment to training and exercises as well as receiving regular briefings on current issues from the various lead Government Departments on their specific roles and responsibilities and their associated work programmes. The Task Force establishes Subgroups from time to time to specifically look at particular areas of emergency planning that may need to be addressed.

Defence Forces Strength

107. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the up to date figures for the strength of the Permanent Defence Force with regard to all three services and all ranks; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48686/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The following tables set out the strength of the Permanent Defence Force as of 31 October, 2014, the latest date for which figures are available, across all three services and ranks, broken down by gender. The figures provided are for whole time equivalent posts.

Army

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant General	1	0	1
Major General	2	0	2
Brigadier General	6	0	6
Colonel	32	0	32
Lieutenant Colonel	100	3	103
Commandant	217	25	242
Captain	246	42	288
Lieutenant	189	36	225
Sergeant Major	26	0	26
Battalion Quarter-master Sergeant	31	0	31
Company Sergeant	105	1	106
Company Quarter-master Sergeant	158	1	159
Sergeant	822	54	876
Corporal	1236	115	1,351
Private	3829	187	4,016
Cadets	32	8	40
Totals	7,032	472	7,504

Air Corps

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Brigadier General	1	0	1

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Colonel	2	0	2
Lieutenant Colonel	12	0	12
Commandant	32	0	32
Captain	44	6	50
Lieutenant	29	1	30
Sergeant Major	7	1	8
Battalion Quarter- master Sergeant	4	0	4
Company Sergeant	47	0	47
Company Quarter- master Sergeant	14	0	14
Sergeant	119	6	125
Corporal	150	12	162
Private	249	9	258
Cadets	23	0	23
Total	733	35	768

Naval Service

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Brigadier General	1	0	1
Colonel	2	0	2
Lieutenant Colonel	12	0	12
Commandant	39	5	44
Captain	36	11	47
Lieutenant	39	11	50
Sergeant Major	6	0	6
Battalion Quarter- master Sergeant	7	0	7
Company Sergeant	64	0	64
Company Quarter- master Sergeant	15	0	15
Sergeant	168	3	171
Corporal	163	11	174
Private	438	19	457
Cadets	11	2	13
Total	1,001	62	1,063

Defence Forces Reserve Strength

108. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the up to date figures for the strength of the Reserve Defence Force; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48687/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The following tables set out the effective strength of the Reserve Defence Force as of 31 October, 2014, the latest date for which figures

are available, in both the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve broken down by rank and gender.

Army Reserve

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant Colonel	5	0	5
Commandant	34	0	34
Captain	97	4	101
Lieutenant	182	31	213
Sergeant Major	8	0	8
Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	8	0	8
Company Sergeant	57	0	57
Company Quartermaster Sergeant	71	2	73
Sergeant	313	20	333
Corporal	329	76	405
Private	802	188	990
Total	1,906	321	2,227

Naval Service Reserve

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Commandant	4	0	4
Captain	7	0	7
Lieutenant	6	1	7
Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	2	0	2
Company Sergeant	9	0	9
Sergeant	12	1	13
Corporal	20	4	24
Private	57	25	82
Total	117	31	148

EU Meetings

109. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence when the next meeting of EU Defence Ministers will take place; the agenda for same if decided; his priorities for it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48688/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The next informal meeting of Defence Ministers will be hosted by Latvia as part of their Presidency of the EU Council and will take place in Riga on the 18th and 19th February 2015. The agenda has not yet issued. However, as with previous meetings, it is assumed that Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Missions and Operations will be on the Agenda. Current EU Military operations are Operation ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Operation EUNAVFOR ATALANTA, the EU's anti-piracy maritime mission off the coast of Somalia; EUFOR RCA, the EU mission in the Central African Republic; and the EU Training Missions in Mali and Somalia (EUTM Mali and EUTM Somalia). The meeting will also probably discuss progress to date on the conclusions agreed by the Heads of State and Government at the European Council in December 2013 that focused

on Defence and look forward to the further discussions on Defence issues to take place at the European Council in June 2015.

Overseas Missions

110. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Defence the number of overseas missions in which the Defence Forces are currently involved; the number of personnel involved in each mission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48689/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): As of 1 December 2014, Ireland is contributing approximately 427 Defence Forces personnel to 11 missions throughout the world. Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas including the lead organisation for each mission are listed in the tabular statement. The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 199 personnel, and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 138 Defence Forces personnel.

The current contribution of some 427 personnel to overseas missions reflects the Government's continued commitment to our responsibilities in the area of international peace and security.

AS OF 01 DECEMBER 2014

1.	UN MISSIONS	Personnel
	UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) HQ	9
	UNIFIL 47th Infantry Group	186
	UNIFIL Sector West HQ	4
	UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel and Syria	13
	MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)	3
	MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)	4
	UNOCI (United Nations Mission in Ivory Coast)	2
	UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) HQ, Golan Heights Syria	8
	UNDOF 46 th Infantry Group	130
	TOTAL	359
	UN MANDATED MISSIONS	
	EUFOR (EU led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina)	7
	EUTM Mali (EU led Training Mission)	10
	KFOR (International Security Presence in Kosovo) HQ	12
	ISAF (International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan)	7
	TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS	395
2.	ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)	Personnel
	OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina	2
	Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group Vienna	1
	TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING OSCE	3

2.	ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)	Personnel
3.	EU MILITARY STAFF	
	Brussels	5
4.	NORDIC BATTLE GROUP 2015	
	FHQ Sweden	14
5.	MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF	
	Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York	1
	Military Adviser Irish delegation to OSCE, Vienna	1
	Military Representative to EU (Brussels)	4
	Liaison Office of Ireland, NATO/PfP (Brussels)	2
	EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium	1
	Irish Liaison Officer to SHAPE & Military Co-Op Division, Mons, Belgium	1
	TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVERSEAS	427

Defence Forces Records

111. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Defence the number of additional recruits the Defence Forces have taken on to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48690/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): A new recruitment campaign for Enlisted Personnel in both the Permanent and Reserve Defence Force was launched in March 2014. The Military Authorities have advised that, to date, from this recruitment campaign a total of 443 recruits have been inducted to the Permanent Defence Force, of which 360 remain in training. A total of 152 personnel have been inducted to the Reserve Defence Force.

General Service recruitment to the Permanent Defence Force will continue in 2015 from the recruitment panels formed from the current General Service recruitment competition .

As a continuation of the March 2014 recruitment campaign the Defence Forces were accepting applications for the RDF up to 14 November 2014. The selection process for enlistment in the Reserve Defence Force is continuing. Future recruitment into the RDF will be informed by Reserve strength figures.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, I intend to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

Driver Licence Data

112. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of professional drivers prosecuted to date for not complying with the requirement to have acquired a driver certificate of professional competence, CPC, card. [48538/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am making enquiries with An Garda Síochána and the Road Safety Authority in relation to the matter referred to by

the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as the information is to hand.

Rights of the Child

113. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on concerns that the Children and Family Relationships Bill 2014 commodifies children, undermines the right of a child to a mother and father whenever possible, and deliberately disrupts the natural ties between parents and children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48564/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The General Scheme of the Children and Family Relationships Bill will significantly reform family law, and is intended to secure the legal rights of a child in her or his family setting. Many children live in families other than with their married biological parents, and up to now there has been very little legal recognition or protection for children living in these families.

The Children and Family Relationships Bill is a child-centred Bill which will have a real and meaningful effect on the lives of many children, especially those born through donor-conception, whether they are born to opposite-sex or same-sex couples. Under the law as it stands, parentage cannot be secured by a same-sex couple. As a result, the non-biological parent does not have the rights and responsibilities of a parent in relation to the child. Opposite-sex couples can benefit from presumptions of paternity in relation to the intending father, but this is rebuttable, which means that the child remains in a vulnerable position as regards his or her parentage.

The Bill will change this situation. The measures in the Bill will ensure that a donor-conceived child born to a couple has rights in relation to both of his or her parents, and that both parents have corresponding rights and responsibilities to the child. The rights of the child to know his or her identity, including as to his or her genetic origins, are also secured. A key aim of the Bill is to secure the child's best interests and to ensure that they and their families have legal recognition and protection.

The General Scheme also includes a number of provisions aimed at supporting the relationship between parents and children. Many unmarried fathers will benefit from the provisions, for example, enabling them to become guardians of their children automatically if they have lived with the child's mother for 12 months, including 3 months following the child's birth. The provisions on making parenting orders work recognise the importance of supporting parents to maintain meaningful relationships with their children even in the context of relationship breakdown between the adults. To this end, the General Scheme proposes a series of measures to ensure better compliance by both parents with custody and access orders.

In light of these points, I would not, therefore, accept any of the propositions behind the concerns set out in the Deputy's question.

Alcohol Sales Legislation

114. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the consultation process will begin for the draft statutory code of practice relating to the sale and display of alcohol in mixed trading premises; if she will provide an update on plans for the structured separation of alcohol from other products in such premises; and if the draft code will include measures to separate alcohol in this regard. [48496/14]

115. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the new statutory

code of practice relating to the sale and display of alcohol in mixed trading premises will include measures to restrict the advertising of bulk alcohol offers and below-cost alcohol in large quantities. [48497/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 115 together.

The position is that my Department is currently finalising the content of the draft statutory Code of Practice on the display and sale of alcohol products in mixed trading outlets. I hope to be in a position to launch the consultation process on the contents of the Code, as required under section 17 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011, in the coming weeks. It is intended that the statutory code will operate for a two year period, after which its effectiveness will be jointly evaluated by my Department and the Department of Health. The results of this joint evaluation will inform any future decision on implementing the statutory provisions on structural separation which are set out in section 9 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008.

With regard to volume-based alcohol promotions, the position is that section 16 of the 2008 Act contains separate provisions for the making of regulations concerning the sale, supply and consumption of alcohol products. From the outset it was recognised, however, that a joint North/South approach to restricting alcohol promotions would be desirable; otherwise, the effectiveness of any measures introduced in this jurisdiction could be undermined by means of increased cross-Border shopping if similar measures were not introduced in Northern Ireland. During discussions in early 2012 between my predecessor and the Minister for Social Development in Northern Ireland, the desirability of implementing a joint North/South approach to restricting certain ‘volume-based’ alcohol promotions was agreed.

The Department of Social Development in Northern Ireland subsequently launched a consultation process on draft proposals to restrict bulk purchases of alcohol products in supermarkets and other premises with off-licences. Arising from this consultation process, and following the expression of concerns by the Assembly’s Social Development Committee, the Minister announced that he had decided not to proceed with restrictions on bulk purchases from off-licences.

As regards future action, the position is that the Government has agreed that the forthcoming Public Health (Alcohol) Bill will give Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) statutory enforcement powers in relation to regulations made under section 16 of the 2008 Act. Following enactment of this legislation, I will consider how best to proceed with the making of such regulations. In this context, I remain conscious that the effectiveness of any future restrictions on volume-based promotions in this jurisdiction could be undermined by the lack of corresponding measures in Northern Ireland.

In so far as ‘below cost’ selling is concerned, the position is that the Government has approved an extensive package of measures to deal with alcohol misuse in response to the Report of the Steering Group on a National Substance Misuse Strategy, including minimum unit pricing measures which will be included in the forthcoming Public Health (Alcohol) Bill.

Prisoner Data

116. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of life sentence prisoners released from prison in 2013; the average length of time served by these life sentence prisoners prior to release in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48505/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that a total of four life sentenced prisoners were released into the community in 2013. The average length of sentence served by these four prisoners prior to release was seventeen and a half years.

Life sentenced prisoners who are released into the community continue to serve their sentences, subject to a number of stringent conditions. While in the community, a life sentenced prisoner will be on reviewable temporary release under the supervision of the Probation Service. Reviewable temporary release is where a prisoner is granted a specific period of temporary release from prison. This can be at varying intervals, for example, weekly, monthly or annually. The period of release is reviewed when the prisoner returns to prison and a decision is made whether to refuse or grant a further period of reviewable temporary release.

The Probation Service provide progress reports to the Irish Prison Service outlining resettlement and reintegration progress and will report on any risk management concerns a Life Sentenced prisoner may present. Where it is reported to the Irish Prison Service that the prisoner in the community is failing to abide by the conditions of their release, that person may be refused a further period of temporary release and be taken back into custody.

An Garda Síochána may return a prisoner to prison where they are of the view that the prisoner is in breach of their temporary release conditions. When this happens, the Governor will conduct an oral hearing. If the Governor is satisfied, taking into account evidence presented and comments made, that a breach of temporary release conditions has occurred the prisoner should be notified accordingly. The reviewable temporary release is then revoked and the prisoner is taken back into custody.

Fines Data

117. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the revenue that is raised on speeding fines annually since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48558/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that, under the provisions of Section 4(3) of the Courts Service Act, 1998 the Courts are independent in their performance of its functions, which includes the provision of statistics. However, to be of assistance, I have had enquiries made and am informed by the Courts Service that the following table outlines the amount paid in respect of fines imposed for speeding offences from 2011 to October 2014. The Deputy will appreciate that substantial revenue is also received in respect of payments made on foot of fixed charge notices issued by the Garda authorities for speeding offences, which do not proceed to Court. I have sought up to date Garda information on the income arising from these payments and I will forward this information to the Deputy when it is available.

Year	Amount paid
Jan - Dec 2011	€708,085.00
Jan - Dec 2012	€812,922.00
Jan - Dec 2013	€775,476.00
Jan - Oct 2014	€602,840.00

Asylum Applications

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 352 of 2 December 2014, if an application for asylum or refugee status has been made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; when such application was made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48560/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My response to Parliamentary Question No. 352 of 2 December, 2014 clearly states the policy of my Department with regard to not providing information in respect of individual applications for asylum or subsidiary protection for so long as they remain in the protection process. Section 19 (1) of the Refugee Act, 1996 states that “The Commissioner, the Board, the Tribunal, the Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and their respective officers shall take all practicable steps to ensure that the identity of applicants is kept confidential”.

Citizenship Applications

119. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of revenue raised through citizenship applications annually since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48561/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The amount of revenue raised annually through citizenship applications between 2011 and 2013 was €9,592,000, €17,009,000 and €23,106,000 and is estimated at approximately €20m for 2014.

Charities Regulation

120. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the impact the Charities Regulatory Authority will have on the charity sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48593/14]

121. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Charities Regulatory Authority's website (details supplied) will be live; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48594/14]

122. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of registration and annual filing fees the Charities Regulatory Authority will cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48595/14]

123. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the public register of all charities operating in the State will be complete; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48596/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 to 123, inclusive, together.

The aim of the Charities Regulatory Authority, established under the Charities Act 2009, is to provide for the better regulation of charitable organisations through a framework of registration, regulation and support. The initial focus of the newly established Authority is on the development of a Register of Charities, upon which all charities operating in this country will be obliged to register. Part 4 of the Charities Act, which provides for the investigatory functions of the Authority, has not yet been commenced. The Register, when it is more advanced, will in time be the foundation which underpins the investigative and other regulatory work of the Authority. I can confirm that the website of the Charities Regulatory Authority, www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.gov.ie

charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie, went live on 16 October 2014, the date of the establishment of the Authority.

The development of the Register of Charities is the initial task of the Authority. To date, it has written to some 4,500 charities with charitable tax exemptions seeking the extensive information on their finances and structure required to underpin the regulation of the sector. It is envisaged that all 8,500 charities that had charitable tax exemptions on the day of the establishment of the Authority will be contacted in this way by early in the New Year. The Register is also open to applications for charitable status from those charities that are not in receipt of charitable tax exemptions.

It is not possible to give a definite timeframe for completion of the Register at this early stage in the life of the Authority, as the work involved in its development is, to a large extent, dependent on the charities themselves. I am assured, however, that the Authority will continue to pursue this goal with all possible speed. My Department conducted a wide ranging consultation with the charities sector and other stakeholders on the matter of fees and other issues in 2013. It is intended that in time, all charities will be charged fees; these fees will vary depending on the income of the charity. It is envisaged that an announcement on the appropriate levels of fees for registration and annual reporting, which will go towards assisting with the cost of regulation, will be made in the coming months.

