

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.

Decentralisation Programme Data

11. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in the context of the State's improving financial position, if it is an opportune time to review the geographic structure of the civil and public service in consideration of targeted and effective relocation of offices, as such measures would help foster regional economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5771/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Deputy will be aware that the Government agreed in November 2011 that the Decentralisation Programme, announced in the December 2003 Budget Statement by the then Minister for Finance, should be cancelled in the light of the budgetary and staffing outlook.

It was also agreed that a review of 22 decentralisation projects should be carried out. Following completion of that review in January 2012, a total of 43 projects had been cancelled, while 50 were maintained, to be managed in the same way as other regionally based offices and Departments. In addition, it was agreed that one project - the Defence Forces in the Curragh should proceed, on a cost effective basis, as soon as budgetary resources permit.

Up to the date of the cancellation of the programme, about a third of the target numbers of staff over 3,400 were decentralised. Consequently, while the decentralised offices account for less than 10% of serving civil service staff, taken together with the pre-existing regional and district offices of Departments the proportion of civil servants working outside Dublin is now just over 50% which highlights the extent to which the geographic distribution of civil service staff supports economic activity across the State.

While there are no plans to introduce a further programme of decentralisation, the Deputy may wish to note that the recently-published Civil Service Renewal Plan includes a commitment to expand career and mobility opportunities for staff across geographic, organisational and sectoral boundaries. The delivery of this action will help ensure that the civil service continues to play its part in ensuring balanced regional development.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

12. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the Public Appointment Service does not keep track of the status of applicants for tem-

porary clerical officer positions; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, for the minimal effort to record such information, large efficiency savings can be made and offers of employment can be sent to those who are in a position to accept at the time the offers are made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5741/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Recruitment to the civil service is governed by the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act, 2004 and by the Civil Service Regulation Acts, 1956-2005. The 2004 Act provides for the establishment of the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) and of the Public Appointments Service (PAS). PAS - an independent statutory body - provides a centralised recruitment, assessment and selection body for the civil service.

Under the Codes of Practice prescribed by the CPSA appointments into the public service must be made in accordance with the principle of merit. In practice this means that candidates are ranked based on their performance in the competitive recruitment process, and are then offered appointments in order of merit.

I recognise that the suggestion made in the Deputy's question is intended to improve the efficiency of the recruitment process for temporary clerical officer positions. However, unfortunately the proposed approach would conflict with the fundamental principle of merit-based appointment laid down in the CPSA Code which PAS is obliged to respect. In essence, it would give rise to a situation in which PAS would determine which candidates are in a position to accept an offer of employment and that PAS should then offer appointments selectively on this basis.

The decision on whether to accept an offer of appointment must always be one for the candidate concerned who is entitled to determine whether to take up an offer of employment based on their consideration of whatever factors are relevant to their assessment of that decision.

Departmental Bodies

13. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to create a new interim procurement board. [5784/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Pending the introduction of enabling legislation for the establishment of the OGP, on an independent and statutory basis, I have appointed an interim Board of the Office for Government Procurement. The interim Board is chaired by my colleague, the Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr Simon Harris, TD.

The other members of the Board are: Martin Fraser, Secretary General, Department of Taoiseach; Paul Quinn, Chief Procurement Officer; Eileen Creedon, Chief State Solicitor; Mr. John McCarthy, Secretary General, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government; Mr Jim Breslin, Secretary General, Department of Health; Ms. Niamh O Donoghue, Secretary General, Department of Social Protection. In addition, it was identified that a suitably qualified and experienced external person would be appointed. This appointment was commenced in 2014 through the Public Appointment Service, and this appointment is expected in the near future. The interim Board will continue to operate until the enabling legislation is put in place and a new Board established in accordance with that legislation.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

14. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his reform of public sector pay, including Garda pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5718/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): There are two measures which currently underpin public service pay and pensions policy: the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts (or FEMPI) and the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA). The HRA, in the Government's view, sets the parameters for pay policy in the public service for until July 2016. The pay and conditions of members of An Garda Síochána come within the ambit of public service pay policy in this regard.

The pay reforms in the period from 2009 to 2015, encompassing both the Haddington Road Agreement and the preceding Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement, have seen the Exchequer pay bill reduced by some 20% from peak. Public servants continue to make a significant contribution to meeting our international fiscal obligations including bringing the general government deficit below 3 per cent of GDP by 2015. Measures under the FEMPI legislation have achieved a reduction of €2.2 billion in the pay and pensions bill. Overall, the Public Service gross pay bill has reduced from its peak of €17.5 billion in 2009, to an estimated €13.8 billion net in 2014. This has been an important element in reducing public expenditure.

These cost reductions and the substantial productivity increases, including the additional hours, which the Agreement has facilitated, have allowed the Government the scope to reinvest in key frontline services such as education, health and policing by recruiting additional staff to deliver them. The recent recruitment of some 100 gardaí is very tangible evidence of the reform dividend that will help sustain the Public Service Reform agenda by re-investing some of the efficiency savings we are delivering into improved services.

The public service unions have indicated their intention, should the State's financial circumstances permit, to lodge a pay claim. If such a claim is made the Government will of course have to consider it, in line with the prevailing fiscal position. Any ensuing discussions will encompass the pay and conditions of all public servants in line with the well established public service industrial relations procedures including those relating to An Garda Síochána and their staff representative associations. The legal position concerning the financial emergency legislation, which has underpinned the public service pay and pension reductions to date, will also have to be addressed in that context while ensuring that this country has a sustainable pay arrangement over the longer term.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

15. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he and his Department have identified the most important elements of infrastructural deficiency most likely to affect economic performance in the future; the extent of his ongoing proposals to address such deficiency, with a view to ensuring the maximisation of employment opportunities throughout the economy in the future, and achievable through improved infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5745/15]

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

and equitable growth.

As part of the Estimates process, and informed by the capital review, Government has made decisions on the capital allocations for the next three years. These were set out in Budget 2015. The report of the capital review is currently being finalised and I intend to publish it in the coming weeks. The report will include the three year ceilings announced on Budget Day along with new ceilings for the period 2018 to 2020.

While investment for economic growth is vital at a time when our economy is in recovery, we must ensure that this growth is equitable and sustainable. For this reason, the capital allocations published in the Budget include increased investment for social housing reflecting the Government's prioritisation of investment in this area. They also provide continued investment for Education to meet demographic demands in our schools and for Health to allow the HSE to progress a number of large scale and priority projects. The new investment plan will also ensure the sustainability of our strategic resources through measures to tackle climate change and improve energy efficiency.

The exchequer will of course continue to invest in our roads and public transport and support jobs and the business sector through our enterprise support agencies.

Disposal of Assets

16. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to privatise further State assets in the remaining time in office of this Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5609/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The original programme of asset disposals agreed by Government included

- The sale of Bord Gais Eireann's Energy business;
- The sale of some of ESB's non-strategic power generation capacity;
- Consideration of the sale of some assets of Coillte, but excluding its land; and
- The sale of the State's remaining shareholding in Aer Lingus, at the right time, for the right price and under the right conditions .

The planned asset disposals by Bord Gais Eireann (now Ervia) and ESB have now been completed.

In relation to Coillte, detailed analyses undertaken in preparation for a potential sale of harvesting rights indicated that the consequences of such a transaction for Coillte itself, and for its remaining business, were such that the net proceeds that would be extractable by the Government by way of dividend following such a sale were very modest, compared with the gross proceeds achievable. For that reason, the Government decided not to proceed with its plans to dispose of Coillte's harvesting rights, but instead to proceed to restructure and streamline Coillte as a company. This restructuring, which is ongoing, is addressing the various issues that had been identified in the detailed reviews, and will also facilitate a partial merger with Bord na Mona, in the form of a Joint Venture, focusing on a number of business areas of both companies which offer the greatest potential for efficiencies and synergies - in particular the areas of biomass and wind energy.

The final asset included in the Government's asset disposal programme was Aer Lingus, and

a Government Steering Group is currently assessing the approach that has been made by AIG in relation to a possible takeover of Aer Lingus by IAG. The work of that Group will inform Government's consideration of whether it should agree to sell its remaining shareholding in Aer Lingus to IAG.

Apart from the above, the Government has no plans to dispose of any further State assets.

Decentralisation Programme Data

17. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number and location of decentralised Departments in Portlaoise, County Laois; and the amounts paid in rent for accommodation between 2004 and 2014 inclusive. [5607/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): At present, there are three decentralised locations in Portlaoise leased for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in Portlaoise. The National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) is also accommodated in Portlaoise. These leases are set out in the following tables.

Name and address of Building	Annual Rent
Unit 11 Clonminham Industrial Estate, Portlaoise (primarily storage for DAFM)	98,133.16
Grattan Business Centre, Dublin Road, Portlaoise (2 leases)	233,650.00
Eircom Building, Knockmay, Portlaoise (2 leases)	218,000.00
TOTAL	549,783.16

The National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) are also accommodated in Portlaoise as set out on the following table.

Name and address of Building	Annual Rent
2 James Fintan Lawlor Avenue, Portlaoise	50,000

Note: 18 Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine staff are also located in Kilminchy Crescent, Portlaoise at an annual rent of €84,051.49. This location pre-dated decentralisation.

As part of the decentralisation programme, the Office of Public Works (OPW) took seven leases in four buildings in Portlaoise to accommodate 254 Department of Agriculture personnel. At present, there are 207 Department of Agriculture staff in Portlaoise and the bulk of these (182) are in two locations (Grafton Business Centre and the Eircom Building. Seven staff are in Unit 11 Clonminham Industrial Estate which is primarily a records and document storage facility.

The total amount paid in rent for accommodation in Portlaoise on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine from 2004 – 2014 amounts to €6.4m.

The current annual rental for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine staff in Portlaoise is €633,834.65. €549,783.16 of this relates to the accommodation of decentralised personnel. This rental amount has been reduced from €926,000 approximately.

Freedom of Information

18. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the operation of the amended Freedom of Information Act 2014; and if his attention has been drawn to the problems arising from the new fees regime. [5783/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I am glad to report a number of very positive developments in the operation of FOI that have been brought about since the new FOI Act came into force on 14 October 2014.

- The upfront FOI application fee was abolished immediately following enactment. This was accompanied by a significant re-design of the search and retrieval fees regime allowing for up to five hours search, retrieval and copying time at no charge and caps on the amount of such fees that can be charged.

- A Code of Practice on FOI has been published in tandem with the coming into effect of the new legislation. The Code draws heavily on proposals made by a group of FOI experts. It promotes best practice in the operation of FOI and seeks to bring about greater efficiency and consistency throughout public bodies in dealing with FOI requests.

- A single FOI Training Framework has been put in place which provides a panel of trainers from which FOI bodies can procure quality-assured training in a consistent and cost-effective manner.

- Over 1,000 civil and public servants have attended briefing sessions on the new legislation and Code of Practice.

- A new FOI Central Policy Unit website has been developed and is an important resource for public bodies and the general public.

- Work is underway on the development of a model publication scheme for FOI which I propose to make this year.

Statistics on the operation of FOI during 2014 are being collected at present from FOI bodies and will be published in due course by the Office of the Information Commissioner.

In response to the Deputy's second point, my Department's attention has not been drawn to any specific problems for FOI users relating to the new reformed FOI fees regime. Indeed, the abolition of the FOI application fee, the provision of uncharged 'search and retrieval' time and the capping of the overall level of search and retrieval fees has been received favourably by requesters.

If the Deputy has been made aware of problems in this area and if she provides me with details of same, I will ask my officials to examine the matter and I can advise the Deputy of the outcome.

Departmental Offices

19. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the provision of a permanent building for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in Portlaoise, County Laois; and the current cost of renting offices in Portlaoise. [5606/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): A site was acquired in Portlaoise for the provision of a building for the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine under the decentralisation programme. As the Deputy

will be aware this building was not constructed due to the Government decision not to proceed with further decentralisation.

To accommodate the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine staff, OPW took seven leases in four buildings to accommodate 254 personnel. The Commissioners of Public Works have been working with Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine to consolidate their accommodation in Portlaoise. In October 2013, sanction was received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to proceed with an extension to the existing Government Buildings at Abbeyleix Road to facilitate this but funding was not provided and consequently this project has not been advanced.

The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine still consider it a priority that consolidation of various business areas should proceed. In that context, three leases in Gandon Court were surrendered in 2014 and additional centralised space was leased in Portlaoise town. In addition to the consolidation of staff, a rental saving of approximately €100,000 per annum was achieved.

In order to secure further efficiencies, it is proposed to commence a space audit of the State owned Government Offices on the Abbeyleix Road. This will establish the potential for consolidation of staff through re-configuration of the space with a more modern open plan layout and furniture. The provision of the extension will be reviewed following completion of the space audit.

The current annual rent in respect of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine's leases in Portlaoise is just short of €634,000. (This includes accommodation that was not part of decentralisation). This rental amount has been reduced from €926,000 approximately.

Pensions Levy

20. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on talks and-or negotiations with the public sector unions regarding the abolition of the pension levy and how this relates to the commitment in the Croke Park agreement to use savings to the Exchequer from this agreement to restore pay to those earning under €35,000 per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5747/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): With regard to revising the public service pension related deduction, it is a progressively structured reduction to the pay of pensionable public servants ensuring that those on higher remuneration rates are impacted more adversely than those on lower pay. Given the amounts raised every year, it is therefore a critical component of the public service pay and pension measures adopted as part of our national fiscal consolidation.

However, it should be noted that a start has already been made on reducing the impact of PRD on public servants. As legislated for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, and as provided for in the Haddington Road Agreement, the rate of PRD on the €15,000 to €20,000 band of pay received in a year fell from 5% to 2.5% on 1 January 2014. This cut is worth €125 annually in gross terms to most public servants, with those taxed at the standard rate enjoying the greater gain in terms of take-home pay boost.

As the Deputy is aware, the powers granted by the Oireachtas under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Acts in relation to public service pay and pensions are subject to annual review. The Haddington Road Agreement also reaffirms the commitment made previously in the Croke Park agreement to give priority to public servants with pay rates

at €35,000 or less in any review of the pay measures. Section 2.3 of the HRA confirms that when economic circumstances allow, and the public finances are restored to a sustainable position, the pay measures applied to public servants under the HRA and the FEMPI legislation will be reviewed.

I would envisage that the question of further amendments to the PRD will be raised by the unions and associations representing public servants in the context of the discussions which are likely to take place later this year with a view to ensuring a fair and equitable review of pay measures imposed under the FEMPI Acts.

Public Procurement Regulations

21. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will extend the remit of the Office of Government Procurement to cover professional services and medicines purchased on behalf of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5776/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The procurement reform programme is an important element of the Government's overall reform agenda and is tasked with delivering increased value for money, more accurate and timely data and improvement in the capacity and capability of procurement across the public service.

The new model for procurement was approved by the Government in September 2012, with common goods and services to be procured by a new central sourcing organisation, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) and with centralised sectoral sourcing organisations in health, education, local government and defence procuring sectoral-specific goods and services. Common goods and services account for approximately 60% of the State's public procurement spend. Instead of public bodies each tendering separately for these common goods and services, the OGP, when fully established, will put in place contracts for these categories that all public bodies will buy from.

With regard to the procurement of professional services and medicines, this is a specialised sector-led activity overseen by the Department of Health. There are currently no plans to extend the remit of the OGP to cover this area.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

22. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on pay rises in the public sector in view of the call by SIPTU, the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union, for a 5% pay rise across the economy and a minimum wage of €11.45 (details supplied); and if he will report on contacts made with trade unions on the matter of pay. [5786/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I have already said, in the event that the public service unions make a pay claim as they have indicated that they will, the Government will enter into discussions with them on successor arrangements to Haddington Road and the gradual wind down of the financial emergency (FEMPI) Acts. In this regard I have indicated that my preference is to have the first quarter Exchequer returns available to me before inviting the unions for talks, so that I would have the most up-to-date information on the public finances. The economy is recovering, in no small part due to the contribution of public servants to keeping the cost of the public service paybill at sustainable

levels. I expect that their representatives will be strongly pressing that contribution in the context of any discussions.

In addition the structure of any pay review will have to take account, in the public service, of the need to address the financial emergency measures legislation in a phased way. In that context therefore, suggestions of a generalised pay increase in gross wages over a certain period are less applicable than they might be for profitable private sector employers.