Cyberbullying

124. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures that have been taken in the past year to deal with cyberbullying; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48597/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Office for Internet Safety (OIS) is an Executive Office within my Department. The OIS has been engaging with the issue of counteracting cyberbullying on an ongoing basis and has issued a series of booklets on internet safety including one dedicated to the topic of cyberbullying. A total of 18,459 copies of the cyberbullying booklet have been distributed to parents, teachers and youth groups by the OIS during 2014.

In addition the OIS produced a leaflet on cyberbullying to coincide with the International Safer Internet Day by producing a leaflet on how to counteract cyberbullying. The leaflet was made available electronically on the website www.internetsafety.ie and copies were distributed to libraries, citizens information offices and to members of the public on request. To date over 21,000 leaflets have been distributed.

The OIS acts as the coordinator for the EU Safer Internet Programme in Ireland. One of the four partner organisations in the Programme is the Professional Development Service for Teachers Technology in Education which is part of the Department of Education and Skills. PDST coordinates Ireland's activities for the annual international Safer Internet Day in February each year. For Safer Internet Day in February 2014, PDST launched #Up2us. This is an anti-bullying kit to tackle cyberbullying and it has been widely distributed to schools and youth organisations throughout the country. The Law Reform Commission has published an issues paper on 'Cyber-crime affecting personal safety, privacy and reputation including cyber-bullying'. The LRC has requested that submissions or comments be returned to them by 19 January 2015 and I look forward to their final report in due course.

Mortgage Resolution Processes

125. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if figures are collected by her Department on the number of mortgage repossession cases initiated through the courts; if she will monitor the number of repossession cases initiated; if she will provide the figures publicly per court, if available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48666/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the information is as provided. The tables set out the number of actions for possession initiated in the High Court and Circuit Court in 2013.

Circuit Court	2013
New cases initiated for possession of lands/premises	2,498

High Court	2013
New cases initiated for possession of lands/premises	332

I have asked the Court Service to provide figures for 2014 and I will correspond further with the Deputy when I have the figures to hand.

It is important to note that the number of new cases initiated does not reflect the number of orders for possession granted. It should also be noted that orders for possession do not necessarily equate with repossessions as it is up to the person or company who obtained the order for possession to pursue its execution.

Prisoner Rehabilitation Programmes

126. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the objective of the incentivised regime in relation to remission of sentence is to provide tangible incentives to prisoners to participate in structured activities and to reinforce incentives for good behaviour, leading to a safer and more secure environment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48702/14]

127. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a differentiation of levels of privilege, that is, basic, standard and enhanced currently in operation on the E2 landing of Portlaoise prison, County Laois, and that enhanced privileges are not a right and are in fact dependent on meeting certain criteria, for that level, notably by exemplary behaviour and satisfactory engagement in structured activities. [48703/14]

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views that the progression of a person (details supplied) to the enhanced level was dependent on them meeting the criteria for that level, notably by exemplary behaviour and satisfactory engagement in structured activities. [48704/14]

129. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the incentivised regime scheme regarding one third remission is mandatory for each prison and for all prisoners. [48705/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 to 129, inclusive, together.

I can inform the Deputy that the Incentivised Regimes Policy was introduced on a phased basis across all prisons in 2012 and is now operational in all institutions. Incentivised Regimes provides for a differentiation of privileges between prisoners according to their level of engagement with services and quality of behaviour. The objective is to provide tangible incentives to prisoners to participate in structured activities and to reinforce good behaviour, leading to a safer and more secure environment.

There are three levels of privilege - basic, standard and enhanced and each prison has developed an information booklet on how the scheme operates and specifically on the criteria and privileges associated with each level of regime. Prisoners on the enhanced regime level are significantly more likely to benefit from temporary release programmes such as Community Return—where prisoners are released early under Probation Supervision to partake of voluntary work for the benefit of the community—and/or transfer to an open centre. These are significant motivational factors in encouraging prisoners to engage in authorised structured activities and improve general behaviour. The hope is that these benefits are not just apparent in prisons and that the behavioural change effected will stay with the prisoner on his release. Experience in other jurisdictions has shown that an incentivised regime structure is a hugely valuable addition to prisons in the context of good order and prisoner compliance.

The standard set of core privileges provided in each prison comprises of different levels of daily gratuity ranging from €0.95 to €2.20, the number and length of visits a prisoner is allowed to receive and the number of telephone calls a prisoner is allowed to make. Each prison has drawn up a list of privileges available under each regime level. The list of available privileges is likely to vary between prisons and within different areas of a prison, depending on the operational and infrastructure requirements of each prison. Examples of other incentives offered include improved accommodation (e.g. move from dormitory accommodation to a single room in an open centre). In the past, access to facilities such as DVD players, games consoles have been provided. Prisoners can also gain access to employment opportunities within the prison e.g. kitchens, laundries etc.

Specifically in relation to Portlaoise Prison E Block, the introduction of the Incentivised Regimes policy within the prison system had to take cognisance of existing practices and procedures in prisons. This was to ensure that prisoners were not disadvantaged or suffered a deterioration in their regime due to the introduction of this new policy. Experience in other jurisdictions has shown that an incentivised regime structure is a hugely valuable addition in prisons in the context of good order and prisoner compliance. As such, prisoner buy-in is an essential component for the success of the initiative.

I can advise the Deputy that the Governor of Portlaoise prison and his management team make decisions on the regime level for prisoners on the E Block. On 16 December of the 11 prisoners on the E2 landing 9 were on the enhanced regime and 2 were on the standard. While all prisoners serving a sentence, (excluding those serving a life sentence; those serving a sentence for the non-payment of a court ordered debt and those serving sentences for contempt of court), may apply for one third remission, applications are considered by reference to a number of other factors including behaviour and conduct while incarcerated, the nature of the offence, the level and nature of the prisoner's engagement in authorised structured activities and the views of An Garda Síochána.

130. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the decision-making process she relied upon to reach her decision to deny one third remission in respect of a person (details supplied); if the incentivised regimes status and reports factored in reaching her decision in these matters, or if it was a political decision. [48706/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that the application by the prisoner (details supplied) for enhanced remission was considered under Rule 59 (2) of SI 252 of 2007 (the Prison Rules). This occurred prior to my recent amendment to the Rules.

While the prisoners incentivised regime level was not taken into account, the application was considered by reference to a number of other factors including his behaviour and conduct while incarcerated, the nature of the offence, the level and nature of his engagement in authorised structured activities and the views of an Garda Síochána.

I can confirm that the decision not to grant an enhanced rate of remission was taken solely on objective grounds.

Location of Victims' Remains

131. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will ensure that adequate resources are provided to the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains in view of the very important and necessary work that is undertaken by this commission; if she will provide an assurance to the families of the six persons whose remains have not yet been located that this work will retain the highest priority in view of the murder of innocent persons and the grief and suffering inflicted on so many families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48707/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains (ICLVR) was established by the Irish and British Governments in 1999 to facilitate the location of the remains of a number of people who were killed and buried secretly by paramilitary organisations during the troubles. They have become known as the disappeared.

The ICLVR was among the actions taken in the context of the Peace Process to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation. The families of the Disappeared have had to bear a very particular cruelty in not only having to face the loss of a loved one, but having been denied for so long information regarding the burial places of their loved ones.

The ICLVR, with the support of the two Governments, has worked tirelessly over the years in pursuit of its task and it continues to so do. Its sole aim is to locate the victims' remains in order that they may be returned to their families to receive a decent burial and that the families will then have a grave at which to grieve and to remember. While the remains of a number of the disappeared have been recovered, there are still six victims whose remains have yet to be located. The ICLVR is continuing its inquiries in relation to these cases and I can assure the families of my and the Government's full support for this ongoing humanitarian work.

I know the Deputy will join with me in encouraging anyone with information that could help to locate those still missing to give that information to the ICLVR without delay – contact details are on the ICLVR's website www.ichvr.ie. I would emphasise that all information provided to the ICLVR is treated as strictly confidential and, by law, can only be used to locate and identify the remains of victims. The Government remains strongly committed to the aim of

locating these victims and returning their remains to their families. I call on all others to help to bring it about.

Garda Promotions

132. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality with regard to Garda appointments, the reason there seems to be a preference provided to sergeants who were involved in office-bound duties being promoted to the rank of inspector ahead of their peers who carry out front-line duties on a day-to-day basis. [48715/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Promotion competitions within An Garda Síochána are run in strict compliance with An Garda Síochána (Promotion) Regulations 2006, as amended.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that all members who apply for and are eligible for promotion are invited to take part in a competency based interview. This interview is conducted by an independent interview board comprising two civilian members and one Garda member.

The interview board conducts interviews to select the most suitable candidates for promotion. Preference is not given to members based in any particular section or unit within An Garda Síochána.

Promotions are also subject to the Commission for Public Service Appointments Code of Practice "*Appointments to positions in the civil service and public service*".

Garda Operations

133. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints of petrol stretching received by the Garda districts in counties Westmeath and Longford respectively in each of the months since May 2014; the position regarding these complaints; the number that have been investigated resulting in a person being charged or a file being forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48724/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware that an increasing number of complaints of petrol stretching have been reported to Revenue's Customs Service and An Garda Síochána during 2014. This is a matter of serious concern as petrol stretching, like all forms of fuel fraud, results in losses to the Exchequer, threatens legitimate businesses and potentially can cause significant damage to the vehicles of unsuspecting purchasers of adulterated fuel.

In this regard I have been informed by the Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána that all reports of petrol stretching are followed up as a matter of course and samples of fuel are sent to the State Laboratory for scientific analysis where there is reason to suspect excise duty fraud.

I set out in the table, for the Deputy's information, the material sought concerning complaints of petrol stretching in the particular Garda Districts, as provided to me by the Garda Authorities.

I can further inform the Deputy that all of the reported incidents remain under investigation

and that to date no charges have been brought nor files submitted to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Month	-	Number of Incidents
-	Longford	Westmeath
May	0	0
June	0	0
July	0	0
August	0	2
September	2	1
October	2	1
November	0	6
December	0	1
Total	4	11

Immigration Status

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 271 of 25 November 2014, if she is precluded from releasing the information required therein in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; if so, on what basis, legal or otherwise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48745/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The policy of my Department with regard to the provision of information in respect of individual applications for asylum or subsidiary protection and the legal basis underpinning this policy was fully explained in my letter to the Deputy dated 31 May, 2014. That letter referenced Section 19 (1) of the Refugee Act, 1996 which states that “The Commissioner, the Board, the Tribunal, the Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and their respective officers shall take all practicable steps to ensure that the identity of applicants is kept confidential”. Section 19(2) goes on to provide that no matter likely to lead members of the public to identify a person as an applicant under this Act shall be published in a written publication available to the public or be broadcast without the consent of that person.

Military Aircraft Landings

135. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on statements from her Department that there is no evidence of Irish involvement in CIA renditions when they have been provided evidence of CIA rendition planes passing through Shannon. [48747/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of reports going back some time that Irish airports, particularly Shannon, have been used for the unlawful inter-state transfer of detainees (‘extraordinary rendition’) by the US authorities.

The Government has repeatedly made it clear that extraordinary rendition is an illegal practice which Ireland will not accept. The US authorities have provided clear and unambiguous diplomatic assurances, at the highest level, that Irish airports have not been and would not be used for the purpose of extraordinary rendition. The Government is fully entitled to rely on these assurances.

There is no question of the State having been complicit in the practice of extraordinary renditions.

The recent report of the US Senate related to torture and renditions does not, I am pleased to note, mention Ireland in this regard.

Statutory powers of search and entry are bestowed upon the Garda Síochána under various legislative provisions and when authorised by a judge. However, these powers are exercised in circumstances where a member of the Garda Síochána reasonably suspects that an offence has occurred. These powers can only be used, therefore, where a Garda has a reasonable suspicion supported by some evidence. The mere assertion of wrongdoing by a member of the general public is clearly insufficient in this regard. The Garda Síochána has investigated a range of complaints of alleged unlawful activity at Shannon Airport and, where appropriate, files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In all these cases, no further action was found to be warranted, owing to a lack of any evidence of unlawful activity.

Any person with credible information that Irish airports have been used for any alleged unlawful purpose should report their concerns to the Garda Síochána.

Child Protection

136. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason the Health Service Executive in Sligo has failed to provide services to a child (details supplied) in County Sligo despite the fact that after two years of waiting for these services, it has failed to communicate anything to the parent of the child despite continual requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48651/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I have requested the information from the Child and Family Agency and I will revert to the Deputy when this information is to hand. As the Deputy may appreciate, I will be limited in my response as it is not customary to comment on individual cases.

International Agreements

137. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48568/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The signature and ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women i.e. the Istanbul Convention, has been the subject of engagement between my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality.

While signing the Convention, as a first step towards ratification, will of itself impose no obligations on Ireland, it is prudent to be aware of the legislative, administrative or other issues which will require attention prior to Ireland being in a position to ratify the Convention.

The current position is that my Department is nearing completion of its consideration of the provisions of the Convention with a view to assisting in establishing Ireland's capability to fully meet the obligations that arise for Parties to the Convention. The action my Department has taken to date in that connection has involved examination of relevant articles of the Convention

from a legal perspective and consultation with the Child and Family Agency in relation to the services it provides for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

It is my intention to convey my views in the matter to my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality at an early date.

Childcare Education and Training Scheme Administration

138. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number currently working in early education and child care here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48674/14]

139. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons who are currently working in early education and child care here who have a FETAC level 4 qualification; the percentage of the early education and child care workforce that this represents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48675/14]

140. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons who are currently working in early education and child care here who have a FETAC level 5 qualification; the percentage of the early education and child care workforce that this represents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48676/14]

141. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons who are currently working in early education and child care here who have a FETAC level 6 qualification; the percentage of the early education and child care workforce that this represents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48677/14]

142. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons who are currently working in early education and child care here who have a third level qualification in early childhood; the percentage of the early education and child care workforce that this represents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48678/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 to 142, inclusive, together.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme introduced the first-ever requirement for minimum qualifications for staff working in the childcare sector. Prior to the introduction of the programme in January 2010 there was no requirement for staff working directly with children in pre-school services to hold any education qualification.

It is a requirement of the ECCE programme that pre-school year leaders in services participating in the programme, and who are receiving the standard capitation, hold a qualification in childcare which is equivalent to Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications of Ireland (NFQ). A higher capitation rate is available to services participating in the ECCE programme in which all of the pre-school leaders hold an appropriate qualification at a minimum of Level 7 and pre-school assistants hold a Level 5 on the NFQ.

As part of the Early Years Quality Agenda, new qualification requirements for childcare workers are being introduced. All staff caring for children in an early years service will be subject to a minimum qualification requirement of Level 5, while pre-school leaders delivering the ECCE programme will require a Level 6 qualification. It is expected that these requirements will come into effect from September 2015 for existing services.

Pobal, which administers the childcare support programmes on behalf of my Department, compiles an Annual Survey of the Early Years Sector. According to its 2013 Annual Survey, of the childcare services that responded to the question relating to the number of staff employed, 87% of staff have a qualification equal to or higher than Level 5 on the NFQ.

This figure confirms the finding of previous annual surveys conducted by Pobal. Further figures provided in the Pobal Survey indicate that the number of childcare workers holding a Level 6 qualification is in the region of 45%.

Figures compiled this year by my Department indicate that approximately 24% of the 4,200 services participating in the ECCE programme are in receipt of the higher capitation. This means that at least one member of staff in the qualifying childcare service holds an appropriate qualification at Level 7 or higher.

It is estimated by Pobal, from information provided by respondents to their Annual Survey 2013 that there are in the region of 24,000 staff employed in the childcare sector.

Childcare Education and Training Scheme Places

143. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children with special educational needs participating in the early childhood care and education scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48679/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was introduced in January 2010 and provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children before they commence primary school. The programme is a free and universal provision to which all children have access and figures in relation to special needs children availing of this provision are not collected.

To ensure that the ECCE programme is more accessible to children with special needs a number of additional provisions are in place. These include an exemption from the upper age limit for qualification under the programme where a child is developmentally delayed and would benefit from starting primary school at a later age. In addition, children with special needs can apply to have the pre-school year split over two years on a pro-rata basis, for example availing of the programme for 2 days a week in the first year and for 3 days a week in the second year.

The Department does not have information in relation to the number of children with special needs currently participating in the ECCE programme. About 200 children avail of the over-age exemption and the pro-rata provision each year.

Childcare Education and Training Scheme Administration

144. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is a recommended pupil-teacher ratio for early education and child care providers; the average pupil-teacher ratio at present across early education and child care providers here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48680/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Childcare services are governed by the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006. The Explanatory Guide to the Regulations recommends a range of adult/child ratios that reflect the age of the child and the level of care the child is receiving. For sessional pre-school services (i.e. services offering a planned programme to pre-school children for a total of not more than 3.5 hours per

day), the ratios are:

Sessional Pre-School Services

Age Range	Adult Child ratio
0-1 year	1:3
1-2.5 years	1:5
2.5-6 years	1:10

Following a reduction in the weekly capitation payment to pre-school services participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, which provides a free pre-school year to children prior to commencing primary school, the 1:10 adult/child ratio was increased to a ratio of 1:11 for children qualifying for the pre-school support. This decision, which was made so that participating childcare services would have some flexibility in managing the modest capitation reduction, relates only to the pre-school element of the service and not to other children enrolled in the childcare service.

The Early Years Quality Agenda is currently being progressed by my Department and will introduce a series of reforms that provide for the further development of the childcare sector. Legislation to strengthen the current Early Years Inspection regime and to underpin the Quality Agenda has been enacted. Regulations to give effect to the legislative changes are expected to be published shortly. It is expected that these new Regulations will confirm the existing ratios.

Childcare Education and Training Scheme Places

145. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the percentage of child care services subsidised for children under three years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48681/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): A number of childcare programmes are implemented by my Department to assist parents with the cost of childcare. These include the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme, and the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) programmes.

There is no specific funding allocated to provide for children in the 0 to 3 age category but childcare services can be availed of through one of the above programmes.

The ECCE programme provides funding to support approximately 68,000 children each year but the minimum qualifying age is 3 years 2 months at the commencement of the school year and children under this age do not have access to this provision.

The CCS programme provides support to community not for profit childcare services to enable them to provide childcare to lower income and disadvantaged families at reduced rates. Eligibility for support under the programme is based on the income status of the parent and children of all ages are eligible to enrol for support. There are more than 900 community childcare services participating in the CCS programme.

Within the TEC programmes the Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) programme supports parents who are participating in Solas and Education Training Board (ETB) training and education courses with the cost of childcare. Children of all ages are eligible for support under this programme.

Two additional support programmes, the Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme, which provides support to CE programme participants for children in the 0 to 13 age category, and the After-School Child Care (ASCC) programme, which supports certain categories of parents seeking after school care for primary school children, were introduced under the TEC programme and are currently implemented by my Department. The total number of providers in contract to provide services under the CETS programmes is 1,600 but it should be noted that the ASCC programme relates to school age children.

There are in the region of 4,500 notified childcare services currently delivering childcare services with nearly all of those participating in the ECCE programme. All of these services are eligible to apply for entry to the other support programmes with the exception of the Community Childcare Subvention programme which is limited to community services only.

Childcare Education and Training Scheme Places

146. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if those working in the early education and childhood sector have access to continuing professional development, CPD; if workers in the sector are entitled to CPD; the number of days CPD they are entitled to each year; if they are entitled to paid leave to take part in CPD; if their training is paid for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48682/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides for one free pre-school year for all eligible children in the year before commencing primary school. The programme is normally provided for 3 hours per day, 5 days per week, over 38 weeks. The Government has made a very significant commitment in maintaining the pre-school year on a universal and free basis despite the current budgetary situation.

The ECCE programme is funded by my Department through the provision of capitation grants paid directly to participating services. This capitation payment is for the provision of services, including preparatory and supportive work such as engagement with parents, training and organisation. The standard capitation fee paid to participating services is €62.50 per week per eligible child. A higher capitation fee of €73 per week per eligible child is available to pre-school services with more highly qualified staff.

There are in the region of 4,200 pre-school services participating in the programme with new services applying to enter the programme each year. The funding provided under the programme is a guaranteed source of income, paid in advance, and is an important support to services at this time. Services applying to enter the programme should be satisfied that they can meet the full cost of providing the pre-school year from the capitation provided.

Ireland, like other European countries, does not provide for mandatory Continuing Professional Development for early years practitioners. Data from the 2014 Eurydice and Eurostat Report 'Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care—Education and Training in Europe' shows that in Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Poland, Sweden and Norway, CPD is not obligatory for educational and care staff.

The same report identifies that 'Continuing professional development (CPD) plays an essential part in increasing ECEC professionals' competencies. In certain cases, participating in training allows staff not only to improve their knowledge and develop additional professional skills in ECEC, but also to upgrade their qualifications.

I would like to be in a position to provide for mandatory CPD but first I would like to see ear-

ly years practitioners meet the new minimum requirements. The Deputy may be aware that as part of the early years quality agenda aimed at improving the quality of childcare services, new qualification requirements for childcare staff working directly with children were announced last year. A minimum qualification of Level 5 (or equivalent) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) will be required for all staff working with children in pre-school services and the minimum qualification for all pre-school leaders delivering the free pre-school year under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme will be increased from Level 5 to Level 6 (or equivalent) on the NFQ. It is expected that new qualification requirements will apply to all existing services from September 2015.

To support staff who are seeking to meet the new qualifications requirement, funding of €3 million is being made available over the two years 2014/2015 under the new Learner Fund which was launched in March this year. The Fund is being administered by Pobal, with the assistance of local City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs).

My Department also provides annual funding to seven voluntary childcare organisations in the childcare sector, who provide support to childcare services throughout the country. This funding, which will amount to over €2.6 million in 2014, enables the voluntary organisations to provide a range of support services to their members, including on-going training supports.

Services for People with Disabilities

147. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of clients with special needs for which one personal assistant provided by the Health Service Executive is responsible when travelling by bus in a group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48498/14]

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 Waiting Lists

148. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for a hernia operation at Letterkenny General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48499/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, 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 my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Services for People with Disabilities

149. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the measures that are being taken to secure appropriate care and treatment in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Kildare who has profound intellectual disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48506/14]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

150. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the additional supports that are available in respect a child (details supplied) in Dublin 22 who suffers with attention deficit disorder, ADD, and Asperger's syndrome and who is in need of a greater level of support than is currently being provided. [48507/14]

151. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the additional supports available to the family of a child (details supplied) in Dublin 22 who suffers with attention deficit disorder, ADD, and Asperger's syndrome and who is in need of greater support than is currently being provided. [48508/14]

152. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a child (details supplied) in Dublin 22 receives a full mental health assessment as a matter of urgency to ensure that the supports provided to them and their family are appropriate to their level of need. [48509/14]

153. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason the parent of a child (details supplied) in Dublin 22 has not yet received a reply from the Clondalkin mental health service to a request for a full assessment, despite the fact that said request was submitted in July 2014. [48510/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 to 153, inclusive, together.

As this is a service issue this question has been referred to the HSE 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.

Medical Card Applications

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will re-issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, with particular reference to regulations governing discretionary medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48520/14]

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.

Primary Care Centre Provision

155. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the proposed primary health care centre (details supplied) in Ballyowen Castle Shopping Centre, Lucan, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48522/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has responsibility for the provision of Primary Care Centres and the operation and maintenance of existing Health Centres. Therefore, this matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy. 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

156. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for surgery in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48523/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, 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 my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Hospital Appointment Delays

157. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a date for a cataract operation will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48529/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative,

managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, 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 my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Disability Services Provision

158. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) in view of the appalling treatment of persons with an intellectual disability; his plans to alleviate the plight of parents with children with intellectual disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48532/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I have noted the concerns expressed in the details supplied in the Deputy's question.

I am shocked and distressed by the revelations of extremely poor and unacceptable standards of care and mistreatment of vulnerable residents in Áras Attracta. Every person who uses disability services is entitled to expect and receive supports of the highest standard and to live in an atmosphere of safety and care. This is particularly important for vulnerable people in residential care whose families have entrusted them to the care of professional staff.

The allegations of mistreatment in the Prime Time programme are very disturbing and need to be fully investigated. In that regard, I welcome the immediate response of the HSE, following receipt of these serious allegations, to alert the Gardaí and HIQA and for the protection of both residents and staff themselves, to put a number of staff 'off-duty' while the allegations are being investigated. I am assured that staffing levels are being appropriately maintained to deliver safe care to all residents.

I also welcome and support the HSE's initiation of both an expert investigation into these serious allegations chaired by Mr Christy Lynch and an independently chaired review of the services provided at this facility, led by Dr Kevin McCoy.

Mr. Lynch's investigation will examine in particular the practices, behaviours and attitudes of the staff of Unit 3 and will form an important input into the disciplinary process which must be undertaken by the HSE.

Dr. McCoy's review will focus on assuring the quality and safety of care of residents in Áras Attracta. This will be informed by earlier work done by both the HSE and HIQA and will seek to identify any gaps and any contributory and/or causal factors. It will make recommendations so as to eliminate, in any way it is possible to do so, any risk of harm occurring in the future.

I understand that the Director General of the HSE has written to all staff informing them that the onus is on them to take personal responsibility to ensure that the individuals supported by the HSE in any setting are treated with dignity and respect.

The HSE's new National Policy and Procedures for Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse, which I launched with the HSE on 5th December 2014, clears the way for staff members in HSE and non-HSE facilities, and members of the public, to refer allegations of abuse to designated reporting individuals.

This new policy places an onus on providers of services to vulnerable people to appoint a Designated Officer to both receive and follow up on concerns and reports of abuse. Under the new policy it is the responsibility of all staff and service providers to ensure the protection and welfare of vulnerable people. In each Community Healthcare Organisation, a Safeguarding and Protection Team will work in partnership with all relevant service providers to ensure that concerns and complaints are addressed.

This policy complements the statutory inspection by HIQA of nursing homes and residential centres for people with a disability and is very welcome. I also welcome the public appeal made by the Chief Executive of HIQA to encourage any persons who have concerns about the treatment of vulnerable persons in our disability services to contact HIQA. He has emphasised that the matter will be taken very seriously and looked at in the context of HIQA's very significant regulatory powers of inspection of residential facilities.

A system wide process is now commencing, with the establishment of a National Implementation Taskforce. A 6 step programme will be implemented and monitored and will focus on:

- Implementation of Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse - National Policy & Procedures

- Advocacy

- Evaluation and Practice Improvement

- National Summit (Tuesday 16 December) - to improve Client Safety, Dignity, Respect & Culture Change

- Implementation plan for any recommendations arising from the assurance review of residential services in Aras Attracta when complete

- Development of long term sustainable & evidence based safeguarding practices and training programmes specific to residential settings

- Implementation of Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse - National Policy & Procedures

I have been fully briefed by the HSE since they became aware of these allegations and I have asked it to ensure that all appropriate resources are put in place to ensure that the safety and care of residents at Áras Attracta is maintained at the highest possible standard. I have also asked the HSE to brief me on the outcome of these investigations as soon as possible.

It is not appropriate for me to comment or prejudge the outcome of these investigations in advance of their completion.

Hospital Appointments Administration

159. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health why a child (details supplied) in County Cork has only been seen once this year by an endocrinologist when regular scheduled appointments are required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48555/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. In

relation to the specific case raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

International Agreements

160. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48575/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Minister for Justice and Equality intends to sign, subject to ratification, the Istanbul Convention next year. Health Service matters arising in respect of the Convention are a matter for the Health Service Executive and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Hospital Appointment Status

161. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Laois will receive a day procedure in St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48582/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Alcohol Pricing

162. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health when the general scheme of the public health (alcohol) Bill will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48598/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government has approved an extensive package of measures to deal with alcohol misuse to be incorporated in a Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. These measures are based on the recommendations contained in the *Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy, 2012*. The package of measures to be implemented will include provision for minimum unit pricing, regulation of the marketing and advertising of alcohol, regulation of sports sponsorship, structural separation of alcohol from other products in mixed trading outlets and labelling of alcohol products.

The key measure is the drafting of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, which will include provisions for minimum unit pricing, restrictions on marketing and advertising, structural separation of alcohol from other products in mixed trading outlets and labelling of alcohol products, among other measures. Minimum unit pricing is a key part of our strategy to deal with alcohol misuse. It is, I believe, the one measure that will make the most difference most quickly. Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) sets a minimum unit price for alcoholic drinks below which alcohol

cannot be sold. Under MUP, alcohol which is cheap relative to its strength is increased in price. MUP is able to target cheaper alcohol relative to its strength because the minimum price is determined by and is directly proportional to the amount of pure alcohol in the drink. It is mainly aimed at those who are higher risk, such as adolescents and people who have a harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption pattern. It should therefore only have a marginal effect on moderate drinkers. There is strong and clear scientific evidence that an increase in alcohol prices reduces hazardous drinking and serious alcohol related problems. My Department, in conjunction with our colleagues in Northern Ireland, commissioned a health impact assessment from Sheffield University as part of the process of developing a legislative basis for minimum unit pricing. The research studied the impact of different minimum prices on a range of areas such as health, crime and the economy. The report's findings are under consideration. Officials in my Department are liaising with their Northern Irish counterparts on the introduction of minimum unit pricing. Work on developing a framework for the necessary Department of Health legislation is continuing and it is intended to publish a General Scheme of a Bill in January.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

163. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health his Department and the Health Service Executive's policy in respect of the provision of EpiPens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48599/14]

164. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health the number of children who are in receipt of EpiPens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48600/14]

165. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health his views on introducing a scheme to make EpiPens available in schools, workplaces and other public places, similar to the provision of defibrillators; and if he will introduce a scheme to train volunteers as first responders. [48601/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163 to 165, inclusive, together.

Under the current legislation, epi-pens (adrenaline auto-injectors), as injectable medicines, may only be supplied on foot of a valid prescription. However there is provision in the Medicinal Products (Prescription and Control of Supply) Regulations 2003, as amended, whereby a pharmacist may, in emergency circumstances, supply certain prescription only medicines, including adrenaline auto-injectors without a prescription. The Regulations also permit advanced paramedics, paramedics and emergency medical technicians to supply certain medicines including adrenaline auto-injectors in emergency situations.

My Department is reviewing policy in this area and will shortly carry out a consultation process on wider availability of a number of prescription only medicines used in emergency situations, including adrenaline auto-injectors.

This review will explore, among other things, the use of clinical practice guidelines or protocols by means of which non-health professionals may supply and administer adrenaline auto-injectors without the need for an individual prescription. These guidelines would cover the training requirements as well as aspects such as the supply of the auto-injectors, the certification of the establishment where the auto-injectors are located, their storage and persons responsible for their storage and record keeping.

There is no information available on the total number of children who are in receipt of adrenaline auto-injectors. The Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) of the Health

Service Executive (HSE) has information only on claims made under the General Medical Card (GMS) scheme for children within the age group (0-15 years). The number of children within that age group who received adrenalin auto-injectors from January to October, 2014 was 1,842.

Medical Card Applications

166. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48610/14]

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.

Dental Services Provision

167. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the steps he and his Department and the Health Service Executive will take to ensure, at the very least, a visiting dentist service to the town of Castleblayney in County Monaghan, an urgent need for its population and that of its considerable hinterland; if he will, in the context of this need, meet a delegation of Members of the Oireachtas from the Cavan-Monaghan constituency and a representative number of members of the Carrickmacross-Castleblayney municipal district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48611/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has been asked to examine your specific query concerning dental services in Castleblayney and to reply to you as soon as possible. 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.