The Government is clear that any discussions on pay will take place in the context of the State's fiscal position and the pace of financial recovery for this year and 2016, as well as ensuring a sustainable fiscal position over the medium term.

There are strong indications that reviews of pay levels will take place across a broad range of private sector employers across the wider economy this year which is a welcome sign of a normalising economy. I also welcome the work of my colleague Minister of State Ged Nash in establishing the Low Pay Commission to review issues around low pay across the economy.

Flood Prevention Measures

23. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding flood relief works on the River Suck catchment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5605/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The River Suck, which is the main tributary of the River Shannon, forms part of the River Suck Joint Drainage District. Responsibility for maintenance of the channel rests jointly with Galway County Council and Roscommon County Council. The Councils have heretofore discharged their responsibility through the River Suck Joint Drainage District Committee. The most recent formal report submitted by the Committee to the Office of Public Works (OPW) shows that it expended almost €142,000 in 2011. This expenditure comprised routine maintenance works including the cleaning of drains and river bed, cutting back trees or other obstructions, weed control and, where possible, improving water flow. The OPW has been advised that the Committee has since expended €136,000 in 2012, €149,310 in 2013 and €150,891 in 2014 on further maintenance works. I am advised that the River Suck Joint Drainage Committee was disbanded with effect from 1st January, 2015 on foot of Ministerial Order. However, as I have indicated, the ongoing maintenance of the channel and the funding of that work remains the joint responsibility of Roscommon County Council and Galway County Council.

Substantial funding has been provided by the Office of Public Works under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme to enable Galway and Roscommon County Councils to undertake flood alleviation projects within the River Suck catchment to address localised flood problems. Since the introduction of the Scheme in 2009, nearly €2.1m has been approved to Galway County Council and over €550,000 to Roscommon County Council for this purpose. Details of all the projects for which funding has been approved to local authorities under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme are available on the OPW website www.opw.ie.

With regard to the overall position in relation to flood relief works in the River Suck area as part of the larger River Shannon catchment, the OPW's core strategy for addressing flood risk in the Shannon Basin is the River Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Study. The output of this important project will be an integrated plan of specific measures to address, in a comprehensive and sustainable way, the significant flood risk factors

in the Shannon basin. Draft predictive flood maps are currently being produced by engineering consultants undertaking the Shannon CFRAM Study, on behalf of the OPW, in partnership with the relevant local authorities. The draft flood maps will be subject to public consultation during this year, details of which will be advertised locally and on the Study website.

The next phase in the CFRAM Study will then be the identification of appropriate flood risk management options for each significant risk area, following which, Flood Risk Management Plans are scheduled to be prepared in late 2015/early 2016. Updates on the study are available on the Study website.

National Monuments

24. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide detailed proposals regarding developments at Kilmainham Gaol, its role in the 1916 centenary celebrations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5780/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Kilmainham Gaol is a National Monument site in the care of the Office of Public Works (OPW) and is - with 328,886 visitors in 2014 - one of the most popular and heavily-visited tourist sites in Ireland.

Visitor numbers have been increasing year on year and have now reached a point where the Monument cannot accommodate increased demand with the existing entrance / layout arrangements. Kilmainham Gaol is also, as we know, a very significant site associated with key events in Irish history and, in particular, the 1916 Rising.

The OPW's role at Kilmainham is to maintain the site and present it to the public through a dedicated guide service, explaining its 220 year history and its role in some of the key events in the formation of the State, including the execution of the 1916 Leaders. The site opens to the public on a fulltime basis 362 days a year and has a strong profile as a "must see" visitor site in Dublin; it is therefore a key location in the marketing strategy of Fáilte Ireland for Dublin.

The former Kilmainham Sessions house (Courthouse) occupies a site immediately adjacent to the Gaol to the east. It has presented a unique opportunity to create additional capacity to deal with visitors and to provide ancillary curatorial, exhibition, research and visitor welfare facilities.

In the context of the focus currently on marking the centenary of 1916, and where Kilmainham Gaol obviously holds such a particular strong resonance, the Sessions House facilitates the provision of a greatly enhanced visitor experience at Kilmainham to celebrate some of the seminal moments in the history of the formation of the State, recalling in particular the 1916 executions and the events of the Civil War.

Mindful of the fact therefore that the Gaol makes a very powerful statement about this period of our history, the Government wishes to particularly mark it as a place where the history of the Rising, and many of the historical artefacts associated with it, can be celebrated and shared with citizens and overseas visitors alike. The Government has decided to proceed with the development of this project as one of its signature capital developments associated with the commemorations and arrangements are in train to have these works carried out in time for Spring 2016.

The second major element of work is the refurbishment and adaptation of the existing Museum within the Gaol. This was constructed in the mid 1990's and has been the location for all

the Interpretation and artefact displays at Kilmainham. The exhibition is particularly outdated however and needs to be completely redone. In addition, the building itself is being upgraded and a new entrance is being provided so that it can meet the significantly increased visitor traffic flow from the new Courthouse / Gaol entrance arrangements.

On completion of the entire project, Kilmainham Gaol and the new Courthouse Visitor facility will host one of the early official events associated with the 1916 Commemorations with a wreath-laying event on Easter Sunday, 27th March 2016.

Disposal of Assets

25. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on his latest plans for the retention or sale of State assets, including State shares in commercial companies. [5781/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The original programme of State asset disposals agreed by Government included

- The sale of Bord Gais Eireann's Energy business;
- The sale of some of ESB's non-strategic power generation capacity;
- Consideration of the sale of some assets of Coillte, but excluding its land; and
- The sale of the State's remaining shareholding in Aer Lingus, at the right time, for the right price and under the right conditions.

The planned asset disposals by Bord Gais Eireann (now Ervia) and ESB have now been completed.

In relation to Coillte, detailed analyses undertaken in preparation for a potential sale of harvesting rights indicated that the consequences of such a transaction for Coillte itself, and for its remaining business, were such that the net proceeds that would be extractable by the Government by way of dividend following such a sale were very modest, compared with the gross proceeds achievable. For that reason, the Government decided not to proceed with its plans to dispose of Coillte's harvesting rights, but instead to proceed to restructure and streamline Coillte as a company. This restructuring, which is ongoing, is addressing the various issues that had been identified in the detailed reviews, and will also facilitate a partial merger with Bord na Mona, in the form of a Joint Venture, focusing on a number of business areas of both companies which offer the greatest potential for efficiencies and synergies - in particular the areas of biomass and wind energy.

The final asset included in the Government's asset disposal programme was Aer Lingus, and a Government Steering Group is currently assessing the approach that has been made by AIG in relation to a possible takeover of Aer Lingus by IAG. The work of that Group will inform Government's consideration of whether it should agree to sell its remaining shareholding in Aer Lingus to IAG.

Apart from the above, the Government has no plans to dispose of any further State assets.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

26. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the agreement under the Croke Park agreement deal that savings made from the deal would restore pay to those earning under €35,000 per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5746/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Deputy will be aware that there are two measures which currently underpin public service pay and pensions policy: the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts (or FEMPI) and the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA). The nature of the Financial Emergency Measures legislation is that the powers granted by the Oireachtas under the legislation are temporary in nature and are predicated on the continuing financial emergency in the State. The HRA is due to last for 3 years from 1 July 2013 and, in the Government's view, sets the parameters for pay policy in the public service for its three year length.

The Haddington Road Agreement also reaffirms the commitment made previously in the Croke Park agreement to give priority to public servants with pay rates at €35,000 or less in any review of the pay measures. Section 2.3 of the HRA confirms that when economic circumstances allow, and the public finances are restored to a sustainable position, the pay measures applied to public servants under the HRA and the FEMPI legislation will be reviewed.

As provided for under section 12 of the FEMPI Act 2013, I am required to conduct an annual review, and lay a written report of my findings before each House of the Oireachtas. My last review was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 29th June 2014. In that review I concluded that there is a need to continue to apply the relevant provisions of the legislation controlling the cost of remuneration of public servants and the other measures controlling the cost of the public service pay and pensions bill. It is worth restating that the expenditure proposals as set out in Budget 2015 are based, in part, on the reduced public service pay rates, as well as on the revenue accruing from the Pension Related Deduction and Public Service Pension Reduction as provided for under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts.

As well as the statutory requirement for an annual report to be made by me as Minister to the Oireachtas on the operation of the Acts, the legislation is maintained under constant review to ensure only those measures absolutely necessary are maintained on the statute book. The legal position concerning the financial emergency legislation, which has underpinned the reductions to date, will also have to be addressed as part of putting in place more normal pay setting arrangements in the public service for the future.

As the pay setting environment normalises across the economy, it is important that the Government give consideration as to how, over the medium term, pay policy needs to develop in the public service, to help ensure that overall fiscal targets including achieving a deficit of less than 3% of GDP by the end of 2015, will be met. In addition, the public service unions have indicated their intention, should the State's financial circumstances permit, to lodge a pay claim next year. If such a claim is made, the Government will of course have to consider it, in line with the prevailing fiscal position.

Departmental Expenditure

27. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Government's proposed spring statement will outline its current and capital expenditure plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5778/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In 2014, my

Department carried out the second Comprehensive Review of Expenditure. The purpose of this exercise was to establish the Government's expenditure priorities for the coming years, and to then allocate expenditure ceilings across Government Departments accordingly. This process, which involved engagement with the public and other Government Departments, culminated in the publication of the Comprehensive Expenditure Report on Budget day setting out the multi-annual current and capital expenditure ceilings for all Vote Groups over the period 2015 to 2017.

The publication of multi-annual expenditure ceilings sets the parameters for Government expenditure over a rolling three-year period, and facilitates a whole of year approach towards the budgetary process that allows for constructive discussion on how resources should be prioritised over the medium term. Decisions in relation to specific new budgetary measures would then fall to be considered in the context of the annual Budget in light of the most up to date fiscal and economic data.

This Spring, in addition to the usual publication of the Stability Programme Update in line with our European commitments, it is proposed that the Government publish a Spring Economic Statement. Such a publication would help to develop the domestic whole of year budgetary framework by providing a clear separate point in the year for a statement of national fiscal policy.

As Ireland is set to leave the Excessive Deficit Procedure at the end of 2015 and enter the preventive arm of the Stability and Growth Pact, the Spring Economic Statement would provide the opportunity to set out how Ireland's fiscal policy post EDP will progress the Government's key economic and social objectives, while at the same time living within the parameters as set out under the revised framework of EU fiscal rules.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

28. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the public sector recruitment embargo will be completely lifted; and if analysis has been done on the way the employment embargo is actually adding to budgetary costs and to delays in service provision in health, education and many other Departments. [5773/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I have previously advised the House, the Moratorium on recruitment to the Public Service was introduced in 2009 in response to the severe economic and fiscal challenges faced by the country at that time. As a policy device it was very successful, reducing public service numbers by some 10%, with savings of over €3 billion. This made a very important contribution to the stabilising of the public finances. The Moratorium was not, however, a blanket ban on recruitment. During its operation, provision was made for targeted recruitment in the sectors to which the Deputy refers - Health and Education, and also in the Justice sector.

Most recently, in Budget 2015, I made provision:

- for some 1,700 teachers, SNA and resource teachers; and
- for a further 100 Garda recruits in 2015, on top of an additional 200 in late 2014;

In addition, targeted recruitment into the Civil Service which began in 2014, is continuing this year in the grades of Clerical Officer, Executive Officer, Administrative Officer, Assistant Principal Officer and Principal Officer.

The Deputy may also be aware, as I announced on Budget day, that arrangements are currently being put in place to replace the Moratorium with a framework whereby management of public service staffing will be delegated to Departments and frontline managers.

The new framework will, subject to binding overall pay ceilings, and commitment to on-going reform and efficiency objectives, give front-line managers greater flexibility to manage staffing in response to service needs as they arise. My officials are currently finalising the details of the new framework with the other Government Departments.

Pensions Levy

29. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views as to the amount that has been collected annually from the pension levy imposed on public sector workers; and his plans on revising this levy as part of the Haddington Road agreement regarding negotiations. [5603/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The public service Pension-related Deduction (PRD), referred to as “the pension levy” in the Deputy’s question, was introduced in March 2009 under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009. The Exchequer yield from PRD since its inception up to 2014 is as follows.

Year	PRD Yield (€ million)
2009	837.419
2010	948.605
2011	960.224
2012	934.739
2013	925.986
2014	884.369 (provisional)
Total	5,491.342

The amounts in the above table do not include non-Exchequer PRD receipts, as arising for example in the local government sector.

With regard to revising PRD, it is a progressively structured reduction to the pay of pensionable public servants ensuring that those on higher remuneration rates are impacted more adversely than those on lower pay. Given the amounts raised every year, it is therefore a critical component of the public service pay and pension measures adopted as part of our national fiscal consolidation. However, it should be noted that a start has already been made on ameliorating the impact of PRD on public servants. As legislated for in the the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, and as provided for in the Haddington Road Agreement, the rate of PRD on the €15,000 to €20,000 band of pay received in a year fell from 5% to 2.5% on 1 January 2014. This cut is worth €125 annually in gross terms to most public servants, with those taxed at the standard rate enjoying the greater gain in terms of take-home pay boost. I would envisage that further amendments to the PRD will be raised by the unions and associations representing public servants in the context of the discussions which are likely to take place later this year.

Flood Relief Schemes

30. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he is taking to implement the recommendations contained in the Report entitled, Eight Proposals Urgently required to tackle flooding on the river Shannon, its tributaries and the waters feeding into it, published by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht in July 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5604/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The July 2012 Report of the Joint Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht on Shannon flooding dealt with and included recommendations on a number of issues across a range of Government Departments and State Bodies. The Office of Public Works responded to the Committee by way of a written reply in September 2012, in relation to the specific matters within the OPW's area of responsibility. The main area addressed in the reply related to the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) programme and how the OPW is addressing flood risk on the River Shannon in the context of the CFRAM Programme.

The Shannon CFRAM Study is the OPW's core strategy for addressing flood risk in the Shannon basin. I am advised that good progress continues to be made on the Study. A total of 66 locations along the Shannon have been identified for further assessment under the Study, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW. A public consultation on draft predictive flood risk mapping for these locations is currently being rolled out throughout the Shannon region. Further details on the public consultation and on the Shannon CFRAM Study are available on the Study website www.shannoncfframstudy.ie. Following the finalisation of the flood mapping and the assessment of appropriate flood risk management options, the final output from this important project will be integrated plans containing specific measures to address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risk factors in the Shannon basin.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

31. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a carer's allowance appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [6167/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to disallow or allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 8 December 2014.

Following receipt of additional information the Appeals Officer has set aside her decision and has decided to re-open the appeal by way of granting an oral hearing of the case. The oral hearing will be heard by a different Appeals Officer and the person concerned will be advised of the arrangements for the hearing when finalised.

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.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

32. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the current number of claimants on jobseeker schemes who are 65 years of age and over. [6190/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There was a total of 4,738 recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Benefit at the end of January 2015 who were 65 years of age and over. A further 2,812 persons in this age category were signing for credits at that date. A breakdown of these claimants is detailed in the tabular statement.

Jobseeker scheme recipients aged 65 years or over at the end of January 2015

Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Benefit	Jobseeker's Benefit Credits Only	Total
2,373	2,365	2,812	7,550

Community Employment Schemes Operation

33. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the relaxation of the current time limits and capping rules, placed on participants of community employment schemes, who are a year off retirement; if she will grant these participants a special exemption to allow them to work until they are 66 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6231/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): There are no plans to relax the current participation limits placed on participants of community employment (CE) schemes who may be just a year off retirement and there are no plans to grant those that fall into this category a special exemption to be allowed to work on CE until they reach 66 years of age (state pension age). These requirements are there to ensure that there are adequate places available to long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups to participate on CE and gain qualifications for to enable them to gain employment.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

34. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of claimants in County Donegal who are on the live register in 2015 and are signing on as casuals on a qualifying jobseeker's benefit/jobseeker's allowance payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6233/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Information relating to a claimant's address is not currently coded to the geographical location of the address. As such it is not possible to accurately report persons on the live register living in a particular area at present.