As this is a service matter, I have asked that appropriate HSE officials meet members of the Oireachtas from the Cavan Monaghan constituency and members of the Carrickmacross-Castleblayney Municipal District.

Departmental Meetings

168. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the possibility of bringing forward a meeting with persons (details supplied) to an earlier date in view of the serious nature of the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48614/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am happy to have this meeting brought forward if a mutually agreeable date can be found in January 2015. My office will be in touch with the persons mentioned in order to try to identify a suitable date.

Hospital Staff

169. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 694 of 4 November 2014, the position regarding recognition by An Bord Altranais of nursing qualifications awarded in Australia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48616/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) have informed me that they advise all overseas applicants on the website at the following link: http://www.nursingboard.ie/en/trained_outside_ireland.aspx that each application received is assessed on an individual basis and therefore NMBI does not pre-determine the outcome of any application until a full review is carried out on same.

Applications received from nurses/midwives who undertook their nursing programme in Australia are each assessed on an individual basis. This is based on assessment of a transcript of the applicant's education programme(s), a detailed curriculum vitae, a professional reference and verification of the applicant's registration status and good standing from any regulatory authority where the applicant has worked. The applicant's education programme is assessed to see how it compares with the requirements and standards of NMBI for nurse/midwifery registration education programmes. The NMBI requirements are based on European Union Directive 2005/36/EC which clearly sets out the theoretical and clinical practice requirements for nurse registration education programmes throughout the EU. These have been in place for general nursing since 1977 and 1980 for midwifery and must be adhered to by all Member States of the EU. Taken into account in assessing an education programme are the specific subjects and quantity of the theoretical instruction and the variety and quantity of the clinical practice experience during the programme. If an individual's initial nursing education programme does not meet the requirements then any post-registration nursing education and supervised clinical practice can be taken into account. The outcome of an application will be one of the following: if the requirements are met in full, then Direct Registration will be granted; if the requirements are not met in full but, taking into account all education and supervised clinical practice experience, are not significantly below the requirements then the applicant will be required to successfully undertake a period of adaptation and assessment in an approved site prior to registration with NMBI; if the applicants education programme is so significantly below the requirements for registration such that post-registration education and supervised clinical practice cannot compensate for the deficits within their programme, then registration will be refused; an internal appeals mechanism is in place for those applicants who have either been refused registration, been issued with an adaptation and assessment decision or who fail an adaptation placement.

Nursing/midwifery education programmes in Australia are not uniform in duration or content. The theoretical and clinical content of these programmes varies significantly. Some education programmes are such that registration is refused or an adaptation and assessment decision is reached. In other instances registration is granted. It is important again to note that each application is assessed and evaluated on an individual basis.

The central tenet of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) is the protection of the public and as such NMBI must be fully satisfied that each application that is considered for registration is fully reviewed and decisions reached are in full compliance with requirements and standards for registration. Individuals who have queries regarding the application process or outcome of an individual assessment should contact NMBI directly.

Medical Card Applications

170. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to have a general practitioner visit card issued by the Health Service Executive in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath who has supplied the requested information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48637/14]

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

171. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry as they have submitted all relevant information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48641/14]

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

172. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the reason income is calculated differently for those under 70 years of age and over 70 years of age who apply for medical cards (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48642/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Applications for persons aged 70 years and older can be assessed both on the basis of the standard national assessment guidelines and on the basis of the guidelines for persons aged 70 years or over.

Under the Health Act 2008, automatic entitlement to a medical card for persons aged 70 and over ended on 31 December 2008. Under the arrangements effected by the Act, a revised system of assessment for eligibility was introduced for those 70 years of age and over, based on the significantly higher gross income limits rather than the standard net income thresholds. Gross income, in respect of the over 70s medical card scheme refers to total basic income prior

to any or all deductions being made. This advantageous arrangement for persons aged over 70 years has facilitated a much greater share of this cohort qualifying for a medical card compared to the general population as a whole. There are no proposals to change this assessment process and it is not seen to constitute discrimination under equality legislation.

In the main, persons in the over-70s age cohort do not have the same outlays and expenses as those under 70 years of age who are assessed on a means basis. The assessment of eligibility under the standard means tested medical card scheme is based on the combined income of the applicant and spouse or partner (if any) after tax, PRSI and USC have been deducted. Allowance may be made for rent/mortgage, travel to work and child care costs. Generally, for the over 70s, mortgages have been cleared, children have been catered for and they would not have travel to work related costs.

Furthermore, persons aged over 70 years may still be eligible for a medical card where discretion is exercised where they face undue hardship in arranging medical services as a result of medical or social circumstances.

Hospital Appointment Status

173. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment and operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48643/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

174. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if all proper procedures were adhered to at a centre (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48656/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Redwood Extended Care Facility in Stamullen, County Meath is part of the privately owned Talbot Group. The Health Service Executive (HSE), Louth/Meath Integrated Services Area engages with the Talbot Group via a Service Level Arrangement to provide residential and day services for clients with disabilities and complex needs.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the 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.

Disability Services Provision

175. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on the proposal for

an independent confidential recipient to deal with complaints around persons with intellectual and physical disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48657/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Director General of the HSE yesterday announced the appointment of Ms Leigh Gath as Confidential Recipient in respect of complaints and disclosures of vulnerable persons in receipt of HSE funded services. Ms Gath has been a fearless advocate and a champion for people with a disability for many years and will, no doubt, provide a strong and independent voice in her role. She will be provided with office facilities in Limerick and will also be provided with a staff of individuals who have relevant skills and have had no prior engagement with the health service.

The role - of which the finer details have yet to be finalised - involves acting as a confidential recipient for 'whistleblowers' (including both staff and clients) in relation to safeguarding concerns and issues of alleged abuse, negligence or other mistreatment. The Director General of the HSE has stated that she will be an important champion for people who may be concerned, for various reasons, when they make complaints. The Terms of Reference for the role are currently being agreed.

The Director General has emphasised the importance of the confidentiality associated with this new process. This development complements the system wide process of the establishment of a National Implementation Taskforce that involves a 6 step programme which will be implemented and monitored; the details of which I have already outlined to the Deputy in PQ Number 48466/14, 16 December 2014.

Question No. 176 withdrawn.

National Lottery Funding Disbursement

177. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter regarding funding for a group (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48660/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department administers a National Lottery Discretionary Fund from which once-off grants are paid to community and voluntary organisations, providing a range of health related services. If an organisation wishes to make an application for National Lottery Funding they should send in a formal application. Detailed procedures along with the application form are set out on the Department's website at www.health.gov.ie.

Services for People with Disabilities

178. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date regarding the planned three-month review of St. Hilda's services in Athlone, County Westmeath, and St. Christopher's Services in County Longford; the specific objectives of the review as set out in the review; if one of those specific objectives is to ensure that no services will be cut at St. Hilda's services or St. Christopher's services; the date the review commenced; the date it will conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48717/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions 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.

Ambulance Service Response Times

179. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the reason the national ambulance service provided individual hospital turnaround times earlier this year, but is now refusing to provide any figure other than a national figure for all hospitals; his views that this is in the interests of patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48718/14]

180. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the reason the national ambulance service provided ambulance response times for each of the nine sub regions earlier this year, but is now refusing to provide any figure other than a super-regional figure; his views that this is in the interests of patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48719/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 179 and 180 together.

As these are service matters, 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 my officials will follow the matter up.

Departmental Programmes

181. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the Department programme management office was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48727/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Work on establishing the Programme Management Office (PMO) commenced in February 2013. The Office was established to support the delivery of the health reforms in *Future Health* and its scope includes:

- coordinating the reform programme and acting as a clearing house for projects;
- managing a monitoring and reporting system that shows progress in relation to each project and highlights areas for corrective action;
- advising the Health Reform Programme Board on scheduling, prioritisation and interdependencies of projects;
- developing expertise in programme and project management to support divisions within the Department; and
- managing the development of a consultation, communication and collaboration strategy.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the PMO, the governance arrangements for the health reform programme include a Health Reform Programme Board to which the PMO reports. The Board drives and oversees implementation of the health service reform programme in line with the public service reform agenda.

The PMO has implemented a reporting system across the Department to track all projects and also reports to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on a quarterly basis.

Patient Safety Agency Establishment

182. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the new patient safety agency will be established on an administrative basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48728/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The establishment of a Patient Safety Agency is under review in the context of the strategic reform of the health services and the measures that are being taken to strengthen patient safety, including advocacy and related services, within the Health Service Executive.

Medical Indemnity Cover

183. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the work of the Department with the Health Service Executive and the State Claims Agency to develop a risk-based approach to provision of indemnity to services and professionals was completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48729/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Action 7 of “Future Health - A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012-2015” and in turn Action 7.3.1 of the Health Service Reform Programme, states that *‘the Department of Health will work with the HSE and the State Claims Agency to develop a risk based approach to the provision of indemnity to services and professionals’*. In effect, this means that the Department will work with the HSE and the State Claims Agency to ensure that the indemnity provided to services aligns with health systems policy. Good progress has been made in implementing this Action.

The enhanced IT system, the National Adverse Event Management System (NAEMS), developed by the State Claims Agency, is an essential part of the infrastructure required to provide the data on risk, which is necessary to implement this action. The NAEMS went live in June, 2014 and is now being rolled out on a phased basis to all users. An Information Governance Group, chaired by the Chief Medical Officer of my Department, has been established to provide oversight on the implementation and use of NAEMS.

Legislation is also required to enable the policy of a risk based approach to indemnity to be implemented. This legislation is currently being drafted.

Cancer Screening Programmes

184. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health to set out the date in 2015 when the age range extension of BreastCheck for women from 65 to 69 years of age will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48730/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I recently announced the extension of the BreastCheck screening programme to women aged 65 to 69 years of age. Planning for this is underway and screening of the extended cohort will commence in quarter 4 of 2015. The age extension will be expanded on an incremental basis in order to manage the additional screening and follow up involved. It will be fully rolled out by 2021. The additional eligible population is approximately 100,000 and, when fully implemented, 540,000 women will be included in the BreastCheck Programme.

Women of any age who have concerns about breast cancer should seek the advice of their

GP who will, if appropriate, refer them to the symptomatic breast services in one of the eight designated cancer centres.

HSE Governance

185. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health to outline the findings and recommendations of the review conducted by his Department in conjunction with the Health Service Executive of the corporate functions and resources, staff and budget of the various corporate, support and shared services as they currently exist within the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48731/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In order to effectively reorganise the health service, it is necessary to have a clear, accurate understanding of how resources of all kinds are currently allocated. In the context of the current restructuring programme, particularly community health organisations and hospital groups, my department has asked the HSE to carry out a review in 2015 of how staff, current and capital expenditure, and capital resources are allocated across the whole of the HSE.

This review is an expanded version of the commitment made in Future Health in relation to the review of corporate resources, which has now been subsumed into the wider restructuring exercise. The review will help to inform decisions as to how these resources might best be distributed in the future.

Departmental Budgets

186. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health to explain the way his Department has developed programme-based budgeting in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48732/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Successful transformation of our health services requires a corresponding transformation of the existing funding model. The first stage in transforming this funding model is to clarify funding streams through the creation of directorates and corresponding programme based budgets. In Vote terms, programme based budgets have already been established for the Primary Care Reimbursement Service and NHSS - Fair Deal.

My Department will continue to work with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to develop a new Programme Based Budgeting system. However, given the multitude of financial systems in operation in the HSE, this work will be dependant on the development and roll out of an integrated financial management system. A detailed business case for a new finance operating model, including the procurement of a new Integrated Financial Management System for the wider health service, has been submitted to my Department and to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is receiving attention. The HSE has begun an industry engagement exercise on the Financial Operating Model and the strategic procurement approach it will be taking with suppliers. A key feature of the exercise is an assessment of the technology options available to underpin value for money and the best strategic fit given the current investment.

HSE Expenditure

187. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the recommendations contained in the 2012 reviews of financial management systems in the Irish health service; the progress made in implementing these recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48733/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A Review of Financial Management Systems in the Irish Health Service, commonly known as the Ogden Report, was undertaken in 2012.

The review was commissioned by the Secretary General of the Department of Health. Its overall intention was to review the state of the financial management system in place in the health sector in Ireland at the time in the context of the serious overruns projected to occur in 2012, the continuation of a challenging financial environment for the foreseeable future and the radical reforms envisioned in the Programme for Government.

The report made a number of recommendations to improve the financial management process within the HSE, with particular reference to managing the transition phase that the health sector was undergoing. The recommendations were grouped into 3 distinct areas: Improving Financial Performance; Policy Considerations; and Effective Transitioning (Managing the Change). These are set out in the following table.

As part of the process of further strengthening the financial management of the HSE, additional independent expertise was engaged to evaluate the financial performance management system and a Finance Reform Board has been established comprising the HSE Director General (Chair), senior HSE management and representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The HSE commenced the Finance Reform Programme in Autumn 2012. One of the main outputs of Phase 1 of the programme was the development of a new finance operating model in health which was contained in the document entitled *Defining Financial Management: A Finance Operating Model for Health in Ireland*, available on the HSE website. This report encompasses a roadmap for the finance function to facilitate delivery of an efficient and effective financial service to meet the emerging requirements of the changing organisational face of the health system.

A critical enabler for the transformation of financial management is the introduction of a single Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) which is considered to be the single most important non-clinical priority for the HSE this year. The initial key element of Phase 2 of the Finance Reform Programme was the preparation of a detailed business case for a new operating model in relation to securing the necessary approval to procure a new IFMS for the health service. The Business Case defines the case for change and scope as well as providing an estimate of the resources required to deliver the operating model and supporting technology. The HSE has submitted a business case to my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform which is receiving attention.

Phase 3 of the Finance Reform Programme is now progressing on a number of key workstreams. HSE has begun an industry engagement exercise on the Financial Operating Model and the strategic procurement approach it will be taking with suppliers. A key feature of the exercise is an assessment of the technology options available to underpin value for money and the best strategic fit given the current investment.

-	A REVIEW OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN THE IRISH HEALTH SERVICE
	Main Recommendations
1.	Improving Financial Performance
1.1	Review and clarify the National financial accountability arrangements.
1.2	Enhance the core financial management capability of the system, through - Building on the capacity and capability in the Department of Health;- Developing a clear organisational strategy to prepare the financial system for hospital groups; and- Designing a programme to upgrade financial capability.
1.3	Provide immediate clarity to the system for 2012 on what will be funded nationally and what is a local responsibility for resolution.
1.4	Agree financial control target ranges for each region for 2012 consistent with national agreements.
1.5	Develop a strategy as a priority to establish the technical ICT infrastructure and management capacity required to support a single financial information system.
1.6	Develop systems for measuring cost containment, avoidance, and reduction within the non-hospital sector.
1.7	Review the process and transparency of forecasting, with best practice methodologies researched and adopted.
1.8	Develop a supply chain excellence programme to underpin the full establishment of shared procurement services within the health system.
1.9	Accelerate plans to develop a system wide procurement ICT system and shared service.
2.	Policy Considerations
2.1	Review the process of managing deficits and surpluses urgently and establish a new concordat between the centre, regions and organisations to enshrine the principle that deficits and surpluses will 'lie where they fall', with the appropriate consequences for local leaders in terms of autonomy and control.
2.2	Review the allocations process and policy for 2013 – 2015
2.3	Develop a strategy of stabilisation for hospitals
2.4	Develop a suite of metrics to manage the financial and operational performance in community and primary care services.
3.	Effective Transitioning (Managing the Change)
3.1	The present period of transition is a period of maximum risk and clarity is required urgently on the leadership arrangements that will obtain through the transition period.
3.2	Create a formal accountability framework based on the new incentives and governance arrangements at every level, and re-affirm accountability within the immediate system, through the transition phase into the future system.
3.3	Create a single quality assurance process to ensure savings both now and in future are delivered safely, with full involvement of the clinical community.
3.4	Model the impact of the clinical programmes in a more sophisticated way. This needs to be factored in to the service planning and budget allocation process for 2013 – 2015.