Location information in respect of people on the live register is however recorded on the basis of the local office/Intreo centre which is used to serve their needs. In this regard, the number of people "signing on" the live register as casual workers on a qualifying jobseeker's benefit/jobseeker's allowance payment in one of the Department of Social Protection's offices in Donegal at the end of January 2015 was 5,214.

A breakdown of this number by scheme and local office/intreo centre is detailed in the tabular statement.

Number of casual workers signing for qualifying Jobseeker's Allowance/Benefit on the

live register in Donegal Local Offices/INTREO centres at the end of January 2015

Local Office/INTREO centre	Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Benefit	Total
Ballybofey	513	115	628
Ballyshannon	327	121	448
Buncrana	841	130	971
Donegal	296	220	516
Dunfanaghy	225	69	294
Dungloe	375	128	503
Killybegs	263	291	554
Letterkenny	1,053	247	1,300
Total	3,893	1,321	5,214

Home-makers Scheme

35. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if there is a system set-up whereby a person can reclaim credited contributions, if they are entitled to, and did not sign on for before 1994, when the home-maker credits were introduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6234/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The homemaker's scheme was introduced in 1994 to make qualification for State pension contributory (SPC) 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 people, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being calculated for pension purposes. The effect of this is to reduce the number of years by which the person's contributions are divided, thereby increasing their yearly average, making it easier for them to qualify for a maximum rate SPC. It does not, therefore, involve the award of credits.

To be eligible for the homemaker's scheme, a person must:

- Permanently live in the State (exception may be made where EU regulations apply),
- Be aged under 66,
- Have started insurable employment or self-employment before the age of 56,
- Not work full-time, although for the purposes of this scheme, a person can work and earn less than €38 gross per week,
- Care for a child (under 12) or an incapacitated person on a full-time basis.

It is important to note that the homemaker's scheme will not, of itself, qualify a person for a SPC. The standard qualifying conditions for the SPC must also be satisfied. These require a person to enter insurable employment at least ten years before pension age, pay a minimum of 520 contributions at the correct rate (credited contributions do not satisfy this condition) and achieve a yearly average of at least 10 contributions paid or credited on their record.

Where someone age 66 or over does not satisfy the conditions to qualify for a SPC, or qualifies for less than the maximum rate, they may instead qualify for one the following:

- The means-tested State pension (non-contributory). The maximum personal rate of this

pension is €219, which may be payable if their means are no more than €30 per week. A reduced rate may be payable if their means are no more than €245 per week. A living alone allowance may also be paid, where applicable.

- If a spouse receives the SPC, the other spouse may receive a payment, known as an increase for qualified adult (IQA), which may be up to €206.30 per week.

- If widowed, they may qualify for a widow's contributory pension, which they may claim either based on their spouse's or their own social insurance record. The qualifying conditions for this require fewer contributions paid (260) than the SPC, and the maximum personal rate for those aged 66 or over is €230.30.

Where a person qualifies for more than one of the above payments, they are paid under the pension that is most advantageous to them.

The homemaker's scheme was introduced from 1994, and as with most schemes, this was without retrospective effect. Costs in relation to this scheme, under the current rules, are expected to increase in the coming years due to the increase in female employment rates since 1994. The cost of backdating was considered in the context of the Green Paper on Pensions in 2007. At that time, very tentative estimates suggested that the cost of backdating to 1953 would be approximately €160 million annually. These additional costs would be very significant and consequently, the Government has no plans to backdate this scheme prior to 1994. Any decision to change the scheme would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

Fuel Allowance Data

36. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of applicants in receipt of a winter fuel allowance at the start of the 2014-2015 season who had their eligibility revoked due to a social welfare payment change, that is, applicants on jobseeker's allowance changing to illness benefit, in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6236/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is not routinely collated in my Department.

State Pension (Contributory) Data

37. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide the figures, categorised on the basis of sex, for the number of persons who are currently in receipt of reduced State contributory pensions, due to the rate band changes she implemented on 1 September 2012, whereby rate band 20 to 47 was abolished and replaced by rate bands 20 to 29, 30 to 39 and 40 to 47; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6253/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and has been requested. The Department will contact the Deputy directly when the information becomes available.

Departmental Offices

38. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on a complaint regarding the treatment of people collecting benefits (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6257/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Intreo Centre in Parnell Street caters for well in excess of 10,000 clients, many of whom have regular engagements of various types with the office. In the context of such a large clientele, the amount of complaints received concerning the office is minimal. The most recent statistics available show that in the last 3 months there has been less than 10 complaints received via the complaints procedure on the Department's website in relation to the office. Additionally an even smaller number of individual complaints have been made in writing.

In relation to the nature of the complaints, only 2 of these concerned difficulties that clients experienced with regard to the manner in which they were dealt with in the office. These are being handled by directly contacting the clients concerned. The other issues raised, which include calculation of overpayments and reasons for decisions made, are also being handled currently or have been resolved.

There are currently 12 clients required to attend the office to sign on a daily basis. The option to request a client to sign daily can be taken in certain circumstances. Such circumstances can be when a client has a record of persistently signing late, an officer has formed the opinion that there is a strong likelihood that a client may be currently in employment in the black economy, or a Deciding Officer is of the opinion that a client is not making sufficient efforts to seek employment or to avail of training opportunities. In most cases daily signing is supplemented by frequent interviews monitoring a client's progress in seeking employment and/or training. The success rate of this approach is high; the majority of clients required to sign daily will avail of one of the Department's Labour Activation measures within a short timeframe.

Community Employment Schemes Funding

39. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if consideration will be given to reversing cuts to the pensions and other rights of persons participating in community employment schemes contained in section 7 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6272/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): There are no plans to allow new participants on the Community Employment (CE) programme to retain their original social welfare payments while employed on the scheme and receiving concurrent CE allowances. The main enactment of this measure was contained in Section 12 of the Social Welfare Act 2011. The main purpose of CE is to assist and support long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups to gain the necessary skills and confidence with a view to gaining employment.

Universal Social Charge Yield

40. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount collected by the State in 2014 from the 2% band of the universal social charge. [6195/15]

41. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount collected by the State in 2014 from the 4% band of the universal social charge. [6196/15]

42. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount collected by the State in 2014 from the 7% band of the universal social charge. [6197/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 40 to 42, inclusive, together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that a breakdown of Universal Social Charge (USC) collected at each rate for the tax year 2012, the latest year for which data are available, is set out in the table below.

USC Rate	USC Collected (€m)
2%	360
4%	500
7%	2,880

Tax Reliefs Application

43. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on lowering the limit to claim back tax on charitable donations, particularly with respect to encouraging persons to donate to voluntary and community initiatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6201/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 848A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides tax relief at a blended rate of 31% on donations made by individuals to eligible charities and other approved bodies. In order to qualify for the tax relief currently, a minimum donation of €250 per annum must be made to the body concerned.

As the Deputy may be aware, changes were made to the scheme of tax relief for donations to approved bodies in Finance Act 2013 as follows:

- Donations from all individual donors under the scheme are treated in the same manner, with the tax relief in all cases being repaid to the charity.

- A blended rate of relief of 31% applies to all taxpayers regardless of their marginal tax rate. All donations are grossed up as was previously done for donations from individuals within the PAYE collection system.

- The charitable donations scheme has been removed from the scope of the high earners' restriction in recognition of the fact that donors will no longer benefit from the tax relief associated with their donations.

- An annual donation limit of €1 million per individual, for which a refund of income tax can be claimed by approved bodies, has been applied.

These changes were made following a process of engagement between officials at the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners with representatives of the charities sector from the Irish Charities Tax Reform Group (ICTR).

The objectives of that process were threefold: (i) to simplify the operation of the regime, (ii) to reduce the administrative overheads on charities and on the Revenue Commissioners incurred in the operation of the scheme, and (iii) to ensure that any change would be Revenue neutral from the Exchequer perspective. The proposals for the changes were also recommended in the Report of the Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising.

The €250 threshold has not changed since it was introduced in 2002. Normal inflation levels effectively have reduced the value of the threshold over time. In addition, the donations scheme was introduced to encourage the donation of large sums of money to charities and certain other bodies. It was never envisaged that the scheme should subsidise smaller donations, which in all likelihood, would be made in any event.

The tax relief available for donations is already very generous and donations can be cumulative, such that a donation of just €5 per week over the course of a year would qualify. However, tax relief is no longer provided to individual donors and is refunded directly to the approved bodies. It is therefore questionable as to whether reducing the €250 limit would result in additional donations.

NAMA Property Leases

44. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address concerns raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding a proposal by a person to establish a small business in a property controlled by the National Asset Management Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6206/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, NAMA is not the owner or operator of properties. NAMA's role is, like a bank, that of a secured lender. Other than properties that have been enforced, all of which are listed on NAMA's website and which are managed by the appointed receivers/administrators, properties continue to be managed by their existing owners or their professional managers/agents albeit NAMA takes a very close interest in their efficient management and sale with a view to maximum loan repayment in order to protect the position of Irish taxpayers.

Against this background and as this is a clearly a commercial matter between the owner of the property in question and the interested party it would not be appropriate for me to comment. However, in order to be helpful, I am advised by NAMA that should the interested party wish to raise any issue of concern with it regarding their engagement with the property owner, they can contact NAMA directly through its dedicated email address for members of the public, info@nama.ie. In its capacity as a secured lender, NAMA will facilitate engagement between the relevant parties as appropriate.

I would like to advise the Deputy that should you wish to contact NAMA directly on any matter of importance to your constituents you can do so on oir@nama.ie. This e-mail was set up specifically to deal with queries from Members of the Oireachtas on NAMA, it is regularly monitored and you will receive a prompt reply.

Consumer Protection

45. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the action that will be taken to deal with the very serious issues raised in the Raidió Teilifís Éireann "Primetime" programme on 5 February 2015, regarding a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6228/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has informed me that it cannot comment on its engagement with individual entities.

The Bank has also informed me that the company to which the question refers is not regu-

lated by the Central Bank. The Central Bank Act 1997 contains a number of exclusions from the requirement to be authorised by the Central Bank and firms that meet the relevant criteria can avail of such exclusions. Separately, this Act also contains a number of exemptions from the requirement to be authorised by the Central Bank. To date the Central Bank has granted an exemption to 14 entities but Home Funding Corporation Limited is not one of the entities granted such an exemption.

The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Bill 2015 will protect borrowers in the situation described in the programme when it is enacted.

It will do this by requiring the entities dealing with the consumer to be authorised by the Central Bank and subject to its Codes of Conduct. Dealing with the consumer is credit servicing and the definition of credit servicing is broad. Owners of loan books who deal directly with consumers, that is, who are servicing their own loan books, will be regulated. Otherwise they can have the loan book serviced by a regulated credit servicing firm.

Some of the allegations made in the programme allege criminal wrongdoing and this is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

In Ireland, money laundering has been treated as a very serious offence since the passing of the Criminal Justice Act in 1994.

The law in this area was updated by the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010, as amended by Part 2 of the Criminal Justice Act 2013 (“the Act”). The Act transposes the current European Union Law on AML (the Third Money Laundering Directive (2005/60/EC) and its Implementing Directive (2006/70/EC)) into Irish Law.

Disabled Drivers Grant Appeals

46. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a disabled drivers scheme appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6229/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax (up to a certain limit) on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, and exemption from motor tax in respect of that vehicle and, up to a certain limit, assistance in respect of fuel costs. To qualify for the scheme, an applicant must hold a Primary Medical Certificate.

To be eligible for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled and satisfy one of the following conditions outlined in Regulation 3 of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 (S.I. 353 of 1994) which provides that a person shall be assessed by reference to any one or more of the following medical criteria:

- persons who are wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;
- persons wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- persons without both hands or without both arms;
- persons without one or both legs;
- persons wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;

persons having the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria required to receive a Primary Medical Certificate. A successful applicant is provided with a Primary Medical Certificate, which is required to claim the reliefs provided for in the Regulations. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual. Regulation 6(1)(e) of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations, 1994 (S.I. 353 of 1994) provides that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions.

Tax Code

47. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person who carried out home improvement works in 2012 is entitled to benefit from tax incentives. [6254/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I would advise the Deputy that unlike the Home Renovation Incentive that is currently in place, there were no specific tax incentives available for individuals who carried out home improvement works in 2012. However, Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) is available in respect of interest paid on qualifying loans used to purchase, repair, develop or improve a home.

In order for a loan to qualify for MIR, loan approval must have been in place before the end of 2012. In addition, part of the loan must have been used in 2012. As the Deputy may be aware, where an individual is in receipt of MIR, they will continue to qualify for such relief up until the end of 2017.

Tax Rebates

48. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is due a tax refund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6262/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they have contacted the person concerned to request Form P60 for 2014.

On receipt of the form, a review of the individual's tax liability will be dealt with and a PAYE Balancing Statement (P21) will be issued.

Universal Social Charge Application

49. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the projected cost to the Exchequer in 2015 for reducing the rate of universal social charge on income over €100,000 to 8% for the self-employed. [6301/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated first and full year cost to the Exchequer of reducing the Universal Social Charge (USC) on self-employed income in excess of €100,000 from 11% to 8% is €54 million and €125 million respectively.

All figures above are estimates for 2015, using the actual data for the year 2012 (the latest year for which data are available) adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are provisional and may be revised.

National Minimum Wage

50. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the projected increase in tax revenue in 2015 if the national minimum wage was increased to €9.65; to €10.65; and to €11.45. [6302/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that workers earning the minimum wage are not separately identified on Revenue records, and therefore it is not possible to estimate the additional yield to the Exchequer from increasing the minimum wage as outlined. The complexities of estimating the increased yield from income taxation would require, among other information, details of (i) the number of hours worked by the relevant individuals, (ii) whether they are singly or jointly assessed, and (iii) how tax credits are assigned between spouses.

Furthermore, increases in the minimum wage would be an additional cost for employers and thus would presumably have a negative effect on profits, leading to a reduction in Schedule D Income Tax and Corporation Tax receipts. In cases where employers could not afford the new minimum wage rates, it is possible that job losses could be experienced further reducing the potential yield from such a measure.

Notwithstanding the above however, for illustrative purposes, estimated examples of the increases in Income Tax / USC that could arise for individuals, as a result of the increases specified by the Deputy, are set out in the table below. For the purposes of the illustration, it is assumed that the taxpayer is single, working 39 hours per week, and taxed at the standard rate of tax. Rounding may affect totals.

Minimum Wage	Additional Income Tax per annum	Additional USC per annum	Total
€/ph	€	€	€
9.65	604	197	800
10.65	1,068	254	1,322
11.45	1,793	653	2,446

Debt Conference

51. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to invite the new Greek Finance Minister, Mr Yanis Varoufakis, to Dublin to discuss a eurozone debt conference and a possible write-down of Greek debt, especially in view of the huge per capita levels of debt in Ireland and Greece. [6311/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have no plans to discuss a euro area debt conference with the new Greek Finance Minister in Dublin.

My view is that when countries encounter difficulties, a process of negotiation is always better than one of conflict.

Specifically in the case of euro area Member States, all programme negotiations have been

conducted within the Eurogroup and Ecofin, with IMF involvement as appropriate. My view is that these are the appropriate fora for resolving outstanding issues involving euro area programme countries.

Indeed, it was within the Eurogroup that I, acting on behalf of the Government, secured many of the concessions that have significantly reduced the burden of public debt on the Irish people.

In this regard, I look forward to meeting the new Greek Finance Minister, Mr. Yanis Varoufakis, at the next Eurogroup meeting on 11th February.

National Debt

52. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, details of the interest incurred on the gross national debt for each year from 2010 to 2014 under the headings State savings schemes, benchmark bonds, amortising bonds, floating rate bonds, European Financial Stability Facility loans, European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism loans, European Union bilateral loans, International Monetary Fund loans, short-term debt and other interest paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6337/15]

53. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, a breakdown of the interest received from cash and other financial assets that are offset against the gross national debt, to arrive at the national debt figure for each year from 2010 to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6338/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 53 together.

The National Treasury Management Agency has provided the following figures which for 2014 are provisional, unaudited figures at this point.

The figures presented in the table represent National Debt cash interest only.

The figures in the table reflect the impact of hedging transactions.

Table: National Debt Interest 2010-2014

€ million	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Treasury Bonds	3,175	4,106	4,075	4,446	4,128
Floating Rate Bonds	0	0	0	638	755
Amortising Bonds	0	0	0	44	83
Total Bonds	3,175	4,106	4,075	5,129	4,966
State Savings Schemes	199	209	284	350	394
EFSF	0	67	117	373	405
EFSM	0	112	413	665	661
Bilaterals	0	4	35	66	75
IMF	0	25	803	800	1,025
Total EU/IMF Programme	0	207	1,369	1,905	2,166
Short-term Debt	197	216	39	25	15
Other	23	42	42	40	49

€ million	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Exchequer Account & other operational balances	-83	-94	-55	-13	-10
Deposits including collateralised deposits & others	-9	-61	-2	-52	-45
HFA Guaranteed Notes/ Non-Irish Treasury-Bills	-11	-77	-72	-60	-69
Total Interest Receivable	-103	-232	-129	-125	-124
Total National Debt Interest	3,492	4,548	5,679	7,324	7,466

Rounding may affect totals

Tax Collection

54. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is being deducted the correct amount of tax on their pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6342/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, on the basis of the information currently available to them, the correct tax is being deducted from the individual concerned. I understand that Revenue have made arrangements to send a tax credit certificate to the person concerned detailing how the tax credits have been calculated. If the person concerned has any questions in relation to those credits, he can contact Revenue in the matter using the contact information provided on the certificate.

Tax Reliefs Cost

55. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax relief on the cost of employing a carer that costs the State for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6343/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 467 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for tax relief at the marginal rate for expenses incurred by an individual who employs a carer to take care of an incapacitated individual in their own home.

In order to assist those who prefer to source care for such individuals for provision in their own homes and to alleviate the pressure on nursing home beds, I increased the maximum amount of expenditure that qualifies for the relief in the recent Finance Act from €50,000 to €75,000 per annum.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the cost to the Exchequer of the tax relief available to 'Persons Taking Care of Incapacitated Taxpayer' for the years 2007-2012 (the latest year for which figures are available) is published in the 'Costs of Credits, Allowances and Reliefs' tables on the Revenue Statistics webpage available at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html#section4>

Local Authority Funding

56. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the

amount of money allocated in 2013 and in 2014 to Mayo County Council for the purposes of coastal defences and addressing coastal erosion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6294/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Mayo County Council did not apply to the Office of Public Works (OPW) in 2013 for any funding for the purposes of coastal defences and addressing coastal erosion.

With regard to 2014, the Government Decision of 11 February 2014 that allocated funding for repair of public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014 included a sum of up to €19.6m for repair of existing coastal protection and flood defences, which is being made available via the OPW. Of this sum of €19.6m, up to €4,205,000 was allocated to Mayo County Council, based on a submission made by the Council to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and a subsequent Programme of works approved by the OPW.

In 2014, the Council drew down from the OPW a total of €2,076,309 of the sum of up to €4,205,000 allocated to it by the Government Decision for repair of existing coastal protection and flood defences. The Council is continuing to progress with works and further draw down requests are expected to be submitted and processed in 2015. Provision has been included in the OPW's 2015 Vote to allow the Council to draw down the balance of its funding this year.

Heritage Sites

57. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of visitors to all heritage sites in 2014; if he will provide percentage comparisons with the 2013 figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6184/15]

58. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, the income generated by visitors to each heritage site in 2014; if he will provide details of the staffing costs for each site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6187/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 58 together.

The information requested in relation to the visitor admissions for each site in OPW care where Guide services are provided is shown below. It should be noted that the 2014 figures have not been fully audited as yet and are therefore provisional.

Site Name	Provisional 2014	2013	Difference	%
Altamont	58,023	53,541	4,482	8.37%
Arás	5,197	4,807	390	8.11%
Ardfert Cathedral	6,867	6,265	602	9.61%
Athenry Castle	11,268	10,056	1,212	12.05%
Aughnanure Castle	25,485	20,222	5,263	26.03%
Ballyhack Castle	2,471	1,782	689	38.66%
Barryscourt Castle	8,860	13,177	-4,317	-32.76%

Site Name	Provisional 2014	2013	Difference	%
Battle of the Boyne/ Oldbridge Estate	71,137	60,796	10,341	17.01%
Blasket Centre	44,074	42,362	1,712	4.04%
Boyle Abbey	6,927	5,849	1,078	18.43%
Brú na Bóinne	48,996	44,990	4,006	8.90%
Newgrange	139,173	133,616	5,557	4.16%
Knowth	58,883	51,138	7,745	15.15%
Cahir Castle	66,747	67,713	-966	-1.43%
Carrowmore	31,097	27,569	3,528	12.80%
Casino Marino	18,790	13,511	5,279	39.07%
Castletown House & Parklands	285,410	244,416	40,994	16.77%
Céide Fields	28,484	25,105	3,379	13.46%
Charles Fort	74,446	69,263	5,183	7.48%
Clonmacnoise	149,472	139,413	10,059	7.22%
Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre	3,988	4,209	-221	-5.25%
Derrynane House	24,874	23,611	1,263	5.35%
Desmond Castle	10,507	9,205	1,302	14.14%
Desmond Hall	11,362	9,415	1,947	20.68%
Donegal Castle	40,626	39,995	631	1.58%
Dublin Castle	217,758	103,287	114,471	110.83%
Dún Aonghasa	121,001	105,539	15,462	14.65%
Dungarvan Castle	11,639	10,805	834	7.72%
Dunmore Cave	40,830	36,271	4,559	12.57%
Emo Court	12,082	11,397	685	6.01%
Ennis Friary	15,967	22,272	-6,305	-28.31%
Farmleigh Estate	402,773	435,476	-32,703	-7.51%
Ferns Castle	6,875	5,710	1,165	20.40%
Gallarus Castle	43,650	39,658	3,992	10.07%
Garinish Island	55,088	49,706	5,382	10.83%
Glebe House and Gallery	24,085	23,480	605	2.58%
Glendalough Visitor Centre	79,810	80,922	-1,112	-1.37%
Hill of Tara	11,892	9,600	2,292	23.88%
J F Kennedy Arboretum	92,236	95,356	-3,120	-3.27%
Jerpoint Abbey	23,370	22,097	1,273	5.76%
Kilkenny Castle	259,250	241,302	17,948	7.44%
Kilmacurragh Gardens	50,517	51,500	-983	-1.91%
Kilmainham Gaol	328,886	326,207	2,679	0.82%
Listowel	6,196	4,068	2,128	52.31%
Loughcrew	11,079	9,226	1,853	20.08%
Main Guard	5,774	5,954	-180	-3.02%
Maynooth Castle	25,268	23,326	1,942	8.33%
Mellifont Abbey	5,783	8,253	-2,470	-29.93%
National Botanic Gardens	541,946	550,000	-8,054	-1.46%

Questions - Written Answers

Site Name	Provisional 2014	2013	Difference	%
Newmills Corn and Flax Mills	3,476	3,438	38	1.11%
Ormond Castle	9,116	9,922	-806	-8.12%
Parke's Castle	15,423	16,302	-879	-5.39%
Pearse Museum	34,011	32,507	1,504	4.63%
Pearse's Cottage	7,206	4,615	2,591	56.14%
Phoenix Park Visitor Centre	135,790	137,755	-1,965	-1.43%
Portumna Castle	12,164	10,401	1,763	16.95%
Rathfarnham Castle	0	17,830	N/A	N/A
Reginald's Tower	31,029	26,468	4,561	17.23%
Rock of Cashel	272,503	255,338	17,165	6.72%
Roscrea Heritage	29,987	26,541	3,446	12.98%
Ross Castle	83,225	77,156	6,069	7.87%
Scattery Island	2,491	2,821	-330	-11.70%
Skellig Michael	15,315	13,221	2,094	15.84%
Sligo Abbey	15,309	13,106	2,203	16.81%
St. Audoen's Church	27,502	27,339	163	0.60%
St. Mary's Church, Gowran	2,002	2,034	-32	-1.57%
Swiss Cottage	22,802	22,558	244	1.08%
Tintern Abbey	13,433	13,206	227	1.72%
Trim Castle	76,511	74,724	1,787	2.39%
TOTALS	4,436,214	4,180,720		

Fully audited Income and Cost figures for each individual site are not available as yet. However, the indicative comparative figures on a global basis are as follows:

	€		€
Income: 2014	7.94m (approx)	*Staff costs: 2014	8.97 m
Income: 2013	7.08m	*Staff costs: 2013	8.67 m

*This figure represents Guide pay only.

Departmental Expenditure

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform whether he expects to be in a position to meet all the targets set by his Department and other Government Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6217/15]

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects reform to continue to play a role in the curtailment of expenditure, in accordance with the targets and guidelines set down and agreed with the troika across all Government Departments and relevant subordinate bodies, in the course of the next 12 months; if he is satisfied that sufficient latitude exists to encourage economic expansion and growth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6219/15]

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the

extent to which he can foresee any relaxation of the guidelines laid down by the troika, within which his Department is expected to operate over the course of the current year, with particular reference to the need to meet pressing but necessary expenditure of an infrastructural nature; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6221/15]

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which any particular corrective measures remain to be taken in respect of curtailment of expenditure or increased expenditure to address specific needs in the course of the next five years, having particular regard to the achievements to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6222/15]

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which savings continue to be made across each and all Government Departments, in the context of meeting targets laid down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6223/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 61 to 64, inclusive, together.

While Ireland is no longer subject to the Troika programme having successfully exited the EU-IMF programme of financial support in December 2013, there remain the annual deficit ceilings set out in the Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP). The Government's key budgetary target for 2015 is to bring the General Government Deficit below 3% of GDP so that Ireland can exit the EDP at the end of this year.

With the recovery in the economy and the improvement in the fiscal outlook, the Government in agreeing expenditure allocations for 2015 was able to provide for targeted increases in expenditure to support the delivery of key social and economic objectives.

In this context, it is clear that fiscal policy has moved its focus away from consolidation and towards prudent prioritisation and allocation of resources with sustainable modest increases in both current and capital expenditure. The allocations provided in the Revised Estimates Volume 2015 across Government Departments for 2015, and the multi-annual expenditure ceilings published in the Comprehensive Expenditure Report 2015-2017 will assist with ensuring the ongoing provision of vital public services at an affordable cost while also serving to further support the nascent but strengthening economic recovery.

It is the responsibility of Ministers and their Departments to manage within their 2015 expenditure allocations to ensure that our key deficit target for 2015 is achieved. My Department will monitor and report on expenditure trends to Government and engage with Departments in relation to managing expenditure within profile.

Economic growth requires sound and sustainable management of the public finances. Added to this, the growth-friendly environment and policies, as well as the significant public service reforms undertaken, provide the foundations for sustained economic growth.

Reforms to the way in which the public service operates will provide Irish citizens with high-quality public services that are delivered in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The increased focus on evaluation of expenditure policies and programmes has also contributed to our ability to effectively manage and allocate resources across all areas of public policy. The forthcoming Capital Review will set out multi-annual capital expenditure ceilings for Departments, reflecting the Government's identification of the infrastructure investment which will best underpin future growth and help address pressing social requirements.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects to be in a position, in the course of the next year, to address the increased expenditure requirements, where infrastructural deficits have been identified, which may require capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6218/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Deputy will be aware that my Department commenced a review of the Public Capital Programme in 2014. The purpose of the review is to refresh the Government's existing investment strategy and set a new multi-annual capital envelope which addresses critical infrastructure needs and is in line with emerging Government priorities.

As part of the Estimates process, and informed by the capital review, Government has made decisions on the capital allocations for the period 2015 to 2017. These were set out in Budget 2015 with some technical adjustments and minor revisions made in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2015 (REV 2015). The new ceilings include increased expenditure for Social Housing, Transport, Education and Health in order to address infrastructure requirements in those areas.

It is a matter for individual Ministers and their Departments to decide the specific projects and programmes that will be delivered from within these allocations.

The report of the capital review is currently being finalised and I intend to publish it in the coming weeks. It will include the three year ceilings already announced along with new ceilings for the period 2018 to 2020.

Questions Nos. 61 to 64, inclusive, answered with Question No. 59.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

65. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which recruitment will be approved across the public sector over the next two years, while maintaining guidelines agreed with the troika; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6224/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I announced in Budget 2015 that the Moratorium on recruitment to the Public Service is to be replaced in 2015 with new arrangements giving Departments greater flexibility in managing their staffing resources. This will be subject to Departments remaining within binding pay ceilings and meeting ongoing efficiency and reform objectives. My Department is currently engaging with all Government Departments in ensuring that the necessary structures and controls are in place to allow for the new framework to be rolled out. Where agreement is reached that such structures and controls are in place, formal delegated sanction will then be issued.

Once the sanction is issued, it will be a matter for Departments to manage their staffing resources, including recruitment and promotion to key services, subject to overall pay limits.

I would point out to the Deputy that there is ongoing recruitment in the Public Service. Most recently in Budget 2015, in Education, I made provision for more than 1,700 additional teachers, Special Needs Assistants and resource teachers. I similarly made provision for additional front line staff in the Health and Justice Sectors.

There are no specific guidelines agreed with the Troika with regard to recruitment into the Public Service.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which reform throughout the public sector remains a component of economic policy in the context of economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6225/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Service Reform was a key element of the Government's strategic response to the crisis and remains a key part of our strategy for recovery. Reform has enabled us to maintain and improve public services in the face of the necessary reduction in staff numbers and budgets, at a time of increased demand for public services. For example, 21% more people were in receipt of a weekly social protection payment at the end of 2013 than in 2008, the number of primary school pupils increased by nearly 10% in the same period and there are over 30% more medical card holders now than in 2008.

Significant progress has been made since the publication of the Government's first Public Service Reform Plan in November 2011. Two Progress Reports on the first Reform Plan have been published - the first in September 2012 and the second in January 2014. Staff numbers have been reduced by around 10% since 2008 and the pay-bill was reduced from €17.5 billion in 2009 to a forecasted €13.8 billion in 2014, including the pension related deduction. Good progress has also been made in terms of improving productivity; more online delivery of services; development of shared services; and putting in place the structures to reform public procurement and property asset management, to name just some areas.

A new Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 was published in January 2014. While maintaining an emphasis on efficiency and reducing costs, this Plan puts a particular focus on improved service delivery and achieving better outcomes. There are over 230 specific actions set out in the Reform Plan including greater use of shared services and innovative approaches to service delivery; increased use of technology and improved engagement with service users; more efficient and effective public procurement and property management; increased accountability and transparency in public decision making; enhanced leadership and performance management; and a continued focus on building the required capacity to deliver reform and service improvements across the Public Service. A Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 will be published in March.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Taoiseach and I published a Civil Service Renewal Plan in October last year. The implementation of this ambitious three year plan will lead to very significant changes right across the Civil Service.

Overall, I am satisfied that we have made very strong progress on Public Service Reform to date and that this will remain a key element of our recovery strategy. Finally, the levels of reform that we have delivered could not have happened without the efforts and commitment of our public servants and I commend them for their contribution to date.

Referendum Expenditure

67. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the final costs involved in the holding of the referendum on the abolition of Seanad Éireann and the

referendum on the Court of Appeal on 4 October 2014; the specific additional costs involved in having a second referendum on that date, for example the printing of ballot papers for the second vote, additional resources for the referendum commission and overtime costs for staff to count the second ballot; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6282/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The final cost of holding the Referendum on the abolition of Seanad Éireann and the Referendum on the Court of appeal on 4th October 2013 amounted to €14.4m. The breakdown of this cost is as follows:

Costs	€
Returning Officer Costs for taking the poll and counting of votes	€10.2m
Postal Costs (primarily delivery of Polling Cards)	€1.4m
Referendum Commission Costs	€2.4m
Other Costs (including printing)	€0.4m

The additional or incremental costs of holding a second ballot are relatively small in percentage terms, and are primarily made up of additional Returning Officer Costs €0.4m, additional Printing and Miscellaneous costs €0.1m and Referendum Commission Costs of approximately €1.2m. The additional Returning Officer costs arise as Returning Officers get an additional 20% of their fee where there is more than one poll and Presiding Officers and Count Supervisors get an additional 10%. In total the incremental costs of a second poll are estimated at €1.7m or 13% more than the cost of a single poll. From a cost point of view, as you would expect, there is a significant advantage in holding more than one poll on the same day.