Care of the Elderly Provision

188. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the single assessment

tool for older persons services was rolled out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48734/14]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

189. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the findings of the review of the fair deal scheme to assess its applicability to other sectors such as the disability and mental health residential sectors will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48735/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): When the Nursing Homes Support Scheme commenced, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Terms of Reference for the Review are:

Taking account of Government policy, demographic trends and the fiscal situation:

1. To examine the on-going sustainability of the Nursing Home Support Scheme,
2. To examine the overall cost of long-term residential care in public and private nursing homes and the effectiveness of the current methods of negotiating/setting prices,
3. Having regard to 1 and 2 above, to consider the balance of funding between long-term residential care and community based services,
4. To consider the extension of the Scheme to community based services and to other sectors (Disability and Mental Health) and,
5. To make recommendations for the future operation and management of the Scheme.

The Review of the Scheme which is currently underway will consider the future funding and sustainability of the Scheme as well as how community and residential services are balanced. It is expected that the Review will be completed in the coming months when a report will be made publicly available.

Palliative Care Services

190. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the prospective funding model for palliative care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48736/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In line with recommendations contained in Future Health - A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012 - 2015, the HSE is currently working on a Prospective Funding Model for Palliative Care which will assist in integrating and accounting for palliative care across all funding streams and delivery models.

An Expert Group on Prospective Funding in Palliative Care was established in May 2012 to produce a report with recommendations about the development of this Prospective Funding

Model for the consideration of the HSE and the Department of Health. The Group is chaired by Professor Charles Normand, Professor of Health Policy and Management, Trinity College Dublin.

Due to complexities in data collection and analysis, the production of the report has been delayed. However, the report is in the final stages of drafting, with public consultation planned for Q1 2015 and submission to the Department of Health by start Q2 2015.

Disability Services Provision

191. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health with regard to the move towards a person-centred model of services and supports for disability services, when the initiation of demonstration projects as proof of concept commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48737/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Progress is continuing on the complex multi-year project to reform disability services, as recommended in the *Value for Money (VFM) and Policy Review of Disability Services*. Project governance and management structures have been put in place and, as the Deputy has indicated, a range of demonstration projects have been initiated as proof of concept. A total of 110 demonstration projects have been grant-aided by the Genio Trust, a non-profit body which receives funding from the HSE to foster innovation, during the period 2010 – 2013 broken down as follows:

Year:	Number of Projects:	Total amount awarded:
2010	31	€2,150,456
2011	10	€1,063,976
2012	42	€5,428,170
2013	27	€2,370,496

The projects will provide a substantial contribution towards the transition to the new model of person-centred supports and have been targeted in the following areas:

- Projects to move/keep people out of institutional care by supporting them to live as independently as possible in the community, resulting in institutional closure;
- Active integration of people with disabilities into mainstream work, third level education and leisure activities;
- Measures to strengthen and build networks of support comprising family, friends and neighbours offering alternative respite;
- Empowerment of people with disabilities to take control of their own lives and strengthening of strategic advocacy particularly on the part of people with disabilities.

Detailed evaluation on certain targeted projects has been completed by Genio. Taking into account the number and diversity of the demonstration projects however, a more extensive evaluation process will be initiated in 2015 by a Working Group reporting directly to the VFM Steering Group.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

192. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently awaiting placement under the fair deal scheme; the average waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48738/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As of the 11th of December 2014 (latest figures available) there are 1,071 people on the national placement list with an average wait time of 12 weeks. My Department and the HSE are working to ensure that the resources that are available are deployed in the most effective way possible and deliver the best outcomes for older people. This will require an integrated approach across community, residential and other service areas.

The HSE controls the release of funding to manage the funds that are available across the course of the year. Funding is released to approved applicants according to their place, in order of their approval date, on the National Placement List. Over the course of the year to date, demand for funding has exceeded what could be released and the National Placement List has grown as a result.

In July this year, the HSE allocated €5m for an initiative to improve access to appropriate care for older people. To date this has funded over 300 transitional care beds for patients in acute hospitals who are on the NHSS National Placement List and over 200 home care packages to assist patients in the acute hospitals who require a home care package to be discharged.

In Budget 2015 a further €25 million has been allocated to alleviate the problem of delayed discharges. This will be applied across community and residential services to improve the National Placement List waiting times and to relieve the pressure in acute hospitals resulting from beds being taken up by those who no longer require acute care.

Hospital Services

193. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of operations or procedures that have been cancelled or postponed in each public hospital to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48740/14]

194. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of operations or procedures that have been cancelled or postponed in each voluntary hospital to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48741/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 194 together.

As these are service matters, 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 my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Procedures

195. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of procedures the SDU or health service has procured from private-independent hospitals to date in 2014; the amount spent by the health service or SDU on these procedures in private-independent hospitals to date this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48742/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 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 my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Services

196. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason that on one day, 10 December 2014, there were 35 operations cancelled when patients (details supplied) were actually inside the operating theatre and had to be sent home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48758/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 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 my officials will follow the matter up.

Medical Card Eligibility

197. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 295 of 9 December 2014, in circumstances where a person aged over 70 years wishes to remain with his or her non-public sector general practitioner rather than parading around with his or her personal medical file to other GPs, if the non-public general practitioner's prescription will have the same recognition and equal status as that of a public sector GP, in other words, the prescription would be completed at the same cost at the pharmacy as would be the prescription of a public sector GP. [48759/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): A medical card, as issued by the Health Service Executive (HSE), confirms that the holder is entitled, free of charge, to a range of Health Services, including:

- A choice of General Medical Practitioner from those doctors who have a contract with the HSE; and

- The supply of prescribed approved medicines, aids and appliances, subject to prescription charges.

A GP visit card holder is also entitled to a choice of General Medical Practitioner, similar to a medical card holder but is not entitled to prescribed approved medicines free of charge.

GMS contract holders must provide prescriptions to their medical card patients on the relevant GMS prescription form in order for them to receive their medication free of charge, subject to any applicable prescription charges. GMS prescription forms are not available to non-GMS contract holders and, therefore, prescriptions written by General Medical Practitioners who do not hold a GMS contract are not reimbursable under the GMS scheme and are instead a private transaction matter between the patient and the pharmacist for which the relevant costs will apply.

The Drugs Payment Scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines. Under the scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines.

Hospital Services

198. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 335 of 9 December 2014, if he will provide the full details of the care plan being arranged in St. Aloysius ward in the Mater Hospital, Dublin 7; if he will provide a comprehensive description of the suitable physicians who will take care of the person; and if he will provide a breakdown of the treatment available over the course of each week and detail the different modes of rehabilitation and care. [48762/14]

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 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 Applications

199. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork in need of a medical card and issue same on hardship grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48767/14]

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.

International Agreements

200. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48574/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland is not party to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). Although my Department has an important role in relation to signing and ratifying international agreements, the necessary legislative or administrative measures required to implement them are for the line Department responsible for the subject matter of the agreement, in this case Department of Justice and Equality. My Department has been consulted by the Department of Justice and Equality on issues relating to the possible signature and ratification of the Convention. The Minister for Justice and Equality recently indicated that she intends to seek the approval of the Government to sign the Convention on behalf of Ireland as early as possible in 2015.

Middle East Issues

201. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he

will take to recognise the state of Palestine following Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann passing motions in favour of Ireland's recognition of the state of Palestine; the expected timeframe for the full recognition of the state of Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48622/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government's approach to the question of recognition of Palestine was set out in detail during the course of the debate held in the Dáil on 9 and 10 December. Achieving and recognising a Palestinian state has always been the Government's objective, and everything we do on the Middle East is directed towards that aim. While successive Governments have always seen recognition coming as part of an agreed peace, I have made clear that I have absolutely no difficulty in principle with the idea of early recognition, if I believe it can contribute to achieving a settlement of the conflict. The present stalemate is not acceptable to me, and I am open to any action that can move things forward positively. As you know, the EU at the last Foreign Affairs Council, prompted by Sweden's action and with my own support, began a process of reflection among Ministers as to the implications and possibilities of recognition and I believe that is an important, responsible and reasonable approach to take. In parallel with this, I am also reflecting on the views expressed by all sides in the House during the recent debate on the issue, including the considerations set out for the House by my Ministerial colleagues, and on the motions passed by both the Seanad and the Dáil; along with the views and positions of other EU partners; and on what early recognition could mean both for Palestine and for Ireland's influence on this critical issue.

I am not in a position to indicate a timeframe for conclusion of this process at present.

Northern Ireland Issues

202. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at the recent all-party talks in Northern Ireland; if progress was made on any of the issues under discussion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48710/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Since 16 October, when the Northern Ireland political talks were convened, in excess of 90 meetings have been held across the four streams of the talks. Those four streams relate to budgetary and financial issues; legacy issues (parades, flags and emblems, and dealing with the past); institutional issues including the functioning of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly; and, outstanding commitments from the Good Friday and St. Andrews Agreements.

The Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister attended the talks last week. Whilst some important gaps remain, good progress has been made on many of the most difficult but significant challenges, including in relation to legacy issues. On welfare reform and broader issues around budgets, a number of challenging decisions have still to be faced. I am determined that further progress be made on all issues so that a comprehensive agreement to address the divisive legacy of the past and to secure a prosperous future for the people of Northern Ireland can be achieved.

I will be in Belfast today and tomorrow for further talks. It is clear that compromises will be needed from all participants. There is now a very limited window of opportunity if agreement is to be reached. Political representatives must show the leadership required to secure an agreement for the benefit of people across this island.

Northern Ireland Issues

203. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the proposed bill of rights for Northern Ireland, the Irish Language Act and the establishment of the civic forum were discussed at the recent North-South Ministerial Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48711/14]

204. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the outstanding issues arising from the Good Friday Agreement and the St. Andrews Agreement were discussed at the recent North-South Ministerial Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48712/14]

205. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if tax issues, such as corporation tax, were discussed at the recent North-South Ministerial Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48713/14]

206. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues that were discussed at the recent North-South Ministerial Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48714/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 to 206, inclusive, together.

The nineteenth meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in plenary format was held in Armagh on 5 December 2014.

At the meeting, discussions covered economic and budgetary issues in both jurisdictions. The Council welcomed the broadly encouraging prospects while recognising that challenges remain. The recent announcement by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer on Corporation Tax was also discussed. Both administrations reflected on their respective successes in attracting external investment while acknowledging that there is a key role to be played by indigenous companies in economic development. The opportunities to work together on Joint Trade Missions and on developing new markets were also recognised.

The Council noted that, following Ministerial consideration of a report on the feasibility of submitting a joint bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023, it had been agreed to support the IRFU's bid, and indeed the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, First Minister, deputy First Minister and other Ministers had attended the launch of the bid in Armagh just before the Plenary meeting. The Council discussed the potential benefits hosting such an event would bring to both jurisdictions and agreed that the relevant Ministers should work closely together to ensure the strongest possible bid is submitted.

Ministers noted that the new draft PEACE and INTERREG Programmes are currently with the European Commission for consideration and it is hoped that the final Programmes will be launched in Spring 2015.

The Council welcomed the ongoing discussions between Ministers at NSMC meetings on the potential for collaboration to draw down EU funds and noted that there is active engagement between both jurisdictions on the opportunities available. The Council looked forward to a further progress report at its next meeting.

Ministers also noted the position on Sectoral Priorities and the North West Gateway Initiative and agreed to keep these matters on its agenda. They also discussed the Progress Report prepared by the NSMC Joint Secretaries on the work of the North South Bodies and in the other NSMC areas for co-operation and noted the current position on a North South Consultative Forum.

There was an in-depth discussion on Child Protection issues with a particular focus on e-Safety, and the good collaborative work already taking place, both within the NSMC structures and elsewhere was noted. Ministers recognised that issues such as these are cross-cutting and cross-jurisdictional and will require an ongoing collaborative approach between both administrations. The Council agreed that Ministers who have a remit in Child Protection and E-Safety related activities should engage with their counterparts in the opposite jurisdiction to explore whether there is potential for further collaboration. It was also agreed that this topic should be revisited at a future meeting.

The next plenary meeting of the NSMC is scheduled to take place in early summer 2015, and I am looking forward to continuing to work closely and constructively on all of these issues with our Northern colleagues in the North South Ministerial Council.

Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement provided for the establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council and the North/South Implementation Bodies. It also provided that consideration be given to a North/South Consultative Forum and a North/South Parliamentary Forum. The St Andrews Agreement provided further that the Northern Ireland Executive would support the establishment of an independent North/South Consultative Forum.

With the establishment in 2012 of the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association, which is in effect the North/South Parliamentary Forum envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement, the only Strand Two institution that remains outstanding is the North/South Consultative Forum. The Government continues to support the establishment of the Consultative Forum, and the Taoiseach has raised the Forum at each Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council he has attended including the most recent meeting on 5 December.

The Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, the Irish Language Act and the Northern Ireland Civic Forum were not discussed at the NSMC Plenary meeting as they are not Strand Two issues and are therefore not among the matters discussed at NSMC meetings. However, outstanding commitments of the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements have been discussed at the political talks in Belfast convened by the Irish and British Governments, which began on 16 October. The Irish Government has strongly advocated progress on these matters in the current talks. The principles and values of the Good Friday Agreement and St. Andrews Agreement are essential to peace and reconciliation in Ireland and across these islands. Accordingly, the position of the Irish Government always has been, and continues to be, that all outstanding elements of the Agreements must be implemented.

Shannon Airport Facilities

207. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on statements from his Department that there is no evidence of Irish involvement in CIA renditions when they have been provided evidence of CIA rendition planes passing through Shannon. [48748/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Programme for Government states that the Government will enforce the prohibition of the use of Irish airspace, airports and related facilities for purposes not in line with the dictates of international law. Ireland does not tolerate and will not tolerate the use of our airspace or airports for any illegal purpose, including torture, rendition or the unauthorised detention of any individual. It has been made clear by the current and previous Governments that such activity would be considered completely unacceptable and illegal.

The Government has, over the years, responded to allegations about rendition flights using Shannon Airport. A number of complaints concerning alleged unlawful activity at Shannon Airport have been investigated by An Garda Síochána. However, no evidence of rendition was disclosed in any of the investigations.

Ireland has previously sought and received categorical assurances from the US Government that Irish airports have not been used and would not be used for rendition without our express permission, which it has been made clear would not be forthcoming.

Apprenticeship Programmes

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which precise requirements in apprenticeships have been identified throughout the industrial sector; the extent to which this need is being met and is likely to be met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48697/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The curricula for the current apprenticeship trades are reviewed regularly to ensure they meet the requirements of the relevant sectors.

With regard to apprenticeships in new areas, it should be noted that following on from the recent Review of Apprenticeship, an Implementation Plan was published by my Department on the 30th June 2014. As part of this plan a new Apprenticeship Council was recently established. The Council is enterprise-led and has representatives from business, trade unions, and further and higher education bodies. The first job of work of the Apprenticeship Council will be to develop and manage a call for proposals from industry for new apprenticeships. It will then evaluate and submit proposals to me in this regard.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

209. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason an application for access to a reader in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 was denied, despite the stated support of their psychologist and school. [48405/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

School Guidance Counsellors

210. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the impact of cutbacks in school guidance counselling services in post-primary school students; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48531/14]

222. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has received evidence from the Institute of Guidance Councillors, ESRI, ASTI, TUI and JMB on the impact of the cutbacks in guidance counselling; the numbers and percentage reduction in times for one-

to-one counselling; if there are figures for non-guidance staff carrying out guidance counselling functions in schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48716/14]

223. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views that one-to-one time allocation in guidance counselling is fundamental in schools; if her Department is meeting its obligation under section 9(c) of the Education Act; if sufficient resources will be given to guidance counselling; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48739/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 210, 222 and 223 together.

Since September 2012 guidance provision is now being organised by school management from within the staffing schedule allocation. In this way principals have discretion to balance guidance needs with the pressures to provide subject choice. My Department helped shelter the impact for DEIS post-primary schools by improving their standard staffing allocations. All 195 second-level school in DEIS have been given targeted support by a more favourable staffing schedule of 18.25:1. This is a 0.75 point reduction compared to the existing PTR of 19:1 that applies in non fee-paying second-level schools (23:1 in fee-charging schools).

Guidance and counselling are a whole-school responsibility, with guidance counsellors playing their part within an overall team approach. The representative organisations for school principals and school management have developed a framework that assists schools on how best to manage the provision of guidance from within their staffing allocation. Wherever possible, group work and class-based activity should be used to maximise the amount of time available for those pupils who are most in need of one-to-one support.

In February my Department published a guide to developing student support teams in post-primary schools. This is an important resource for schools in promoting and protecting students' well-being and an aid to establishing a team or reviewing an existing team.

Guidance counsellors have two distinct functions. The first is general career guidance and guidance on the educational opportunities a child or young person might pursue, while the second involves support for students' well-being. The principal and leadership of a school have the best knowledge and experience to determine how exactly guidance resources and teaching resources should be allocated.

International Agreements

211. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions her Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if her Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48571/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department is represented on the National Steering Committee on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence. This Committee is chaired by COSC, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, which is an executive office of the Department of Justice and Equality. My Department is also implementing the commitments in the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence for which it has responsibility. However, lead responsibility for issues relating to the Istanbul Convention rests with the Department of Justice and Equality.

Schools Health and Safety

212. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration is being given to formulate a national policy on the administration of medication in schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48604/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

It is important that the school management authority requests parents to ensure that the school is made aware of any medical condition suffered by any pupil attending. Where the school is aware of potential difficulties that may arise as a consequence of a medical condition suffered by one or more pupils, it may be possible for the management authorities, working in conjunction with parents, teachers and children to put preventative measures in place to lessen the possibility of any difficulties arising or to ensure that, if a pupil suffers from an illness requiring medication, that appropriate treatment is available.

The administration of medicines in primary schools is the subject of an agreement between the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the organisation representing school management at primary level. While this agreement specifies that no teacher can be required to administer medicine or drugs to pupils, it also sets out procedures that must be followed where a teacher or teachers agree to do so. The position is that either the parents of the child should make themselves available to administer medication as required or where they wish the staff in the school to administer it they should indemnify the school.

My Department cannot direct any member of the Board of Management or the teaching staff of a school to administer medical treatment to pupils, action and procedures which are normally carried out by medical professionals such as doctors and nurses.

Bullying in Schools

213. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of incidents of school bullying, including cyberbullying, reported to her Department by the primary and-or post-primary sectors over the past year; the extent to which it has been found possible to address the issue to date; her plans for the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48607/14]

214. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures that have been taken in the past year to deal with cyberbullying; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48608/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 214 together.

The Action Plan on Bullying, which was published in January 2013, sets out my Department's approach to tackling bullying in schools. These actions focus on support for schools, teacher training, research and awareness raising and aim to ensure that all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, are addressed.

As part of the implementation of the Action Plan, new National Anti-Bullying Procedures for schools, which include a specific reference to cyberbullying, were published in September 2013 and are currently being implemented by all 4,000 primary and post primary schools in

the country. Training materials for parents, teachers and Boards of Management are also being developed and rolled out.

The recommended approach is for schools to aim to prevent bullying in schools and, where it does happen, to take the steps required to address the issue at local level. There is no obligation on school authorities to report incidents of bullying to my Department and my Department does not collate data on individual bullying incidents.

My Department supports Safer Internet Day, an initiative that addresses internet safety issues, including cyber-bullying, for young people. In addition awareness-raising initiatives on cyberbullying including “Up2Us”, a new resource to tackle cyberbullying, are provided through the internet safety initiative, Webwise. An Up2Us Social Media Roadshow to help teenagers adopt best practice in terms of social media engagement was run in collaboration with Beat 102-103 over a 5 week period from mid-October 2014.

A study on “The Prevalence and Impact of Bullying Linked to Social Media on the Mental Health and Suicidal Behaviour among Young People”, which was commissioned by my Department and the National Office for Suicide Prevention, was published in May 2014. The review notes that as cyberbullying appears to be closely tied to traditional bullying, it is likely that already established anti-bullying interventions will also impact on cyberbullying and that entirely new programmes are not necessary.

Central to promoting safer use of the Internet by young people is a strong commitment to changing behaviour and raising the knowledge, skills and attitudes around preventing, responding to and reporting cyberbullying incidents. The continued implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying will increase capacity in these areas and build on my Department’s current strategy to ensure that internet safety is mainstreamed throughout schools’ teaching, learning and other practices.

Legislative Programme

215. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the education (admission to schools) Bill will be brought before the Houses of the Oireachtas for debate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48609/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Government gave approval in March of this year for drafting the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2014 and the bill is currently at an advanced stage of drafting. The Bill is on the Government legislative programme for publication early in the Spring/Summer session.

The objective of the Admissions to School Bill is to provide an over-arching framework to ensure that how schools decide on who is enrolled and who is refused a place in schools is more structured, fair and transparent. The framework also proposes a mechanism for ensuring that every child receives a school place. A key objective in designing the framework is to create greater confidence for parents that the admission criteria laid down by schools are legitimate, reasonable and fair.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

216. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide, in tabular form, the total number of applications for the 2014 summer works scheme;

the number of these which were funded by county; the number of which were not funded by county; the amount of funding sought by each unfunded school; and the nature of the works funding was sought for. [48631/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Over 1,600 applications were received under the 2014 Summer Works Scheme. In total, the spending of more than €70 million on the 2014 Summer Works Scheme has been approved to allow over 770 schools undertake improvement works. In that regard, I wish to advise the Deputy that provision has been made in the 2015 allocation for the carryover costs of the improvement works concerned.

Commensurate with the level of funding set aside for the Scheme, applications were assessed on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the Circular accompanying the Scheme. Unfortunately, due to the scale of demand for funding under the Scheme, it was not possible to grant aid all applications. However, in accordance with the Scheme’s Circular, these applications will be retained and will be prioritised for consideration in the future, subject to availability of funding.

In respect of the further details in tabular form requested by the Deputy, I wish to advise that this will be forwarded separately to the Deputy in the coming days.

Summer Works Scheme Expenditure

217. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total funding allocated to the 2014 summer works scheme; if any of this funding was sourced from an underspend in the 2013 primary and secondary capital works budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48632/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Spending of over €70m on the 2014 Summer Works Scheme has been approved of which €58.5m has been issued to date in 2014. The balance will be a commitment in 2015 in respect of Summer Works projects that are not as yet completed.

While capital expenditure on the schools sector in 2013 amounted to €361.4m which was €5.6m shy of the allocation for the sector in that year, the Department’s overall capital outturn was over €7m ahead of the original allocation for 2013. Consequently, no funding was carried forward from 2013 to 2014.

Teacher Data

218. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of qualified primary teachers currently unable to find work or under-employed in part-time work; the number of student teachers currently in colleges including private colleges that will be seeking work in coming years; the number of full-time positions filled in the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48633/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Teaching Council, the professional standards body for teachers, have been asked for advice on the matter of teacher supply and demand. The Council is currently working to provide that advice with the overall goal of ensuring that there is timely information to inform the system generally and for planning in my Department. The Teaching Council has established a Technical Working Group to pilot a draft model of teacher supply and a Consultative Forum for stakeholders which will offer ad-

vice and feedback on proposals developed by the Technical Working Group. I expect to receive an initial report from the Teaching Council shortly.

Information on the number of teachers out of work is not available in my Department. Teacher allocations are approved annually in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. There were a thousand more teachers employed in schools around the country in the last school year, than there was the year before. There will be a further increase of circa 1,300 teachers in the current school year. This is a very significant investment at a time of scarce resources. Teachers are appointed by the Management Bodies of schools. There are approximately 3,000 substitute teachers employed by School Authorities in any one day in the Primary Sector. A sub replacement service is operated by some Education Bodies. The policy of my Department is to ensure, as far as possible, that the Managerial Authorities of schools give priority to unemployed registered teachers who are fully qualified when filling vacant teaching posts. My Department has issued a number of Circulars addressing this issue in recent years. Under these Circulars School Principals must maintain a list of unemployed registered teachers who are available for substitute work at short notice. Circular 31/2011 details a cascade of measures for the recruitment of teachers, prioritising an appropriately qualified registered teachers.

The information sought by the Deputy on number of full time positions filled in the past three years is not readily available in my Department in the format required by the Deputy. School authorities appoint teachers to full time posts on an ongoing basis when posts fall vacant, for example, to replace teachers who resigned or retired and to fill newly sanctioned posts.

The current average number of graduates from the State funded colleges is approximately 1300 per annum. Hibernia College expects in the region of 550 graduates per annum.

Departmental Funding

219. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide additional funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Laois to enable them complete a building project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48647/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy will be aware, the school in question were granted approval in February 2014 for a mainstream classroom with en-suite facilities to replace a prefab unit. This additional accommodation will significantly enhance this 3 classroom school’s facilities. My Department have since been made aware that the school, in question, are seeking additional funding to provide further works, that are significantly in excess of the scope of the accommodation approved. It is open to the school to submit details to my Department of the proposed works, in question. When this information has been received, my Department will then be in a position to assess the application.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

220. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the employment of persons who have been working full time as special needs assistants, SNAs, in schools and where there is no longer a demand for a full time SNA or any SNA in a particular school; if there are arrangements in place where they can go on a panel to be provided with employment in adjoining schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48649/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): SNA allocations are deter-

mined by the NCSE on an annual basis. Where the allocation of SNA resources to a school is reduced this may necessitate a reduction in the allocation of the hours of the most junior SNA(s). Where the hours of an SNA are reduced, a compensation payment is made to that SNA where they have the requisite service in line with the terms of DES circular 58/2006. Where a reduction in the allocation of SNA(s) to a school results in the redundancy of SNA(s) the following will apply.

A set of proposals for a public service agreement were put forward by the Labour Relations Commission which now form the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016 (the Haddington Road Agreement). One aspect of this Agreement relates to supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and as both Unions that represent SNAs namely, SIPTU and IMPACT, have signed up to the Haddington Road Agreement, my Department has implemented supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs.

The first part of the LRC proposals for supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs outlines that the supplementary assignment arrangements only apply to current SNAs who are notified that they are to be made redundant. Accordingly, the purpose of these arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school/ETB.

With effect from 1 May 2013 once an SNA with a minimum of one year's service (Service in a substitute capacity i.e. covering for maternity leave, sick leave, career breaks, job-sharing etc. does not count) is notified by his/her employer that s/he is to be made redundant then s/he shall be deemed to be a member of a supplementary assignment panel for SNAs.

With the exception of SNAs who have been re-employed on permanent contracts or have chosen to opt out of the panel in accordance with the terms of Paragraph 6 of the circular, all SNAs who have been made redundant since 1 May 2013 are members of the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel.

The detailed supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) for the 2014/2015 school year are set out in Departmental Circular 0044/2014 which issued on 12 May 2014 and which is available on the Department's website at the following address: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0044_2014.pdf

It should be noted that this does not prevent any person, including SNAs who were employed prior to 1 May 2013, from applying for SNA vacancies but employers are obliged to give precedence to applicants who are members of the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel.

When an employer has a vacancy to fill, they must undertake the recruitment process in accordance with the provisions outlined in paragraphs 12-18 of Circular 44/2014.

Finally, my Department has set up a dedicated e-mail address to deal with all queries in relation to the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel and any queries in respect of the operation of the Panel can be directed to this dedicated e-mail address: snasupplementpanel@education.gov.ie

School Staffing

221. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers currently employed in second level schools that are surplus to requirements due to not having been redeployed. [48691/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The redeployment process takes place in the first half of each year and takes effect from the start of the following school year. The process operates and deals with any surplus for the following school year.

The redeployment process for the 2015/16 school year will commence early in 2015. The numbers involved for redeployment will be finalised at that stage. Given that Budget 2015 did not impact on teacher allocations it is likely that the level of redeployment will be lower than in recent years.

Questions Nos. 222 and 223 answered with Question No. 210.

Water Charges Administration

224. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views that it is appropriate that her Department is paying a connection fee to Irish Water of €1,650 for school extensions even where the pipe work is in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48752/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government is the lead Department relating to Irish Water. With respect to the Deputy’s question, Irish Water has indicated to my Department that the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) in its role as economic regulator of Irish Water, will introduce a national connections policy to which Irish Water will adhere. This Connections Policy is expected in 2015.

In the interim, CER has instructed Irish Water to adhere to a composite connections policy. This is based on the connections policies in place in each local authority at 31 December 2013.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

225. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) can overcome Student Universal Support Ireland queries regarding their place of residence, in view of the fact that they share the dwelling, have no utility bills in their name, but are capable of providing a sworn affidavit from the owner of the property regarding the fact that they have resided there for the relevant time. [48756/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): When considering whether a student meets the conditions to be assessed independently of his or her parents, grant awarding authorities are obliged to satisfy themselves beyond doubt that an acceptable degree of proof of independent living in the relevant period has been submitted by the grant applicant.

In exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to produce such proofs of residence for demonstrable reasons, the awarding body may, at its discretion, agree to accept other documentary evidence that provides an acceptable degree of proof of independent living. For example, while an affidavit, if accompanied by other supporting documentation, may be considered as evidence of independent living, an affidavit in isolation is not considered acceptable as sole proof of residency. Individual circumstances should be discussed by an applicant with the grant awarding authority.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to their awarding body.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down, in writing, by their awarding body, and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grant Appeals Board.

Motor Tax Rates

226. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 207 of 5 November 2014, if he will introduce a special reduced tax classification for vintage and classic motor vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48487/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Concessionary rates of motor tax for vintage vehicles have been in place since 1991. 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 vintage vehicles.

I have no plans to further reduce these already favourable rates.

Water Charges Administration

227. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to surrender the exemption to domestic water charges secured by Ireland under the European framework directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48819/14]

228. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is, at present, no requirement for charges to be imposed on domestic dwellings for the use of water from public mains for domestic purposes under the EU water framework directive and that Article 9.4 formally and legally absolves Ireland from the requirement to charge for domestic water; if he will ensure, on behalf of the Government, that this exemption is renewed before 1 January 2015 in order that the Government will retain the power to charge or not to charge for the use of water for domestic purposes into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49031/14]

229. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on new information on Article 9.4 of the water framework directive (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49075/14]

246. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding domestic water charging; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48744/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 to 229, inclusive, and 246 together.

Article 9 of the Water Framework Directive of 2000 requires Member States to take account of the principle of recovery of the costs of water services, in accordance with the principle of “polluter pays”. Article 9(4) of the Directive states that Member States are not in breach of the Directive if they decide in accordance with established practices not to apply the provisions of the recovery of costs for a given water-use activity, where this does not compromise the pur-

poses and the achievement of the objectives of the Directive.

While this may have been referred to at the time as providing the basis for not charging for domestic water services, the introduction of such charges has subsequently been grounded, primarily, in, firstly, the confirmation by the 2007-2011 Government of the intention to charge in the first round of River Basin Management Plans developed in compliance with the Directive and adopted in 2010 and, secondly, the commitment entered into as part of the Programme of Financial Support for Ireland (2010-2013) agreed between the previous Government and the EU/ECB/IMF. The question of continuing an exemption under the Directive before the end of the year therefore does not arise.

In July 2014, I published a consultation document setting out the timeframe for the implementation of the second cycle of the RBMPs and the consultation period remains open until 31 January 2015. In mid-2015, I intend to publish, and engage in consultation on, an interim overview of the significant water management issues in Ireland and this will provide context for the measures to be undertaken as part of the second cycle RBMPs. As outlined in the consultation document, it is likely that finalised second cycle RBMPs will be published by end-2017.

The Programme for Government commits to introducing a fair funding model to deliver clean and reliable water and establishing a new State-owned utility to take responsibility for water infrastructure. The new more sustainable funding model being put in place through the establishment of Irish Water will allow for the investment required to ensure our water infrastructure can meet demographic and economic needs and comply with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive in relation to the water environment.