IDA Supports

68. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the specific plans that are being, or have been, put in place by the Industrial Development Authority to market a new factory (details supplied) in County Westmeath, which is now complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6273/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that it is actively seeking an investment for the new building in Athlone and is confident of a positive outcome. As property is one of the key considerations for clients when choosing a location, the availability of suitable premises in Athlone will provide an additional positive element in the Midlands.

IDA Ireland promotes Westmeath as part of its Midlands Region, which also includes Counties Longford, Laois and Offaly. There are 35 multinational companies employing 4,032 within the Region. The Region is marketed as having a strong cluster in Medical Technology and Life Sciences and is home to many key clients, one such example being Covidien in Athlone.

Growing both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous enterprise is key to Ireland's economic recovery. I am glad to inform the Deputy that 2014 was a record year for both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in terms of investment wins and job creation, with 7,131 net new jobs being created in IDA Ireland client companies and 8,476 net new jobs being created in Enterprise Ireland client companies.

As the Deputy is aware, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 was launched on 29 January last. This is the fourth annual plan in a multi-year process, which began in 2012. When the First Action Plan for Jobs was launched, unemployment stood at 15.1%. Today it stands at 10.6% and

we are on track to exceed our target of 100,000 additional jobs by 2016. We are now setting a goal to bring employment to 2.1 million by 2018 – 2 years ahead of our original target.

We are determined to ensure that every region will benefit from the recovery. Yesterday, along with the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste, I announced the details of a comprehensive new strategy to support enterprise growth and job creation at regional level. The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative seeks to build on the success of the annual Action Plan for Jobs process by developing locally driven plans that can build on the strengths and opportunities identified in each region.

The strategy will provide up to €250 million over five years in additional funding to support regional enterprise development. This includes the roll-out of a five-year, €150 million property investment programme by the IDA to attract foreign direct investment into the regions. This programme will build on the recent investment by the IDA in a number of advance manufacturing facilities in regional locations. A further sum of up to €100 million will be available to Enterprise Ireland to support enterprises in the regions to start up, grow and export, thereby creating more jobs in regional locations.

Community Enterprise Centres

69. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to open the business development management grant scheme, administered through Enterprise Ireland; when applications will open; the budget that might be attributed to such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6303/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand from Enterprise Ireland that since the launch of the first Community Enterprise Centre scheme in 1989, Enterprise Ireland has approved €64 million for the development of Community Enterprise Centres in towns and villages across the country. There are currently 117 such centres across the country. The last scheme rolled out was in 2012 and 2013 when Enterprise Ireland provided funding of €2 million to support the recruitment of a total of 46 Business Development Managers.

On the wider issue of the performance of the Centres, the success levels, occupancy levels and sustainability of jobs at the Centres varies and therefore I asked Enterprise Ireland to review the operations of the Community Enterprise Centres in the context of Regional Enterprise Development and how the Community Enterprise Centres, the Local Enterprise Offices and other Regional entities might work more closely in support of business start-ups, before giving further consideration to the matter.

Earlier today the Government announced details of its 5-year, €250 million Regional Strategy, aimed at accelerating the jobs recovery in every part of the country. Action Plan for Jobs – Regional - is based on the principle that the best way to support job-creation in towns and villages across the country is to support agencies and organisations within 8 regions, to build on the particular strengths and assets of their area and drive new job-creation strategies and projects.

The Strategy is based on the successful Action Plan for Jobs model of setting out lists of actions with timelines and responsibility allocated, and then monitoring implementation.

As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I will lead the initiative. Each of the 8 regions will develop its own Action Plan. It is my intention that all Regional Plans will be published or in development by July 2015.

Under the Strategy, Enterprise Ireland will launch a series of new competitive funding initiatives in the areas of entrepreneurship, innovation, enterprise infrastructure and job creation. The objective is to bring forward fresh collaborative initiatives to boost enterprise and job creation in the region. An initial fund of €50 million is to be made available for three competitive calls.

The first of these competitive calls, with a budget of €5 million, will focus on community-driven enterprise initiatives and how all the local players, public and private, can work together to maximise job creation.

The Community Enterprise Initiatives Fund call will be open to existing Community Enterprise Centres (CECs) and also to any other organisation or groups of organisations with innovative ideas to create jobs, promote entrepreneurship, boost innovation or enhance exports. It should be open to any credible and novel approach rather than simply replicating what has been done before.

The criteria in any such competition will be announced by Enterprise Ireland, but the typical criteria will include:

- Promoting a culture of entrepreneurship locally and regionally;
- Developing capacity to start up and scale companies; filling gaps in enterprise facilities;
- Building on existing strengths or opportunities, e.g. developing a sectoral opportunity where there is a competitive advantage
- Devising a credible plan to deliver added value in jobs and start-ups and increased level of exporting / potential exporters
- Commitment of matching finance
- Bringing originality in approach, objectives, leverage of other stakeholders
- Leveraging off other enterprise support (Mentoring, funding, networks)
- Promoting public and private partnership, e.g. alignment/collaboration with others players (e.g. LEO, ETB, HEIs, Chambers etc.)

I believe this is a significant challenge and a significant opportunity for the Community Enterprise Centres, in collaboration with others, to deliver new businesses and jobs in their locality.

Value for Money Reviews

70. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the independent value for money assessments his Department has scrutinised, in order to sanction the co-funding for the operational programme for fisheries and aquaculture, in view of the limited employment created by aquaculture, in comparison to the tourism and angling industries. [6247/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is presently finalising a new Seafood Development Programme 2014-2020 under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Regulation (508/2014). I will be publishing a detailed consultation document and Strategic Environmental Assessment for public consultation in the next month or so, with a view to submitting the new Programme to the Commission

by May this year for its consideration and adoption. As required by the EMFF Regulation, an independent ex-ante evaluation is being conducted by consultants on behalf of my Department. That evaluation is still ongoing and the consultants' report will be published in due course. In addition the Programme document itself will set out details of arrangements to subject expenditure programmes to ongoing evaluation in accordance with the Public Spending Code published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Co-funding of the Programme by the Exchequer is a pre-requisite for availing of the €147.6 million EMFF funds allocated to Ireland. The EMFF funds are allocated by the Commission in accordance with the five envelopes identified in article 13 of the EMFF Regulation. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has sanctioned in total €93.9 million in Exchequer co-funding for the Programme and this was similarly allocated on the basis of those five envelopes. Funding for aquaculture is not separately identified in that process.

The sustainable development of aquaculture is part of the Common Fisheries Policy and the EMFF is specifically intended to support that policy. When I publish the consultation draft of the Programme shortly, my proposals on how the funds should be best used in the national interest and in the interests of the seafood industry as a whole will become clear. I will welcome all views at that point on the extent to which our resources should be directed towards aquaculture development. The Deputy may also wish to note that projects relating to tourism and angling may potentially benefit under the Programme.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

71. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a rural environment protection scheme payment appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6161/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2008 and has received payments for the entire six years of his contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. Following the administrative checks in 2013 an issue was discovered in relation to the reclassification of 5.78 ha. of Natura lands requiring the subsequent clawback of moneys based on the difference between the higher and lower rate of payment. A letter issued in September 2013 advising the person named of the clawback amounting to €1,318.42 and of the right of appeal. The person named appealed this decision and this decision is currently under review in my Department .

EU Funding

72. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the European Fisheries Fund, or its successor, the European Maritime Fisheries Fund, provide funding support for fishermen, who are no longer involved in fishing, to retrain in an alternative maritime activity; specifically in respect of a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6166/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Seafood Development Programme 2007-2013 under the European Fisheries Fund (1198/2006) is providing funding to Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) to in turn aid projects that support

the development and diversification of the economy in coastal communities. Support is potentially available from the six FLAGS for fishermen who are no longer involved in fishing to re-train in an alternative maritime activity. I understand from Bord Iascaigh Mhara that the person named has already availed of such supports from FLAG South East for two training courses to assist him in finding employment in the offshore sector.

I am presently finalising a new Seafood Development Programme under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and I expect to launch a €241 million Programme later this year, after it is adopted by the Commission. I will be publishing a detailed consultation document and Strategic Environmental Assessment for public consultation in the next month or so, with a view to submitting the new Programme to the Commission by May this year. I will welcome all views during that consultation on the extent to which the Programme should in the future assist with matters such as the training referred to by the Deputy.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

73. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a 2013 land parcel information system review on an application for a single farm payment in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6179/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A review of the land parcels declared by the persons named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that a number of the land parcels declared by the persons named contained ineligible features. Following an appeal from the persons named, a visit by a Department official to verify the position was necessary to progress the matter. This check confirmed an area over-declaration of 3.6% in the area declared by the applicant for the 2013 Single Farm Payment Scheme. This over-declaration resulted in a reduction between 3% and 20% to the area payable under the 2013 Single Farm Payment Scheme. The applicant was notified in writing of the outcome of the inspection on 5 December 2014 and advised of the right of appeal to the independently-chaired LPIS Appeals Committee. The persons named have not availed of this right to date.

Forestry Grants

74. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a forestry road grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [6182/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The application by the person named was submitted online by his registered forester on 2 February 2015. Once the necessary supporting documentation has been received and the application is complete it will be assessed, which may include consultation with statutory bodies and the general public. He will be notified as soon as his application for approval to build the road has been determined.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

75. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 98 of 15 January 2015, the specific services and-or data that were

provided by the Marine Institute to Bord Iascaigh Mhara for the Galway Bay licence application; the services and-or data of these that were provided by the Marine Institute from in-house resources; the services and-or data of these that were provided from outside the Marine Institute; and the number of staff of the Marine Institute that were involved in providing scientific services and-or data to Bord Iascaigh Mhara in relation to this application. [6244/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am assuming the Deputy meant to refer instead to Question No. 99 of 15 January 2015 and the subsequent direct response to the Deputy from the Marine Institute. Matters concerning services provided by the Institute to Bord Iascaigh Mhara are operational matters for the board of the Institute. I will forward the Deputy's question to the Institute for direct reply.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

76. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, further to Parliamentary Question No. 98 of 15 January 2015, if the delay in deciding on the application by the Marine Institute on the Galway Bay licence amounts to the recognition by him that this application is going nowhere; and that giant fish farms cannot succeed in Irish waters. [6245/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As previously indicated to the Deputy the application in question is currently under consideration by my Department in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the 1933 Foreshore Act. A determination in respect of the application will be made as soon as possible following completion of the necessary assessment process.

As the application is under active consideration as part of the statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Value for Money Reviews

77. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the independent value for money assessments that have been commissioned by his Department to assess the previous and forthcoming operational programmes for fisheries and aquaculture. [6246/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In relation to the present Seafood Development Programme 2007-2013 under the European Fisheries Fund Regulation (1198/2016), ex-post evaluation of the Programme is by law a matter for the European Commission. My Department was responsible for carrying out an interim evaluation of the Programme. This was conducted by independent consultants and published in 2011 and is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/fisheries/marineagenciesandprogrammes/seafooddevelopmentinireland/InterimEvaluationSeafoodDev180612.pdf>

In addition, a value for money review of the 2005-2008 decommissioning schemes was conducted in 2011 in accordance with the then Department of Finance Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative. The report of the Review was published on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/publications/2012/FishVFMFinal310112.pdf>

My Department is presently finalising a new Seafood Development Programme 2014-2020 under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Regulation (508/2014). I will be publishing a detailed consultation document and Strategic Environmental Assessment for public consultation in the next month or so, with a view to submitting the new Programme to the Commission by May this year for its consideration and adoption. As required by the EMFF Regulation, an independent ex-ante evaluation is being conducted by consultants on behalf of my Department. That evaluation is still ongoing and the consultants' report will be published in due course. In addition, the Programme document itself will include an evaluation plan and this will set out details of arrangements to subject expenditure programmes to ongoing evaluation in accordance with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform's Capital Appraisal Guidelines.

Job Creation Data

78. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of jobs that will be created if he agrees to licence the proposed marine harvest fish farm at Shot Head, County Cork; and if the promised jobs are sufficient to justify the damage to the bay's environment from this proposed fish farm. [6248/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The licence application referred to by the Deputy is currently under consideration by my Department in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the 1933 Foreshore Act. The process of assessment will take full account of applicable National and EU legislation and will reflect the full engineering, scientific, environmental, legal and public policy aspects of the application.

As the application is under active consideration as part of the statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Íocaíochtaí Scéimeanna Talmhaíochta

79. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo) faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste do 2009, 2010 agus 2011 agus faoin Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair do 2009, 2010, 2011 agus 2012; cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis na híocaíochtaí seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [6251/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I dtaca le Ceisteanna Parlaiminte eile ar an ábhar seo, tá íocaíochtaí maidir leis an Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair agus le Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste do na blianta 2009, 2013 agus 2014 seolta cheana féin díreach chuig cuntas baine ainmnithe an duine ainmnithe. Tháinig ceisteanna eile chun solais fad a bhí iarratais a fuarthas maidir leis na blianta 2010, 2011 agus 2012 á bpróiseáil. Réitíodh na ceisteanna sin le déanaí agus seolfar íocaíocht díreach chuig cuntas baine ainmnithe an duine ainmnithe go luath.

Milk Quota Applications

80. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farmers who plan to supply milk, after the quota restrictions have been lifted, can apply for any available quota that may exist in their local co-operative, at present. [6266/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Milk Quota Regulations will cease to exist on 31 March 2015 and as a result the requirement to hold a milk quota in order to sell or supply milk will cease to exist. However, between now and 31 March, milk purchasers who are selling or supplying milk must hold a milk quota and have it allotted to a particular milk purchaser. At the end of the milk quota year, on 31 March, each milk purchaser will then distribute any unused quota to their permanent milk quota holders, in accordance with the rules governing the National Flexi Milk Distribution Scheme. There is no application system for such quota.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme

81. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made to allow a farmer, whose farm holding includes commonage grazing rights, to apply in their own right to the new green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; if he will remove the requirement for any such farmer to apply, in conjunction with at least 50% of other farmers grazing a commonage, and the requirement for a joint grazing management plan to be submitted as part of an application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6297/15]

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 EU Commission it was made clear that it is incumbent on Member States to ensure that payments are for actions 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. However, there is general agreement that the key to managing these valuable habitats is a single Commonage Management Plan (CMP), covering all participating GLAS shareholders.

I have recently met with various hill-farmer representatives and I am very confident that we can deliver a successful implementation strategy for these commonages. In this regard, I have stressed that reaching the 50% participation rate is an important target but it will not be a barrier to entry. 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.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme

82. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the new green low-carbon agri-environment Scheme will open for applications; the closing date for receipt of completed applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6298/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The detailed

consideration of Ireland's draft Rural Development Programme (RDP) by the EU Commission is now at an advanced stage and the new Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) is a key component of our RDP. I hope to be in a position to open GLAS as soon as agreement is reached with the EU Commission. In terms of a closing date, I can only make final decisions in this regard when I have EU approval to hand.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

83. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a single farm payment scheme payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6299/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2014. The Single Payment Scheme application was processed with payments issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 16 October 2014 and 1 December 2014. Payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued on 24 September 2014.

Direct Payment Scheme

84. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the review undertaken by his Department, in respect of whether persons who have attended Mountbellew Agriculture College in County Galway and have obtained a level-7 degree in agriculture and environmental management and an add-on course qualification in rural enterprise and environmental management, have the necessary qualifications to act as a planner under the new green low-carbon agri-environment scheme is complete; if so, the decision that was arrived at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6300/15]

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 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 HETAC 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 (NFQ) degree standard.

My Department recently carried out a review of the educational qualification requirements for FAS/GLAS advisors following the receipt of an appeal from Mountbellew Agricultural College/GMIT in relation to the level 7 BSc in Agriculture and Environment Management with the

add-on level 8 BSc in Rural Enterprise and Environment Management, which had been deemed as not meeting the required standard. The review was undertaken by an officer independent of the original decision making process.

This review, which incorporated a detailed examination of all documentation submitted as part of the appeal, identified that this course did not meet the standard of educational qualifications required as some of the core subjects of soil science and animal and crop production were assessed only as part of the level 7 degree. The required standard to be approved as a FAS/GLAS advisor is, and has been for some years, that these core subjects must have been taken/assessed as part of a level 8 (NFQ) degree programme.

In order to address the concerns on this issue, I am now arranging for officials from my Department to meet with relevant institutions in the near future to discuss in detail the educational qualification requirements for FAS Advisors, the feasibility of adapting existing courses to meet this standard in the future and to identify options to facilitate past graduates in achieving the required standard of qualifications.

Agriculture Schemes

85. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts being made to support those farmers under 40 years of age who have been farming full-time for five years but are unable to get access to the national reserve and are also excluded from getting the 25% basic payment scheme top-up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6320/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with the EU Regulations governing the Young Farmer Scheme and National Reserve, eligibility for payment is limited to farmers under 40 years who commenced their farming activity no more than five years prior to submitting the Basic Payment Scheme application. These schemes are intended to provide financial assistance to young farmers during the period immediately following the setting up of their farming enterprise. My Department has no discretion regarding these eligibility criteria and as such it is not possible to extend the Young Farmers Scheme or Young Farmers category of the National Reserve to include the group of farmers as proposed by the Deputy.

The Regulations also include an optional provision whereby Member States may use the National Reserve to allocate new entitlements or give a top-up on the value of existing entitlements for persons who suffer from a ‘Specific Disadvantage’. The application of this optional use of the Reserve for non-priority categories will be dependent on the availability of funds within the National Reserve once the two priority categories have been allocated. My Department is aware of the particular category of farmer referred to by the Deputy. In this regard, my Department is engaging with the EU Commission to examine the possibility of including this category of farmer under the “Specific Disadvantage” provision.

Departmental Agencies

86. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 167 of 7 May 2014, if the subsequent letters from a person (details supplied) to his private secretary and the Secretary General of his Department of 7 June 2014 and 4 September 2014 have been replied to. [6329/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 12 May 2014, I wrote to the person named concerning the matters raised by him about a Bord Iascaigh Mhara study of seal depredation. I advised the person named that I considered it appropriate that his complaint against BIM be processed, in the first instance, with BIM through its Customer Charter. I also said that when appropriate avenues to mediate or arbitrate the issues raised by him had been exhausted with BIM, it may at that point be appropriate to examine the scope for me to become more directly involved. While subsequent correspondence from the person named to me expressed his reluctance to bring his complaints to BIM, I have to maintain that this is the appropriate first course of action. In doing so, the person named may request that BIM have the complaint considered by a senior manager of BIM with no past involvement in the matters concerned.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

87. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an area aid headage payment and Rural Environment Protection Scheme payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6336/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas scheme was received from the person named on 23 April 2014. The Single Payment Scheme application was processed with payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 14 January 2015. Payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued on 13 January 2015. As the SFP application of the person named has been resolved the REPS application will now be further processed.

Civil Defence

88. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the position regarding a service medal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow. [6261/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Civil Defence is a volunteer based organisation and it is important to honour those who have given such dedicated service over many years.

Long Service Medals were first introduced in Civil Defence in 1997 for members who had given 10 and 20 years of continuous service to the organisation. As Civil Defence is now over 60 years old it was decided last year to introduce Long Service Medals to recognise those who have given 30, 40 and even 50 years of continuous service to the organisation.

The Minister of State at the Department, Mr. Paul Kehoe T.D., presented the first of these medals at a ceremony in Dublin Castle last November. For those eligible volunteers who were unable to attend at Dublin Castle to receive their medals, local presentation ceremonies are being organised.

Volunteers are recruited into Civil Defence through their local authority. My Department has been in contact with Wicklow County Council to request that they examine their records to establish the number of years of service the individual in question has given to Civil Defence. When these investigations are complete the Civil Defence Officer for Wicklow will make contact with the individual regarding the awarding of an appropriate Long Service Medal to him.

Defence Forces Fatalities

89. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence regarding reports that a person (details supplied) suspected of involvement in the killing of persons (details supplied) could go free under an amnesty covering crimes committed during the 1975 to 1990 Lebanese civil war; if he has established whether this is likely to happen; the action he is taking in relation to the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6330/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The matter to which the Deputy is referring is the case of the deaths of Private Thomas Barrett and Private Derek Smallhorne who were murdered, and Private John O'Mahony who was seriously injured while serving with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) on 18 April 1980. In July 2014 the alleged perpetrator, Mr. Mahmoud Bazzi, was arrested by the United States of America's Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Agency for administrative immigration violations. During his immigration court hearing in Detroit, on 11 August, Mr. Bazzi admitted that he entered the United States in 1994 without proper documentation. The Judge ruled that Mr. Bazzi be deported to Lebanon. Mr. Bazzi was finally deported from the United States to his native Lebanon on 30 January 2015. On arrival in Beirut, Mr. Bazzi was arrested and detained by the Lebanese authorities where he remains in custody. It is now a matter for the Lebanese authorities to investigate the case. The Irish Ambassador in the region is continuing to monitor developments in the case and is in contact with the Department of Defence.

Unfortunately, there are no provisions in Irish law, which provide a basis for Ireland to pursue a prosecution against the alleged perpetrator. Lebanon is the country with primary jurisdiction in this case. The Irish Government have requested the support of the Lebanese Government in seeking justice for the murdered Irish UNIFIL peacekeepers, should such action be feasible. During my visit to the Lebanon last December, I met with the Lebanese authorities at the most senior levels of Government and highlighted the Irish Government's continued commitment and interest in progressing this case.

I am not in a position to state whether the alleged perpetrator will go free but I can state that we are committed to continuing to do everything possible to pursue justice for both men who lost their lives in the line of peacekeeping duty, and stand ready to provide whatever assistance possible to the Lebanese authorities in progressing this issue. However, it is a matter for the Lebanese authorities to investigate the case and to determine any future action in accordance with their national legislation and judicial procedures.

Gambling Sector

90. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the introduction of virtual gambling; and if it is covered under the Betting Act 1931. [6163/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It is my intention that this form of gambling will be covered by the Gambling Control Bill, once enacted. The General Scheme of the Bill, published in July 2013, and available on my Department's website, has virtual gambling within its scope. It is not possible to indicate at this point when the Bill will be published.

My colleague the Minister for Finance has primary responsibility for the oversight of the Betting Act 1931 (as amended) and currently has legislation before the Oireachtas - the Betting (Amendment) Bill 2013 - which will update the current legislation in this area.

Betting Legislation

91. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the opening of betting offices in pubs is covered under the Betting Act 1931. [6164/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): General provisions relating to the control and regulation of bookmaking and betting are set out in the Betting Act 1931, as amended. This legislation prohibits a person from carrying on business or acting as a bookmaker without a licence issued by the Revenue Commissioners. Applicants for such licences must submit a certificate of personal fitness issued by a Superintendent of the Garda Síochána and be tax compliant. A certificate of suitability of premises, also issued by the Garda Síochána, is required by applicants engaged in off-course bookmaking activity.

Section 11 of the 1931 Act sets out the grounds for refusal of a certificate of suitability of premises. As regards the suitability of licensed premises, section 11 includes a specific refusal ground which remains in force, i.e. where the application for a certificate is in respect of premises which did not prior to 28 July 1926 form part of premises licensed for the sale of intoxicating liquor, that the applicant is the holder of a licence for the sale of intoxicating liquor. With the exception of premises forming part of licensed premises prior to 28 July 1926, section 17(2) of the Licensing Act 1872 prohibits the carrying on of betting activities on licensed premises.

Gambling Legislation

92. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps his Department is taking to tackle the ever increasing problem of gambling in this country. [6165/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Government approved the General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill in July 2013. This Bill will, upon enactment, replace all extant laws on gambling (with the exception of that governing the National Lottery). The Scheme is with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel awaiting formal drafting, and is available on my Department's website. As per the current Legislative Programme, it is not yet possible to indicate when the Bill is likely to be published.

The new legislation will have consumer protection generally as one of its core principles, and it is envisaged that it will include several measures aimed at assisting and protecting vulnerable persons, the young and those for whom gambling has become a problem.

It is proposed, in Part 7 of the Scheme, to establish a Fund to aid research, education and awareness activities and to support treatment programmes. The Fund will be based on contributions from the industry but the proposals will ensure independent supervision of the disbursement of monies collected.

As I have already stated, there is a scarcity of information on the scale and impacts of gambling. This underlines the need for measures such as the Fund I referred to above.

Garda Strength

93. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Kildare division, broken

down by station, from 2009 to date in 2015; her views on whether this is adequate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6186/15]

98. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Limerick division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6284/15]

99. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Clare division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6285/15]

100. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Cork city division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6286/15]

101. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Cork west division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6287/15]

102. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Cork north division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6288/15]

103. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Westmeath division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6289/15]

104. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Mayo division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6290/15]

105. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Meath division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6291/15]

106. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Kildare division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6292/15]

107. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí stationed in each station in the Laois division from 2009 to date in 2015; the number of vehicles allocated to same during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6293/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 98 to 107, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel and vehicles, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have arranged to send detailed tables of the information which the Deputy has requested directly to him.

Prison Committals

94. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners jailed in the State for non-payment of fines for each year since 2010; when this practice will cease and other appropriate arrangements for payment including staged payments will be put in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6226/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The number of committals for each year since 2010 solely for non-payment of fines is set out in the table below. Figures are taken from the Annual Reports of the Irish Prison Service. In the case of 2014, these figures are provisional pending the publication of the 2014 Annual Report.

Year	Committals for non-payment of fines
2014	8,965
2013	8,121
2012	8,304
2011	7,514
2010	6,683

I wish to advise the Deputy that the Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014 was signed into law by the President on 16 April 2014. The aim of the legislation is to seek to effectively eliminate, in so far as is possible, the need for judges to commit anyone to prison for the non-payment of a fine. As well as introducing an option for persons to pay fines by instalment, there are also changes in the way those who fail to pay fines are dealt with, with a range of options available to judges including recovery orders, attachment of earnings, community service and ultimately imprisonment.

Work is ongoing in preparing for the implementation of the Act. The area most directly affected by the changes is the Courts and the Courts Service is working on a number of developments which will ensure that the implementation of the legislation, and the new procedures which will operate under it, are as efficient as possible.

In relation to the introduction of payment of fines by instalment, a decision was taken to outsource all aspects of the recovery of fines to an external provider. The Courts Service is introducing new arrangements for the payment of fines which will allow payments to be made in a range of outlets across the country, and not just through Courts Service offices. There are significant changes in information technology required to ensure that the instalment payment system operates effectively and that the necessary accounting procedures are in place for the recording of payments. Changes are also required in the way that information is transferred between the Courts Service and An Garda Síochána to ensure that both organisations have fully up to date information on the cases and their current status.

It is expected that all the preparations for the new system will be completed by the third quarter of 2015. While it is desirable that the Act be commenced as soon as possible, it is important that these preparations are done correctly to ensure that the significant changes being implemented in the fines system as a result of this legislation are implemented smoothly and effectively from the start.

Prison Committals

95. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of female prisoners jailed in the State for each year since 2010; the percentage of all prisoners this represents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6227/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The number of female committals for each year since 2010 is set out in the table below. Figures are taken from the Annual Reports of the Irish Prison Service. In the case of 2014, these figures are provisional pending the publication of the 2014 Annual Report.

Year	Female Committals	% of Total Committals
2014	3,093	19%
2013	2,727	17%
2012	2,560	15%
2011	2,238	13%
2010	2,024	12%

Naturalisation Applications

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determining eligibility for stamp 4, in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 6; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6237/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they are currently in correspondence with the person mentioned. Following the introduction of the Reactivation Work Permit Scheme where a person who previously held an Employment Permit may be eligible for a Work Permit, an application form for this scheme issued to this person on 03 February 2015. Following a return of this form INIS will be in further contact with this person.

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

Domestic Violence

97. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a provision will be included in the reformed Domestic Violence Act (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6269/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government is committed to introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence. In this regard, I intend to bring the General Scheme of a consolidated bill on domestic violence to Government early this year with a view to enactment later in the year.

My Department has received a number of proposals in relation to the reform of our domestic violence legislative provisions including the extension of the availability of orders to other classes of applicants. All such proposals will be carefully considered during the legislative process for the Bill.

Questions Nos. 98 to 107, inclusive, answered with Question No. 93.

Criminal Prosecutions Data

108. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there have been any prosecutions, to date, for the offence of failing to surrender a driving licence, when a driver has been disqualified. [6305/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware from my response to Parliamentary Question No. 350 yesterday, I have sought the detailed views of An Garda Síochána in relation to the matter raised and I will be in contact directly when information is available.

Domestic Violence Policy

109. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 382 of 3 February 2015, if there will be a provision for protection, in relation to an adult person not living with another person, included in the draft proposals for reform and consolidation of the Domestic Violence Acts; and the number of persons who have been prosecuted under the Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997 in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. [6306/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has received a number of proposals in relation to the reform of our domestic violence legislative provisions including the extension of the availability of orders to other classes of applicants. All such proposals will be carefully considered in the finalisation of the General Scheme of a Bill to consolidate and reform our domestic violence legislation. I intend to bring the General Scheme of this Bill to Government early this year with a view to enactment later in the year.

The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy.

Crime Data

110. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of harassment complaints received by An Garda Síochána, involving online harassment through social media websites, in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014; the number of prosecutions arising from same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6307/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide such relevant information as may be available directly to the Deputy.

Garda Promotions

111. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to fill vacancies at the ranks of sergeant, inspector and superintendent, at the earliest opportunity. [6308/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): One of the primary functions of the Garda Commissioner under the Garda Síochána Acts is to direct and control An Garda Síochána. The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. This necessary ongoing flexibility in the distribution of personnel means that it is not feasible to identify specific vacancies within specific areas of the force.

At a national level, sanction has been given by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for a maximum strength in each rank. The agreed strength for ranks above Garda rank are given in the table overleaf, together with actual strength as of the end of December 2014. Where current actual strength is below the approved maximum strength, it is the Garda Commissioner who will make the necessary arrangements to have the balance of posts filled through promotion competitions.

Rank	Actual strength	Approved max. strength
Commissioner	1	1
D/Commissioner	0	2
A/Commissioner	8	8
C/Superintendent	39*	45
Superintendent	140*	166
Inspector	297	300
Sergeant	1,919	2,000
Garda	10,395	

Promotion competitions to fill vacancies at the ranks of Chief Superintendent and Superintendent have been completed. On 3 February 2015 the Government approved my recommendation to make six (6) appointments at Chief Superintendent level and thirty five (35) appointments at Superintendent level. Competitions for promotion to the ranks of Inspector and Sergeant will commence as early as possible this year.

Domestic Violence Policy

112. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there will be a provision for protection, in relation to an adult person not living with another person, in the current draft proposals for reform and consolidation of the Domestic Violence Acts (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6323/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has received a number of proposals in relation to the reform of our domestic violence legislative provisions including the extension of the availability of orders to other classes of applicants. All such proposals will be carefully considered in the finalisation of the General Scheme of a Bill to consolidate and reform our domestic violence legislation. I intend to bring the General Scheme of this Bill to Government early this year with a view to enactment later in the year.

In relation to the details supplied by the Deputy, I understand that An Garda Síochána are currently investigating the matters raised by the individual concerned and that the investigating members are continuing to liaise with the complainant to ensure she is kept fully apprised of the current status of each investigation. I am pleased to note from the correspondence that the individual considers that progress is being made in relation to the matters raised.

Naturalisation Applications

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 321 of 20 January 2015, if a person (details supplied) in County Dublin will be facilitated in a request for an update of a stamp 45 and in preparation for a valid application for naturalisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6344/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is a sibling of an Irish citizen child of non-EEA national parents, born in the State before 1st January, 2005, whose mother was granted temporary permission to remain in the State on 24th January, 2006 under the Revised Arrangements for the non-EEA national parents of children born in Ireland before 1st January, 2005, commonly known as the IBC/05 Scheme.

As a discretionary measure, the person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on 11th April, 2008, in line with the permission granted to her mother. This permission has been renewed on a number occasions with the latest permission having expired on 31st January, 2015. It is open to the person concerned to apply to have her permission to remain further renewed. Any such application must be made in writing and should be addressed to the INIS, PO Box 10003, Dublin 1.

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

School Completion Programme

114. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of reversing the cuts to the school completion programme which were implemented under this Government. [6176/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The School Completion Programme aims to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle and to generally improve the school attendance, participation and retention of young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage. The Programme is a targeted intervention aimed at school communities identified through the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. It provides targeted supports annually to approximately 36,000 children.