In line with Government policy, and the provisions of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, Irish Water can collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it. The package of measures which I announced on 19 November 2014, provides clarity and certainty and ensures that water charges are affordable for customers. Legislation is currently before the Oireachtas to underpin this package of measures.

Water Services Provision

230. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the percentage of water leakage that is unaccounted for and-or customer leakage in county Wicklow and east county Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48490/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The most recent published figures for unaccounted for water for each of the local authority administrative areas are set out in the report Service Indicators in Local Authorities 2012, which was published by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on 24 March 2014. A copy of the report is available on the LGMA website at http://www.lgcsb.ie/sites/default/files/service_indicators_2012_report_for_website_0.pdf.

Irish Water has an overall remit to promote water conservation in relation to public water services and I understand that a comprehensive water conservation programme will be undertaken by the company and will cover the full spectrum of measures including customer awareness and education campaigns about water conservation.

Housing Adaptation Grant Applications

231. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason a person (details supplied) in county Donegal was not considered for a separate bedroom under priority 3 of the housing adaptation grant for people with a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48500/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): My Department provides capital allocations to each Local Authority under the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. The schemes are 80% funded by my Department, with a 20% contribution from the local authority.

The detailed administration of these schemes, including the assessment, approval and payment of grants to applicants, is the responsibility of the relevant local authority.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

232. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the consideration his Department has provided to converting a building (details supplied) in Dublin 1 into accommodation for the homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48534/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): On 20 May 2014, the Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness was published in which the Government's approach to delivery on its objective of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 was outlined. A copy of this plan is available on my Department's website at, <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

Bringing vacant local authority housing back into productive use as quickly as possible is one of the critical actions in the implementation plan and steps are being taken across the country to bring over 1,800 such units into use before year end.

Other suitable vacant residential properties in State ownership are also being considered to be brought into productive use as quickly as possible and my *Department has been engaging with key State property stakeholders* including OPW, the Department of Defence, the HSE and the Irish Prison Service as well as Dublin City Council and the Housing Agency *for this purpose*. The objective is to maximise the number of housing units available across the country so as to address the housing need of homeless households; the focus initially is on units in the Dublin region.

In the Action Plan to Address Homelessness which I launched last week, all Dublin housing authorities are considering properties in their area including those listed on the intra-State Property Asset Register with a view to utilising all potential properties for housing purposes on an emergency basis. Housing authorities across the country have access to this Register, currently being populated with property data, where details of all State properties including vacant properties are identified and these authorities may consider such properties for housing purposes.

Plastic Bag Levy

233. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the revenue that is raised from the plastic bag levy annually since 2011; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [48551/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Receipts from the plastic bag levy for each year are published in the Environment Fund Annual Accounts. The 2013 Annual Accounts will be published on my Department's website in due course after they have been audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Annual Accounts for the Environment Fund up to and including 2012 are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/Waste/EnvironmentFund/>.

Commercial Rates

234. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the revenue that is raised on business water rates annually since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48557/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The commercial water revenue collection totals for 2011 and 2012 are €190,984,225 and €180,684,153, respectively. The information relates to the amount of commercial water charges collected, including arrears, as reported by local authorities in Appendix 7 of their individual audited financial statements. The latest audited information that is available relates to the financial year 2012.

International Agreements

235. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48572/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): It is a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality to consider the issues with regard to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, as well as Ireland's signature to, and ratification of, this Convention, as appropriate. My Department continues to liaise with the Department of Justice and Equality on this issue.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

236. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48591/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The implementation of individual social housing works contracts is a matter for local authorities. In that regard, local authorities comply with circular DPE108/001/2014 of 16 April 2014, which sets out measures to assist small and medium sized enterprises in relation to public procurement. This circular is available from the Office of Public Procurement at www.procurement.ie.

Irish Water Administration

237. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of households that have sent complete application packs to Irish Water; the number of households that are registered but are not eligible to pay water charges; the number of application packs that have been returned blank to Irish Water. [48619/14]

249. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of water application packs that have been returned to Irish Water to date; of the water packs returned, the number that have completed the section F declaration; the number that were returned without any completed information; the number that were returned illegible; of all packs returned, the number that have been counted by Irish Water as indicating the returner wishes to be counted as a registered customer of Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48754/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 249 together.

I have no function in relation to the Irish Water application process. Under section 6 of the Water Services Act 2007 and section 26 of the Water Services Act 2013, this is a matter for Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives and has contacted all Oireachtas members to provide details of an improved level of service which it is aiming to provide. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a new dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Community Development Projects

238. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will agree to a request for a meeting (details supplied) with the National Collective of Community based Women's Networks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48627/14]

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 €281 million over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis for 2014 with a budget of €47 million 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 and its budget for next year will be decided in the 2015 Estimates process. 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 will involve 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 public procurement process is a competitive process that is open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme. 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. That said, I understand that some small groups, such as the groups under the remit of the NCCWN, faced a number of challenges in competing in the Stage one process. The results of Stage one were released on 24 September and I can confirm that none of the NCCWN groups expressed an interest either as lead applicants or as part of a consortium.

I am now considering the implications of that for NCCWN and my Department is liaising with other relevant Departments to find a workable solution. I can confirm that interim LCDP funding, based on a small budgetary reduction in the order of 6.5%, on 2014 levels, will be provided to NCCWN up to end March 2015. While a meeting would be beneficial at this stage, I will not be in a position to facilitate a meeting until January 2015.

Homelessness Strategy

239. Deputy Peadar Tóibín asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his proposed 20-point action plan to tackle emergency and short-term homelessness will be extended to County Meath; the number of vacant properties in the County Meath area that will be brought back into immediate use; and the number of additional emergency beds that will be provided in County Meath by Christmas. [48629/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): On 4 December I hosted a special Summit on Homelessness to reaffirm the Government's commitment to end involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The Summit was attended by Oireachtas members, elected members and officials from the four Dublin Local Authorities, representatives from Government Departments, State Agencies and the NGO sector, and the Catholic and Church of Ireland Archbishops of Dublin. A number of actions arising from the Summit were considered at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on 8 December and were then formalised into an Action Plan to Address Homelessness which was noted by the Government at its meeting on 9 December 2014. In addition to those actions which constitute an immediate response to the issue of rough sleeping in Dublin, actions have been identified which tackle the more systemic issues, classified under the three categories of the 'housing-led' approach. A copy of this action plan is available on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>. In addition, all housing authorities will return void properties to productive use as a matter of urgency under the action plan.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities and the purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. I am making arrangements to ensure that sufficient Section 10 funding is available nationally in respect of additional costs incurred by housing authorities in securing emergency accommodation during the Christmas period.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Application Numbers

240. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, of the number of rental accommodation scheme tenants by county; the average rent paid to landlords per month under the RAS scheme by county; the number of RAS contracts by county that are due to expire in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48663/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is a targeted scheme catering for the accommodation needs of persons in receipt of Rent Supplement from the Department of Social Protection, generally for more than 18 months, and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need. My Department does not hold information on the numbers in RAS at any given time. The numbers in RAS fluctuate as, inter alia, contracts end, tenants move on and landlords withdraw. From its inception in 2004 up to the end of September 2014, a total of 50,684 households have been transferred by local authorities from Rent Supplement. Of these, 29,924 were housed directly under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and a further 20,760 were accommodated under other social housing options. The table sets out the position in relation to the numbers transferred broken down by authority as at end September 2014.

Cumulative to End Sept 2014

County	Transfers to Private and Voluntary Housing	Transfers to Social housing	Total all transferred.
Carlow Co. Cl.	693	278	971
Cavan Co. Cl.	657	464	1121
Clare Co. Cl.	638	367	1005
Cork City Cl.	1362	1213	2575
Cork County Cl.	1610	1721	3331
Donegal Co. Cl.	828	1726	2554
Dublin City Cl.	2937	1058	3995
Dublin South Co. Cl.	2208	1472	3680
Dun/Rathdown Co. Cl.	760	832	1592
Fingal Co. Cl.	1490	1259	2749
Galway City Cl.	943	421	1364
Galway Co. Cl.	785	381	1166
Kerry Co. Cl.	1243	764	2007
Kildare Co. Cl.	694	697	1391
Kilkenny Co. Cl.	1047	425	1472
Laois Co. Cl.	372	198	570
Limerick Ct & Co.	1559	551	2110
Longford Co. Cl.	406	134	540
Louth Co. Cl.	342	888	1230
Mayo Co. Cl.	1381	475	1856
Meath Co. Cl.	517	422	939
Monaghan Co. Cl.	373	198	571
Offaly Co. Cl.	363	360	723
Roscommon Co. Cl.	658	469	1127
Sligo Co. Cl.	710	217	927
Tipperary Co. Cl.	1578	959	2537

County	Transfers to Private and Voluntary Housing	Transfers to Social housing	Total all transferred.
Waterford City Cl.	884	438	1322
Waterford Co. Cl.	430	334	764
Westmeath Co. Cl.	678	205	883
Wexford Co. Cl.	1010	1208	2218
Wicklow Co. Cl.	632	494	1126
Totals	29924	20760	50684

Details of the rents paid by each authority in respect of individual RAS tenancies and contract data for such tenancies is not collected by my Department. However, based on data provided by local authorities, the average monthly rent paid under the scheme in 2013 is set out in the following table, broken down by different types of units.

Year	1 bed unit	2 bed unit	3 bed unit	4 bed unit
2013	€499	€569	€651	€708

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

241. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown by county of the number of current social housing units that are not currently let; the number of these that are available to let; the number of these that will be available to be let in the next three months; the number of social housing units that will be constructed by county in the next 12 months; the number of persons on each local authority social housing list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48664/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, local authorities, as the housing authorities for their areas, are responsible for the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock and my Department does not hold some of the specific information sought. Statistics on local authority housing stock, including units that may be empty, are published by the Local Government Management Agency; the most recent data are in respect of 2012 and are available at the following link: http://www.lgma.ie/sites/default/files/service_indicators_2012_report_for_website_0.pdf. The latest summary of social housing assessments carried out as at 7 May 2013 provides data on the number of households on local authority waiting lists at that date across a range of categories broken down by authority and is available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

Waiting list numbers are subject to on-going fluctuation due to households being allocated housing and new households applying for housing support. The 2013 results cannot be directly compared to previous results given that this last summary employed different methodologies and was the first to be carried out under the 2011 Social Housing Assessment Regulations.

In relation to the refurbishment of vacant social housing stock, my Department provides funding to local authorities for works to such units to support their return to productive use. €30 million has been available in 2014 targeting the return of 1,960 vacant and boarded up units to productive use in an energy efficient condition and I expect this target to be met by the end of the year. Budget 2015 has given additional impetus to this area, and I envisage a further 1,000 vacant properties being returned to productive use through additional funding next year.

The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform, published on 26 November, builds on the provisions contained in Budget 2015 and sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the housing list. In committing to provide 35,000 new social housing units, at a projected cost of €3.8 billion, the strategy marks a fresh start for social housing in Ireland. The strategy will be delivered in two phases: phase 1 targets the delivery of 18,000 additional housing units and 32,400 Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme units by the end of 2017. In phase 2, spanning the years 2018 to 2020, the strategy targets the delivery of 17,000 additional units and 43,000 Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme units.

For 2015, I expect that some 7,400 new social housing units will be provided under the range of existing initiatives broken down as follows: 3,000 units through leasing initiative; 2,000 new Rental Accommodation Scheme units; 1,000 vacant local authority units to be refurbished and brought back to use; with a further 1,400 units to be built or acquired by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies through the Social Housing Investment Programme and Capital Assistance Scheme. A further 8,400 households will be assisted through the Housing Assistance Payment. The detailed planning in relation to the number of units that will be built or acquired in 2015 by individual local authorities is now underway; this will be based on each individual authority's housing need and priorities and will build on a range of social housing construction projects already underway across the authorities.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

242. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown by county of the number of temporary accommodation beds provided; the number of these that are currently occupied; the number of persons who have sought temporary accommodation by county in the past three months; the number of persons currently registered as homeless by county; the funding provided to local authorities and other services in order to provide temporary accommodation on a county basis over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48668/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Data on homeless households in emergency accommodation is provided through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). Quarterly reports from lead housing authorities are being published on my Department's website as soon as these are available. In addition, lead housing authorities provide monthly reports on homelessness which identify the number of people utilising State-funded emergency accommodation on a regional and county basis. These monthly reports are also available on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

Households that are qualified for social housing support are recorded by housing authorities through social housing assessments. When assessing the housing need of an applicant household for social housing support, each housing authority records, among other information, details on the household's current tenure such as whether they are living with parents, relatives/friends or homeless. This information is reflected in the statutory summary of Social Housing Assessments which provides details of the number of households qualified for social housing support and on housing authority waiting lists. The latest summary was carried out at 7 May 2013, in accordance with Section 21 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and the results are available on my Department's website at

<http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

Details of the Section 10 funding provided by my Department to housing authorities on a regional basis for the years 2009 to 2013 and the allocations for 2014 are set out in the table.

Funding Provided under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988

Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 - Allocation
Dublin	€40,521,375	€35,732,525	€32,398,290	€31,322,223	€31,322,223
Mid-East	€906,842	€697,665	€839,146	€811,275	€811,275
Midlands	€666,344	€624,897	€672,027	€649,707	€649,707
Mid-West	€3,435,607	€2,905,457	€3,516,119	€3,399,336	€3,399,336
North-East	€1,037,617	€912,250	€910,194	€879,963	€879,963
North-West	€423,355	€406,335	€360,865	€348,879	€348,879
South-East	€1,742,886	€2,110,476	€1,848,877	€1,787,469	€1,787,469
South-West	€4,270,143	€3,505,749	€4,418,967	€4,272,197	€4,272,197
West	€1,699,288	€1,227,696	€1,581,478	€1,528,951	€1,528,951
Total	€54,703,457	€48,123,050	€46,545,963	€45,000,000	€45,000,000

Under the delegated arrangements for Section 10 funding, the responsibility for rigorous assessment, appraisal and decision making in relation to proposals for funding of particular services including temporary accommodation within the current budgetary allocation rests with the statutory homelessness Management Group of the respective region.

Community Development Initiatives

243. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown on by county of the funding provided to community services directed towards women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48669/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I assume the Question refers to my Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP). The 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 €281 million over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis for 2014 with a budget of €47 million pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April 2015.

While the LCDP caters for disadvantaged women nationally, LCDP funding is also provided specifically for some 17 Women's Projects under the remit of the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN), details of which are set out in the Table. The NCCWN was allocated funding in excess of €1.3 million under the LCDP this year. In addition, my Department also supports a number of Women's projects under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO). This funding scheme, which supports national organisations in the community and voluntary sector, aims to provide multi-annual funding towards core costs associated with the provision of services. A new round of funding under this scheme commenced on 1 July 2014, under which the NCCWN was allocated some €160,122 for the two year period of 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2016. In addition, Women's Aid and the National Travellers Women's Forum (NTWF) have also been funded in 2014 under both the LCDP and SSNO on a national basis. In 2014, the combined funding allocated under the two programmes for Women's Aid was €103,918, and for NTWF was €110,475.

Women's projects funded through LCDP via the NCCWN:

1. Access 2000, Wexford
2. Blayney Blades, Monaghan
3. Clare Women's Network, Clare
4. Claremorris Women's Group, Mayo
5. Clondalkin Women's Network, Clondalkin, Dublin
6. Dochas for Women, Monaghan
7. Donegal Women's Network, Donegal
8. Limerick Women's Network, Limerick
9. Women's Community Projects, Mullingar, Westmeath
10. North Leitrim Women's Resource Centre, Leitrim
11. Ronanstown Women's CDP, Clondalkin, Dublin
12. Roscommon Women's Network, Roscommon
13. Rowlagh Women's Group, Clondalkin, Dublin
14. Southside Women's Action Network, Loughlinstown, Dublin
15. Southwest Kerry Women's Association, Kerry
16. Waterford Women's Centre, Waterford
17. Women Together Tallaght Network, Tallaght, Dublin.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

244. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details of the funding to be made available over the next 12 months specifically for the upgrade of the current empty social housing stock in the form of retrofitting and refurbishment works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48670/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Details of funding to be provided in 2015 under individual elements of my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme, including the programme for the refurbishment of vacant stock, will be set out in the 2015 Revised Estimates Volume to be published later today. Under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, the management and maintenance of the local authority housing stock is the responsibility of the relevant housing authority. Following a very successful programme in 2014, further provision was made for the refurbishment of vacant units in Budget 2015, and I envisage a further 1,000 vacant properties being returned to productive use through additional funding.