The School Completion Programme was subject to a Comprehensive Review of Expenditure in 2011, requiring an annual reduction in budget of 6.5% in the period 2012-2014, from €30.258m in 2011 to the 2014 allocation of €24.756m. Since 1st January 2014, the Child and Family Agency has operational responsibility for the School Completion Programme, including the allocation of funds to local projects. The Agency has approved local projects' school retention plans for the 2014/2015 academic year. The first instalment of 2014/15 funding issued to local projects last September. Further payments totalling approximately €9.5m have issued over the past month, with a third instalment planned for payment in May 2015.

The estimate for the Child and Family Agency for 2015 is €631 million, a 4.3% increase on its 2014 allocation. My Department has recently issued a Performance Statement to the Agency under Section 45 of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. This includes my priorities for consideration in the development of the Agency's 2015 Business Plan. The Business Plan will set out the Agency's proposed activities, programmes and priorities for 2015, including provision for the School Completion Programme, in the light of the monies available.

A review of the School Completion Programme has commenced. It is being carried out by the ESRI following a procurement process managed by the Agency. The programme has been in operation since 2002 and I believe that it is timely that a review be carried out. The Review is an important initiative to plan for the future development of this Programme. It is envisaged that the review will be completed during the 2014/2015 academic year.

Early Childhood Care Education

115. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the significant difficulties being experienced with the early childhood care and education scheme, particularly in relation to the capitation level, which is not sufficient to cover the costs of delivering a high quality service for children; if he will conduct a study, in consultation with the providers, to determine the real costs of providing this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6238/15]

116. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on additional capitation under the ECCE scheme to support children with additional needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6239/15]

117. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his Department will increase the duration of the ECCE scheme contract to 48 weeks per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6240/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 to 117, inclusive, together.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children, in the age range 3 years and 2 months to 4 years and 7 months, before commencing primary school.

Many children with special needs avail of the free pre-school year in mainstream childcare services without any additional supports. I am aware that the Health Service Executive does, where possible, assist children with special needs who may require additional support to enable them to avail of pre-school services in mainstream settings.

To ensure that the ECCE programme is more accessible to children with special needs, a number of additional provisions have been added. 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 free pre-school programme is designed to be delivered for three hours per day, five days per week, over 38 weeks (183 days per year), and capitation fees are paid to participating services on the basis of this provision. The provision is based on the primary school model, under which primary schools are required to open on 193 days per year (equivalent to 38.6 weeks). There are no plans to increase the current provision within the pre-school year or to extend the age range for eligibility.

A total of some €175 million is spent on the ECCE scheme annually in which some 67,000 children receive free pre-school care and education. The Government succeeded in maintaining the pre-school year on a universal and free basis despite the difficult budgetary situation that prevailed in recent years. While considerable progress has been made in correcting the overall budgetary situation, the funding available to my Department following the completion of budgetary process this year does not allow for an increase in the capitation paid to childcare providers. As the economy improves and the public finances recover, I would hope that the capitation rates for all childcare programmes could be improved.

To ensure that all the benefits of childcare investments are fully realised, future public investment in childcare must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I am establishing a cross-Departmental group to look at the provision right across the 0 to 6 age group as well as to consider the after-school needs of older school-going children. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services. This new group will include representatives of the Departments of Education and Skills, Social Protection, Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Public Expenditure and Reform, Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department.

Child Protection

118. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the action he will take on the 8,000 cases of child abuse, neglect and welfare concern, and to end these serious crimes, inflicted on innocent children, as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6324/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am replying on the basis that the Deputy's question relates to the number of child welfare and protection cases which are with the Child and Family Agency and which do not have an allocated social worker.

As of November 2014, the Child and Family Agency has advised that a total of 19,988 children were in receipt of a dedicated social work service. A further 8,451 children did not have an allocated social worker.

Of the 8,451 cases, 2,844 were deemed to be high priority. These cases represent a mix of new referrals that need further assessment and social work input, as well as children known to the Agency who need a continuing social work service. I am assured by the Agency that emergency cases are dealt with immediately, for instance a child who has been abandoned or is in immediate physical danger or at immediate risk of sexual abuse and that high priority cases are kept under review.

The Child and Family Agency is undertaking a number of manpower related initiatives designed to increase the workforce capacity of the organisation and to ensure that unallocated cases are dealt with expeditiously. These include:

- Continuing recruitment, with 164 social workers recruited since the Agency was established, and a further 219 posts currently in the recruitment process;
- The introduction of a pilot Maternity Leave Scheme whereby temporary staff can be offered a 12 month contract to cover maternity leave;
- In recognition of the challenging nature of this work, new entrants and graduates have a reduced workload for their first year, with opportunities for regular supervision with experienced practitioners;
- The roll out of a caseload management system to ensure caseloads are manageable and prioritised appropriately.

Ministerial Meetings

119. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with parents in Every Life Counts to discuss the comments he made prior to Christmas 2014 regarding the provision of abortion, where children have a profound disability, meaning they might not live for long after birth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6162/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy might be aware I recently received a request to meet with this group. I responded to the request by offering my sympathy and explaining that the Government will not be proposing any changes to the eighth amendment. For this reason, I did not believe that a meeting would serve any purpose and I declined their request.

Primary Care Services Provision

120. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his Department, or the Health Service Executive, has carried out, or have plans to carry out, a feasibility study into the possibility of setting up additional test-scan centres at a primary care level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6175/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The 2015 National Service plan commits the HSE to extend ultrasound access to additional primary care sites on a prioritised basis. This is a first step in a programme to extend the availability of diagnostics to support the management of patients in general practice. €0.7 million is being made available for this purpose in 2015.

The pilot will provide GPs direct access to ultrasound, at approximately eight primary care sites, across the South and West, from early 2015. This will be an outsourced initiative that will

run for an initial 12 month period. The tender evaluation process is near conclusion. It is due to be awarded in February and the sites will be rolled out over a 3-12 week period thereafter.

The initial prioritised areas were identified as those of greatest need from the HSE's and Irish College of General Practitioners' Radiology Reports. Subject to the procurement exercise, the following numbers of ultrasounds are targeted:

Cork – 4,250

Kerry – 1,500

Galway – 2,250

Mayo – 1,750

Roscommon – 750

Sligo/Leitrim – 1,250

Donegal – 2,250

Limerick – 2,000.

GPs will be able to electronically refer patients to the preferred provider. The preferred provider will see urgent patients within 5 working days and non-urgent patients within 10 working days. An ultrasonographer will conduct the ultrasound and a radiologist will report on each examination. The pilot will aim to clear any existing hospital waiting lists for GP referrals to ultrasound.

The pilot will help inform the HSE's future planning in the context of the provision of ultrasound scans in Primary Care.

Health Services

121. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6202/15]

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

122. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the delay in processing a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6205/15]

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 in-

11 February 2015

cludes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Services

123. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive a date for surgery from the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6230/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Spinal conditions, including scoliosis, in children and young people are predominantly managed at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin (OLCHC). It is acknowledged by all that waiting times for surgery are unacceptable and the HSE, Children's Hospital Group and OLCHC are actively working to address them as quickly as possible and exploring all short, medium and long-term options to increase capacity. I am pleased to say that funding has been allocated in the 2015 Service Plan to facilitate the appointment of an orthopaedic surgeon, anaesthetist and support staff to maximise utilisation of available theatre sessions in OLCHC.

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 Services

124. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an urgent operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6232/15]

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.

Departmental Expenditure

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the amount of money paid by the State in respect of treatment for Irish patients in the National Health Service in the United Kingdom in each year from 2008 to 2014; the amount received by the Health Service Executive

for treatment of nationals of the United Kingdom here during the same period; if he expects increased costs for treatment of Irish patients in the United Kingdom following recent changes to the rules in this regard by the National Health Service in that country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6249/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Regulation (EC) 883/2004 and Implementing Regulation 987/2009 provide for the coordination of social security systems, including healthcare, within the EU/EEA and Switzerland. Under these provisions, persons who are insured with (covered by) the healthcare system of one EU member state are entitled to receive healthcare in the public system of another member state in certain circumstances, at the cost of the member state in which they are insured. Such persons may include:

- people who are employed in one member state and resident in another and their dependants,
- pensioners of one member state who reside in another and their dependants,
- visitors to one member state from another, and
- persons referred for treatment to another member state.

The EU Regulations provide for the costs to be reimbursed between member states. The Regulations also allow for two or more states to agree alternative arrangements for reimbursement other than those laid down in the Regulations, or to mutually waive reimbursement altogether.

Ireland's primary interaction has been and continues to be with the United Kingdom with whom it operates a bilateral healthcare reimbursement agreement, covering such persons as temporary visitors between the two countries, pensioners of one country and their dependants residing in the other country, and the dependant families of persons employed in the other country. Under the terms of the agreement net liability between the two countries is calculated on a lump sum basis rather than an individual basis. The amount payable is the net difference between the costs to the Irish health services of providing care to those with only UK entitlements and the cost to the UK health services of providing services to those with only Irish entitlements. The amount payable is agreed following compilation of the necessary data and discussions between the two administrations. Payments are made in advance and are subject to final settlement once all necessary statistical and financial information is complete. Total payments in any one year can as a consequence relate to both final settlements in respect of previous years' liabilities and advance payments in respect of the current and/or previous years. The net payment received by Ireland from the United Kingdom was €100m in 2008; €286m in 2009, €320m in 2010; €270m in 2011; €220m in 2012; €220m in 2013 and €172m in 2014. These amounts represent the actual payments made in cash in these years and do not correspond to the full liability for that particular year.

As explained below, only a small portion of the above payments relates to UK visitors to Ireland and Irish visitors to the UK. By far the largest part of the payment received from the UK authorities on an annual basis relates to the provision of healthcare to UK pensioners and their dependants residing in Ireland. Entirely separate arrangements apply to patient referrals for scheduled treatment in the other jurisdiction whereby the costs arising are reimbursed on an actual costs basis. These arrangements are administered by the Health Service Executive.

The amount payable in any one year attributable to temporary visitors between Ireland and the UK (i.e. EHIC type costs) is determined by the estimated number of visitor days and an estimate of the average cost of providing healthcare treatment. The finalisation of accounts is

normally some years in arrears to facilitate collation of relevant statistics and for the approval of the average cost prepared by each country for the year concerned at EU level. The last accounts finalised were in respect of the year 2008 in respect of which Ireland's liability to the United Kingdom was calculated at Stg£10,161,467 (€12,269,340 approximately) for 22,945,700 visitor days (Ireland to UK) and the United Kingdom's liability to Ireland was €17,735,993 for 19,095,600 visitor days (UK to Ireland). Accounts for subsequent years have not yet been finalised. However visitor days for the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 have been estimated respectively as follows:

Estimated Visitor Days in 000's

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Visitor days Ireland to UK	22,946	23,083	21,614	19,017	17,754	15,790	not available
Visitor days UK to Ireland	19,096	17,057	14,377	14,174	13,107	14,134	not available

There are no proposals to change these arrangements.

Cancer Screening Programmes

126. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the cost involved in the current breast test mail shot, which is by registered post rather than by standard post, which the cervical smear test mail shot has used; the way the database was compiled and is being used; and how accurate it is in providing the high volume of returns, many of which are not claimed, due to the fact of being registered mail. [6252/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow up the matter with them.

Nursing Home Services

127. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, details of the public nursing homes that are not in compliance with national regulations on physical environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6263/15]

128. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns that there may be 27 public nursing homes that are not compliant with national regulations on physical environment; the actions being taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6264/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 128 together.

As these are service matters they have 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.

Hospital Services

129. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if he will approve funding for the development of a new Central Sterile Supply Department sterilisation unit at Roscommon County Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6274/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The endoscopy unit project currently under-way at Roscommon General Hospital also includes a decontamination unit.

Any future investment at Roscommon County Hospital must be considered within the overall acute hospital sector infrastructure programme, within the overall capital envelope available to the health service and in the context of the establishment of hospital groups. In 2015, there will be a structured integration of all hospitals in the Saolta University Hospital Group. This will provide further support for all hospitals in delivering high-quality, safe patient care in a cost-effective manner.

There will always be more projects than can be funded by the Exchequer and there is limited funding available for new projects over the next multi-annual period 2015-2019 given the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place. It is essential that all projects, other than those where existing contractual commitments are in place, are assessed on their merits to ensure that the limited capital funding available goes to those developments which address the greatest service need. The HSE is concentrating on applying the limited funding available for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs.

Hospital Equipment

130. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of part-time and full-time magnetic resonance imaging, MRI, radiographers at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; and his plans to appoint additional radiographers at this hospital. [6309/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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

131. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Wexford will receive a decision on their medical card application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6317/15]

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 Aids and Appliances Provision

132. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite provision of hearing aids in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [6319/15]

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 Procedures

133. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding kidney transplants in the State; the number of such transplants carried out for each year since 2010 by location; the number of specialist kidney transplant surgeons employed for each such year by location; the numbers presently employed in 2015; the number of vacancies existing presently; if same have been advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6321/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The national renal transplant team in Beaumont Hospital carries out all kidney transplants in Ireland. The transplants are carried out by the Beaumont team at two locations - Beaumont Hospital for adults and the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street, for paediatric patients up to the age of 19.

The table below shows the kidney transplant details 2010-2014:

Year	Deceased Donor Transplants	Living Donor Transplants	Total Transplants	No of Transplant Surgeons Employed
2010	98	23	121	6
2011	165	27	192	6
2012	131	32	163	6
2013	147	38	185	6
2014	112	40	152	6

All Transplant Surgeons at Beaumont Hospital also work as Consultant Urologists and have significant specialist urology workloads, including urological cancers, complex and benign urology and emergency urology for the North East region.

Two vacancies for Transplant Surgeons at Beaumont Hospital arose at the end of 2014. Approval has also been given for the recruitment of an additional Transplant Surgeon/Urologist to support the expansion of the living donor transplant programme. These specialised posts have been advertised both nationally and internationally and Beaumont Hospital is endeavouring to secure appointments as soon as possible.

Hospital Consultants Recruitment

134. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health his plans to appoint a second

palliative care consultant with supporting non-consultant hospital doctors for the midlands region, and the recruitment of palliative care nurse specialists in the acute hospitals in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6325/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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.

Palliative Care Facilities

135. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to ensure that the objective of the 2001 report of the National Advisory Committee on Palliative Care has been implemented in the midlands to date; whereby the midlands was designated as being in line for an inpatient unit-hospice in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6328/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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.

Military Aircraft Landings

136. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in view of reports that the Government of the United States of America is evaluating the question of military aid to Ukraine, the steps he will take to ensure that no military aircraft of the United States of America landing at Shannon Airport or overflying our airspace are transporting lethal or non-lethal military equipment to the Ukraine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6159/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of reports that the provision of military assistance to Ukraine is currently being evaluated by the United States government. Arrangements under which permission is granted for foreign military aircraft, including US military aircraft, to land at Irish airports or to overfly Irish airspace are governed by strict conditions. These include stipulations that the aircraft must be unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives and must not engage in intelligence gathering, and that the flights in question must not form part of military exercises or operations.

Requests to permit the landing or overflight of military aircraft are considered by my Department on the basis of the conditions outlined above.

Consular Services Expenditure

137. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the Irish embassies that underwent major refurbishment in 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015. [6310/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Details of major refurbishments, including major installation and enhancement of security measures, undertaken by my Department in respect of Irish Embassy premises in 2013, 2014 and 2015 are provided in tabular form below, as requested by the Deputy. My Department is responsible for two Votes: Vote 27 - International Co-operation and Vote 28 - Foreign Affairs and Trade. No major refurb-

bishments were carried out from Vote 27 - International Co-operation in 2013 and 2014, nor are there plans to undertake refurbishment to Irish Aid premises in 2015; therefore the figures below are in respect of Vote 28.

Year	Location	Amount
2013	Abuja	€100,527
2013	Beijing	€258,931
2013	New Delhi	€145,841
2013	Ljubljana	€84,217
2013	Paris	€379,555
2014	Beijing	€365,288
2014	Permanent Representation to the EU, Brussels	€171,351
2014	Moscow	€107,378
2014	Paris	€536,995
2014	Washington D.C.	€110,112

There have been no major refurbishments undertaken so far in 2015.