Foreshore Licence Applications

245. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when a decision will be finalised regarding a foreshore licence application in view of the urgency of the particular case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48743/14]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Legal complexities have arisen in this case which require advice from the Chief State Solicitor's Office. Subject to this, my Department will continue to work to complete its consideration of the matter as soon as possible.

Question No. 246 answered with Question No. 227.

Local Authority Functions

247. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that under section 134 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 49 of the Local Government Act 2014, in an election year, the local authority corporate plan must be prepared and brought before the council for consideration within six months of the annual general meeting; if it is the responsibility and the duty of the policy group and of the chief executive to take all such steps as are necessary to ensure that the corporate plan is submitted to the elected council for approval within the specified period; when the corporate plan is not submitted within the specified period in accordance with section 134 (2) of the Act, is the cathaoirleach of a council obliged to convene a special meeting within 14 days of the expiration of the specified period; if the cathaoirleach and the chief executive are obliged to make a joint submission to the elected council at the said special meeting outlining the steps that will be taken to ensure its completion; when it is proposed to submit the corporate plan to the elected council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48750/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 195 of 11 December 2014 which sets out the position in this matter.

Where a corporate plan is not submitted within the specified period in accordance with section 134(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 2001, the Cathaoirleach is required by section 134(4)(b) to convene a special meeting within 14 days of the expiration of such period at which the steps and time for completion and submission of the plan are to be outlined.

Water Charges Administration

248. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason schools are being charged a €1,650 connection fee with Irish Water for their school extensions. [48753/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since 2001, national water pricing policy has required local authorities to recover the costs of providing water services from all non-domestic users of these services, including schools. This policy provided for charges based on actual metered consumption and is consistent with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provided for the transfer of responsibility for the provision of public water services from the local authorities to Irish Water. Irish Water assumed responsibility for the billing of non-domestic customers with effect from 1 January 2014. The

Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall charge each customer for the provision of services provided by it. The Act also provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the CER has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers.

The CER intends to hold a public consultation on a new connection charging policy for customers of Irish Water. Pending the outcome of this consultation, Irish Water will continue to levy connection charges on customers requiring such services at rates equivalent to the water and wastewater related development levies which the local authorities applied as at 31 December 2013.

If the Deputy has particular queries about the levy charged in relation to a particular school, Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives and has contacted all Oireachtas members to provide details of an improved level of service which it is aiming to provide. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a new dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Question No. 249 answered with Question No. 237.

Postcode Implementation

250. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if a full cost-benefit analysis of the new Eircode postcode system has been undertaken; if so, if he will publish it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48488/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): A National Postcode Project Cost Benefit Analysis was prepared initially in 2006 and updated in 2010 just prior to the commencement of the procurement process. These documents are published on the Department's website www.dcenr.gov.ie. The Department is putting in place a framework under which costs and benefits associated with the project will continue to be systematically assessed as part of implementation.

International Agreements

251. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48569/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): My Department has no direct role in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. I understand that the Minister for Justice and Equality has written to a number of Departments on this issue; my Department was not amongst those Departments who were contacted.

Cyberbullying

252. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the measures that have been taken in the past year to deal with cyberbullying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48606/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I refer to the reply to Question No. 25 of 11 December 2014. The position is unchanged.

Climate Change Negotiations

253. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the discussion he had on hydraulic fracturing at the recent climate change conference in Peru. [48638/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I had no discussions on hydraulic fracturing during my participation in the recent climate change conference. At a national level the position remains as outlined to the House on a number of occasions, no decisions will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing in exploration drilling as part of an unconventional gas exploration programme, until there has been time to complete and consider the outcome of a major research programme, directed at examining the potential environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing, which has been commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Road Traffic Legislation

254. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will introduce legislation on the regulation of the sale of quad bikes and their use in public parks (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48620/14]

270. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the legislation on the regulation of the use and sale of quad bikes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48621/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 270 together.

It is not clear from the Deputy's questions as to what aspect of use and sale of quad bikes he is referring. The Road Traffic Acts set out the legislation which must be complied with by users of mechanically propelled vehicles in a public place.

For the purposes of road traffic legislation a "public place" means any public road, and any street, road or other place to which the public have access with vehicles whether as of right or by permission and whether subject to or free of charge.

Public parks come under the management and control of the relevant local authority or the Office of Public Works and are covered by separate statutory provisions. If the parks are places where the public do not have access to with vehicles, it is a matter for the management body concerned to provide for, and enforce, relevant governing legislation or bye-laws (including the use of quad bikes) to ensure that all persons comply with the permitted use of the park.

There is no legislation under the Road Traffic Acts preventing the sale of quad bikes for exclusive off-road use.

Local Improvement Scheme

255. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will reinstate a budget and make it available to Kerry County Council to restart a programme to deal with local improvement scheme applications of which there are 140 on a priority list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48634/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Local Improvement Scheme remains in place and it provides funding for roads and laneways that Councils have not taken in charge. However, the maintenance and improvement of these is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. There is no separate allocation for the LIS. Instead, local authorities may use up to 15% (up from 7% in 2013) of their initial Discretionary Grant towards local improvement schemes should they wish to do so. The local contribution for these schemes remains at 20% of the total cost of the project. Furthermore, it is open to local authorities to supplement the percentage of their Discretionary Grant that they can use for the LIS with their own resources. This position is likely to extend into 2015.

Some local authorities want a ring-fenced LIS allocation for private roads while others prefer to put the funding into public roads. I think this decision is best made at a local level.

Road Safety Authority Campaigns

256. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the members of the Road Safety Authority driver certificate of professional competence, CPC, review groups which sat in 2013 were overlooked at the RSA Leading Light Awards in both 2013 and 2014, when a precedent had been set in 2012 when members of the RSA driver CPC groups, prior to that, received special recognition awards at the Leading Light ceremony for their voluntary efforts in sitting on the review committees. [48535/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Leading Lights in Road Safety Awards are organised and presented by the Road Safety Authority to celebrate the outstanding efforts of people to improve road safety in their communities. Neither I nor my Department has any role in the operation of the system or in the selection of Award recipients.

I have referred the Deputy's 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.

Driver Safety

257. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of professional bus drivers, category D and category D1, who were issued with a driver certificate of professional competence, CPC, card in September 2013 and the number of those drivers who completed a relevant module of their periodic training prior to 9 September 2014. [48536/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the Certificate of Professional Competence system is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred this 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.

Driver Safety

258. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of professional truck drivers, category C and C1, who were issued with a driver certificate of professional competence, CPC, card in respect of those categories before 9 September 2014. [48537/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the Certificate of Professional Competence system is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. 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.

Driver Safety

259. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of candidates who sat and successfully passed the transport management certificate of professional competence, CPC, by venue to date in 2014. [48539/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information for 2014 is set out in the following table.

CPC Centre - 2014	No. of Candidates	No. of Passing Candidates
Bus Éireann	10	10
Galway	30	24
Athlone	7	6
Birr	26	22
Mullingar	6	6
Letterkenny	24	17
Cavan	6	4
Dublin (Green Isle)	110	86
Dublin (Sheldon Park)	64	45
Limerick	30	22
Cork	37	31
LIT Limerick Students	42	22
DIT Students	13	4
Curragh (Armed Forces)	16	15
Enniscorthy	6	6
Maynooth	15	14

Public Transport Provision

260. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of specific road passenger service route licence applications received, rejected and granted during 2013 and to date in 2014; and if he will provide details of same. [48540/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's ques-

tion to the NTA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Safety Authority

261. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the health and safety guidelines under which authorised Road Safety Authority inspectors operate in selecting locations for conducting road side enforcement checkpoints. [48541/14]

262. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of Road Safety Authority roadside enforcement checkpoints by road number and by county conducted to date in 2014. [48542/14]

263. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of operator premises visits carried out by the Road Safety Authority enforcement inspectors in respect of drivers' hours regulations to date during 2014. [48543/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 to 263, inclusive, together.

The issues of health and safety, roadside vehicle checks and premises checks are a matter for the Road Safety Authority. Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the appointment of Transport Officers, and the duties of those officers and the terms and conditions of their work contracts are also a matter for the Road Safety Authority.

Therefore, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the Road Safety Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety Strategy

264. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce own account operator licensing in the road haulage sector. [48544/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020 includes a commitment to "review policy on licensing of road transport operators to assess if own account operators should be included."

A review of own account operator licensing is currently being carried out in my Department. The policy will be finalised in 2015, following a stakeholder consultation.

Haulage Industry Regulation

265. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce refresher training on a periodic basis for those who have completed the transport management certificate of professional competence, CPC, course. [48545/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My officials have concluded a review of the conditions relating to the requirement of professional competence provided for in Regulation (EC) 1071/2009. I propose to make new regulations short-

ly that will enable me to authorise a body to provide transport managers with continuous training to update their knowledge.

Road Tolls

266. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will continue his efforts at the North-South Ministerial Council to get the Northern authorities to review their recent decision in respect of the imposition of the UK heavy goods vehicle levy in respect of trucks registered in the Twenty-six Counties and in respect of trucks using the A5 as the main transit route between north Donegal and Dublin. [48546/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The introduction of the UK HGV road user levy was an unwelcome development for Irish hauliers, particularly for those operating in areas around the border with Northern Ireland. My Department lobbied extensively against the application of the levy in Northern Ireland, but the UK Minister for Transport refused to grant any significant exemption beyond certain small sections of NI roads that criss-cross the border.

The Northern Ireland Assembly recently voted in favour of introducing the secondary legislation necessary for the enforcement of the levy in Northern Ireland. A proposal to repeal the legislation was debated in the Assembly but was rejected by the majority of MLAs.

My Department, in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment, is monitoring the imposition of the levy in Northern Ireland and its impact on Irish hauliers. I will continue to discuss the issue with Minister Durkan under the aegis of the North South Ministerial Council, and to seek to identify ways to mitigate the impact of the charge on Irish hauliers.

Road Tolls

267. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the routes in the Border counties in respect of which the Northern Ireland authorities granted exemptions to southern hauliers from the UK heavy goods vehicle levy. [48547/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The HGV Road User Levy introduced on 1 April 2014 in the United Kingdom and including Northern Ireland is a matter under the remit of the central U.K. Government in Westminster. The U.K. Minister For Transport has exempted approximately 7 km of roads that repeatedly criss-cross the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, as follows:

- A section of the A3 intersecting with the N54, being the usual route used to access Monaghan town coming from central Ireland; and
- A section of the A37 intersecting with the N53, used to access Monaghan and Castleblayney by traffic coming from locations east of those towns.

EU Regulations

268. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that, under EU regulations, a coach driver on an international journey carrying passen-

gers can legally drive subject to certain conditions for 12 consecutive days, while a truck driver carrying goods must take at least 24 hours rest after six consecutive days driving; his further views that goods are more strenuous to transport or are more valuable than human life; and his plans to raise this issue at EU level. [48548/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Article 29 of Regulation (EC) 1073/2009 amended Article 8 of Regulation (EC) 561/2006 and its application to certain forms of passenger transport with effect from 4 June 2010. As a result, a coach driver on an international coach tour trip can avail of driving time regulations known as the “12 Day Rule”. Certain conditions apply, however, which are intended to protect the safety of the driver, the passengers and other road users. The conditions include:

- The driver must be engaged in a single international trip.
- The driver must take a rest period of at least 45 hours immediately before the journey.
- The driver must continue to take daily rest and breaks in line with existing requirements.
- For 24 hours of the 12 days, the driver and the coach tour passengers must be in a different country (includes Northern Ireland) than where the trip started.
- After the trip, the driver must take a longer than regular rest period.
- From 1 January 2014, the vehicle must be fitted with a digital tachograph and if the driving time is between 22:00 and 06:00 there must be more than one driver, otherwise the driver cannot drive for more than 3 hours without a break.

In view of these important safeguards, I believe the regulations are appropriate.

International Agreements

269. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions his Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if his Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48579/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department operates within the national policy framework regarding gender equality, including in relation to preventing and combating violence against women. It also takes part in the Inter-Departmental Committee, chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality, charged with monitoring the implementation of the National Women’s Strategy, which includes two objectives aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, namely:

Objective 11: To protect women from bullying and harassment in the workplace, and,

Objective 12: To combat violence against women through improved services for victims together with effective prevention and prosecution.

Question No. 270 answered with Question No. 254.

Consultancy Contracts Data

271. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number

of consultants used by the National Transport Authority since 2009 to date in 2014; and if he will provide in tabular form the cost and rationale for use of them in each case. [48624/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

National Transport Authority

272. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of the subvention received by a company (details supplied) in County Kilkenny on a yearly basis; the length of time it has been receiving this subvention; the number of tickets it received from Bus Éireann and the passenger numbers carried. [48625/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Eligibility

273. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48655/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Any organisation interested in applying for a grant under the next round of the Sports Capital Programme should register on OSCAR at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie (if not already registered). OSCAR is the portal on the Department's website which must be used by organisations to register, to apply for funding (when the Programme is open for applications) and to manage the drawdown of any grants allocated. It should be noted that in order to register on OSCAR a tax registration number from the Revenue Commissioners is required.

Detailed preparations are being made at present for the next round of the Sports Capital Programme and I will launch the 2015 Programme when these are complete. Interested organisations should read the document "Guide to Making an Application" very carefully (this will be made available when the new round of the SCP is launched) and should provide all information and documentation required.

Under the 2014 round of the SCP Schools, ETBs and 3rd Level Colleges could only apply for funding jointly with local sports clubs or community groups and were required to provide copies of formal legal agreements (e.g. a licence agreement between school and club(s)) that allowed local clubs and/or the local community to use the proposed facilities.

Departmental Contracts Data

274. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

results of the tender process relative to the bike hire scheme; if he will provide the total of each tender; if he will confirm the analysis that was carried out on each tender to determine the reasons for any variance in costed items or generally in the tender amount; if the €11 million contract was awarded without meeting the bidders and without meeting an examination of the equipment to be used at a cost of €4 million; if clarification was sought or offered by the bidders; if his Department requested any clarification from the bidders; if the project is on schedule; the timeframe for delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48708/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Responsibility for the tender process and subsequent roll-out, extension, maintenance and commercial elements of the Dublin and Regional City Bikes Scheme is an operational matter for the National Transport Authority, working closely with the relevant local authority. Noting the above, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. However, I would advise the Deputy that the details requested in relation to the tender process can only be obtained through the Freedom of Information process. The NTA will advise you on the procedure to be followed in this regard while also addressing the elements of your question with regard to delivery timeframes.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply from the NTA within 10 days.

International Agreements

275. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the actions her Department has taken to allow for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention; if her Department has any engagement with the Department of Justice and Equality on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48567/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, has lead responsibility for matters relating to equality and reform. I am advised, therefore, that the implementation of the legislation and policy regarding the Istanbul Convention is a matter for her Department.

Land Issues

276. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the names of townlands in County Limerick that have designated lands for the protection of the habitat of the hen harrier; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48626/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the Statutory Instruments for the Special Protection Areas concerned - S.I. 587 of 2011 and S.I. 591 of 2012, which can be accessed in the Irish Statute Book at the following addresses: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2011/en/si/0587.html> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2012/en/si/0591.html>. For the convenience of the Deputy, I am also arranging for copies to be forwarded to him directly.