Foreign Conflicts

138. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will contact the Israeli authorities to express concern regarding a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6314/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In regard to this question, I refer to my answer to Question No. 489 of 10 February, which was as follows:

The treatment of Palestinian children in the Occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem is of deep concern, and an issue on which Ireland has been active for some time. In October 2013, during the universal periodic review of Israel's human rights record, Ireland expressed this concern and urged Israel to fully implement the recommendations of the February 2013 UNICEF report, entitled "Children in Israeli Military Detention".

We recommended that Israel end urgently night arrests of Palestinian children, the admissibility in evidence in military courts of written confessions in Hebrew signed by Palestinian children, the use of solitary confinement and the denial of access to family members or to legal representation.

Bilaterally, our concerns regarding the detention of Palestinian minors have been raised as part of our ongoing dialogue with the Israeli authorities on the overall situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel's treatment of the Palestinian population, both with the Israeli Embassy here and through our own Embassy in Tel Aviv.

We cannot attempt to follow each specific case in which these issues arise. The case cited by the Deputy has not previously come to the attention of my Department, although it is a clear example of the reasons why these practices are of such concern.

In my view, Palestinian children should be afforded the same rights and protections under the law which Israel rightly considers to be appropriate for Israeli children living alongside them. The overall human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the treatment of children in detention, remains a matter of concern and will continue to be raised in the relevant multilateral fora, and to feature in the EU's broader concerns about human rights in the area.

Similar concerns would exist in relation to the detention of children in many other states in the region.

Language Schools

139. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to deal with the lack of regulation in relation to agencies and persons that recruit students from outside the European Union for college courses here, particularly in relation to those dropping out of, or failing to turn up for, the courses, and the lack of any monitoring or check-up on their attendance, in conjunction with colleges and language schools in the State. [6158/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Ireland has an excellent international reputation for the quality of education services delivered to both our own citizens and those who come here from abroad. The vast majority of providers of education and training to international students in the State operate to a high standard and are motivated by the desire to enable learners to reach their potential. However, it is evident that a minority of providers do not operate to the same standards, with serious implications for students and the reputation of the wider sector. For this reason, I announced robust regulatory reforms to the international education sector together with the Minister for Justice and Equality on 2nd September 2014. These reforms are designed to provide certainty and clarity for international students coming to Ireland, to prioritise education over work, to give effect to an enhanced inspection and compliance regime and to safeguard the strong international reputation of high-quality Irish education providers. A key pillar of these reforms is a strengthened and more integrated inspection regime, including an enhanced inspection function for the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) and the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), which will be linked to Revenue, the Department of Social Protection and the National Employment Rights Authority. Officials from my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality are co-operating closely on the arrangements for the implementation of the reforms and when finalised, these will be brought to Government for approval. Another key pillar of the regulatory reforms for international education is the International Education Mark and related Code of Practice. The Code of Practice, which is currently being finalised by QQI, includes requirements relating to the protection of enrolled learners, treatment of fees and tax compliance, and will also address other ‘non-academic’ issues such as recruitment, marketing and accommodation. Providers will have to demonstrate compliance with the Code before being authorised to use the Mark. The Mark will be used both as a driver of quality within institutions and as a marketing tool to underpin the promotional activities of Enterprise Ireland in seeking to attract international learners to Ireland. In addition, the Mark will be used for immigration purposes. From 2016 it will become a requirement that providers wishing to recruit students from outside the EEA have authorisation to use the Mark. Providers authorised to use the Mark will also be subject to ongoing monitoring and review.

State Examinations

140. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a request for assistive technology in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6160/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. The State Examinations Commission operates a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate examinations. Applications for such accommodations are submitted by schools on behalf of their students. Full details of the scheme are available for downloading from their website: www.examinations.ie/candidates/reasonableaccommodations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

School Closures

141. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she or her Department have legal grounds to prevent a school closure or amalgamation; and the legal provision in which this is contained. [6169/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the Education Act (1998) provides for a general statutory framework for the administration of the education system at first and second level. Individual institutions in the education sector have varying degrees of autonomy according to their status and statutory provisions.

The Act also provides for the right of schools to manage their own affairs in accordance with the Act and any charters, deeds, articles of management or other such instruments relating to their establishment or operation. In accordance with Sections 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the Act, the Minister may designate a school or a proposed school on request by a patron or patrons to be a school recognised for purposes of the Act.

An amalgamation proposed by a Patron(s) of two or more schools involves the closure of the existing schools and the establishment of a new school. Accordingly, the recognition of the new school concerned for purposes of the Act is subject to the approval of the Minister. However where a Patron of a school advises the Department that it is no longer in a position to continue to operate a recognised school, the position is that such a decision to close the school concerned is a matter ultimately for the Patron.

Schools Amalgamation

142. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide, in tabular form, details of the schools which have amalgamated or closed during each year since 2010, including names, locations, school patrons, the number of pupils in each school, and the schools which amalgamated together. [6170/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and will be forwarded to him shortly.

Education Policy

143. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way her Department defines rural schools. [6171/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department does not have a specific definition of a rural school. Rural areas differ in terms of their geography and population density and schools vary in terms of their enrolment size.

Education Policy

144. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Depart-

ment has a definition for strategically important small schools; and if so, the number there are within the State. [6172/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department does not define small schools in terms of strategic importance. Every school, small and large, may be regarded by the community it serves as being of strategic importance to that community.

Teachers’ Remuneration

145. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the status of an application for a retirement pension and lump sum, on grounds of permanent infirmity, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [6173/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): An application for retirement on grounds of permanent infirmity has been received from the person to whom the Deputy refers. The statutory basis for Ill Health Retirement pension benefit for members of the Teachers’ Superannuation Schemes in Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools is contained in the Secondary, Community and Comprehensive School Teachers Pension Scheme 2009 and the Primary School Teachers Pension Scheme 2009 as appropriate.

The application is being processed in accordance with the relevant pension scheme.

Bullying in Schools

146. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the details of in-service training for teachers on combatting bullying in schools. [6177/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Following the publication of the “Action Plan on Bullying” in January 2013 a collaborative process involving the teacher support services under the remit of my Department undertook a review of the existing provision. Subsequently a three phased approach was put in place to provide a comprehensive programme of support for teachers in primary and post primary schools in the area of anti-bullying. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) took a lead role in this collaboration. This complied with the second recommendation of the Anti Bullying Working Group calling for a review of existing provision and putting in place a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development (CPD) to support schools in this area.

The subsequent publication of my Department’s “Anti Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools” in September 2013 further informed the programme of CPD.

Phase 1 concentrated on the development of policies and procedures and was completed in the 2013/2014 school year. It involved the design of a webcast on policies and procedures made available to all schools, the development of a policy template and a toolkit resource for schools.

Phase 2 was a follow on which included local workshops and working with pilot schools with a view to harnessing good practice and in school support was provided where necessary.

Phase 3 concentrated on raising awareness, prevention and intervention strategies. National seminars have been designed and delivered along with a suite of website materials, with follow up school support available where appropriate.

Bullying in Schools

147. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the idea of developing an all-Ireland anti-bullying strategy for schools. [6178/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy may be aware, the topic of child protection and e-safety, including measures to combat cyber-bullying were discussed at the most recent Plenary meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council.

This topic will be discussed at a future meeting of the Council and the potential for future North-South cooperation in this area will be part of those discussions. The suggestion of an all-Ireland anti-bullying strategy for schools may be considered in that context.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

148. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a Student Universal Support Ireland grant was refused in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6188/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

Schools Building Projects Administration

149. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the proposed extension to a school (details supplied) in County Cork will be advertised for tender to interested contractors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6213/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b - Detailed Design.

The pre-qualification shortlisting, commencing with advertisement on the Governments e-tenders website, for suitably qualified contractors has been completed. It is anticipated that the Design Team will shortly be authorised to issue tender documents to the selected contractors.

Disadvantaged Status

150. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reviews or

other considerations that have been provided to restoring delivery of equality of opportunity status to a school (details supplied) by her, or her predecessors, as such status was lost in 2005, and considering all other schools in its vicinity in the Erris area have this status, qualifying due to reasons of disadvantage, which also pertain to this school; the reason there appears to be no urgency in addressing this ongoing discrimination being experienced by the pupils of this school, notwithstanding numerous requests; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6215/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, an extensive identification process to select schools for inclusion in DEIS was conducted in 2005. In spite of reminders, a completed survey form was not received at that time from the school referred to by the Deputy and therefore it could not be assessed for participation in DEIS. Further, an appeal mechanism was put in place in 2006 to address the concerns of schools that did not qualify for inclusion in DEIS but regarded themselves as having a level of disadvantage which was of a scale sufficient to warrant their inclusion in the programme. The school referred to by the Deputy did not apply for an appeal of their DEIS ranking.

Many representations have been made to my Department and to my predecessors, by and on behalf of this school, seeking its inclusion in DEIS. These representations were unsuccessful. It should be noted that none of the existing schools in the country, which were unsuccessful in the initial identification and subsequent review processes, were ever admitted into the DEIS programme.

The DEIS Programme is the subject of ongoing evaluation to ensure successful implementation and the use of the best possible approaches to measuring progress and outcomes at both local and national level. An overall report on the learning from DEIS is also being prepared by the Economic and Social Research Institute which will draw together the main findings of research to date and provide advice to inform future policy to combat educational disadvantage, including DEIS.

Higher Education Institutions

151. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the report by the expert group on future options for funding higher education (details supplied) is expected to present its final report to her; the main funding proposals that the expert group has presented to her in their interim report; the future funding options being considered by her Department for increasing the long-term sustainability of the higher education sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6242/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): An Expert Group is currently examining future funding options for higher education. The objective is to identify a range of approaches that, combined, will achieve a sustainable funding base to address the continual expansion of the sector while protecting the quality of education.

I understand that the Group intends to undertake a series of stakeholder consultations during the course of its work. As an interim report, the Group published a discussion paper on the role, value and scale of higher education last month and this is informing the first set of consultations. The paper is available on my Department’s website at <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education>.

I expect to receive the Group’s report before the end of 2015.

School Enrolments Data

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools in the State with less than 500; between 501 and 600, 601 and 700, 701 and 800, 801 and 900, 901 and 1,000, and more than 1,000 pupils enrolled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6267/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The number of pupils enrolled in individual schools is provided in the National School Annual Census. Results from the census for the current school year (2014/2015) are being finalised at present. A list of all schools and their enrolment numbers for 2013/14 are available on my Department’s website at the following link <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/>.

School Enrolments Data

153. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of post-primary schools in the State with less than 500; between 501 and 600, 601 and 700, 701 and 800, 801 and 900, 901 and 1,000, and more than 1,000 pupils enrolled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6268/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Results for the current school year (2014/2015) are being finalised at present. A list of all schools and their enrolment numbers for 2013/14 are available on my Department’s website at the following link <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/>.

Pupil Data Collection

154. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied that the collection of data concerning primary school children for the primary online database is legally permissible; the way schools have gathered and processed sensitive personal data, as defined under the Data Protection Acts 1988 - 2003; the way this has been done in a manner consistent with statutory obligations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6275/15]

155. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way it is legally permissible for schools to gather and process the personal data of primary school children for a purpose other than the purpose for which the data has been collected; if she will categorically list the purposes for which data is being collected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6276/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 and 155 together.

The legal basis for sharing the pupil data between schools and the Department is as laid out in Section 28 of the Education Welfare Act, which provides for the sharing of data for the purposes outlined in the act.

(1) The data controller of a prescribed body may supply personal data kept by him or her, or information extracted from such data, to the data controller of another prescribed body if he or she is satisfied that it will be used for a relevant purpose only.

(2) The data controller of a prescribed body may, for a relevant purpose only, keep and use personal data supplied to him or her under this section.

(3) In this section—“data controller” and “personal data” have the meanings assigned to them by the Data Protection Act, 1988;

“prescribed body” means a body prescribed by the Minister;

“relevant purpose” means the purpose of—

(a) recording a person’s educational or training history or monitoring his or her educational or training progress in order to ascertain how best he or she may be assisted in availing of educational or training opportunities or in developing his or her full educational potential, or

(b) carrying out research into—

(i) the extent to which persons in receipt of, or who have received, a certain minimum education present for examinations to which Part VIII of the Act of 1998 applies, and the performance in such examinations of persons who so present,

(ii) the extent to which persons who have received a certain minimum education participate further in programmes of education, training or instruction, or

(iii) the general effectiveness of educational or training programmes.

The primary purpose of POD will be to monitor the education progress of primary pupils (in DES aided schools), throughout the primary system and onwards to post primary level and to help them develop their full educational potential. Once up and running other secondary purposes of POD will include becoming the basis for the allocation of teachers and capitation grants. Aggregated POD data will also be used for the production and publication of primary level statistics.

Pupil Data Collection

156. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will confirm that capitation grants and staffing resources are linked to the provision by parents of personal information regarding their children to schools for the primary online database; that there is an inherent coercion in this, in that schools feel obliged to gather and process this information, for fear of losing funding; if this places the schools in an invidious position considering their statutory obligations, as data controllers, under the provisions of the Data Protection Acts 1088-2003; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6277/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): From the 2016/2017 academic year, it is intended that teacher allocations and capitation grants will be made on the basis of POD data, and the previous basis for allocations, the National Annual School Census will cease operation from that point. The Department will endeavour to work with schools and parents to help avoid the loss of funding or resources. However there is no mechanism for separate payment and allocation to schools for pupils that are not on POD, and from a practical point of view it is difficult to see how such a system could work in practice.

Under Section 12 of the Education Act 1998, the Minister of Education shall determine and publish the criteria in each school year by which funding shall be provided to schools in the following academic year. Over 3 billion euro of taxpayers money is spent annually on funding our primary school system. The vast majority of this funding is allocated to schools on the basis

of reported pupil numbers. It is more than prudent from an audit and financial accountability point of view that we validate the data underlying these payments and ensure that payment is made only once in relation to each pupil.

Schools Data

157. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views that the creation of the primary online database without the protection of the provisions of the Statistics Act 1996 is an appropriate method of gathering and processing the personal data of primary school children. [6278/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The statistics Act 1993 Under this Act “Information collected may be used only for statistical purposes, and no details that might be related to an identifiable person or business undertaking may be divulged to any other government department or body.” The primary purpose of POD will be to monitor the education progress of primary pupils (in DES aided schools), throughout the primary system and onwards to post primary level and to help them develop their full educational potential. Once up and running other secondary purposes of POD will include becoming the basis for the allocation of teachers and capitation grants. Aggregated POD data will also be used for the production and publication of primary level statistics. It therefore is not possible to develop the Primary Online Database under this legislation.

Pupil Data Collection

158. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that her Department has instructed schools to make a copy of the personal data collected and processed for the purposes of populating the primary online database; to store and process it on site; the way such actions could possibly meet the security requirements as mandated by data protection legislation, and the way she has satisfied herself of this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6279/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Department takes the protection of pupil’s data very seriously. The Primary Online Database (POD) may only be accessed through password-controlled accounts. POD application roles have been developed which limit school staff to viewing and maintaining their own pupil records. Only the school that the pupil attends and a small number of Department staff will have access to an account. Access within the Department to POD data is limited to the POD team which is currently less than 15 people. Pupil data is stored securely in the Department’s database which is hosted on the Department’s own servers in the Revenue Commissioners Data Centre. Access to the servers is protected by both Revenue and Government Networks firewalls. No agency or other Government Department, including the Revenue Commissioners, have access to the Primary Online Database.

Teachers Conciliation Council

159. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Teachers Conciliation Council deliberations on a subject matter (details supplied); when a recommendation on this issue can be anticipated; if the recommendation is binding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6312/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Teachers Conciliation Council is the recognised forum for dealing with matters relating to pay and conditions of service of teachers. The parties to the forum include representatives of the managerial authorities of schools, the teacher unions, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

As the proceedings of the Conciliation Council are confidential it would not be appropriate for me to make any comment at this time.

Schools Building Projects Administration

160. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposed location of a new primary school in Drumcondra-Marino, Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6313/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): On Thursday the 5th of February last I announced that seven new primary schools are to be established in the next two years. One of the new schools to be established in 2016, is in the Drumcondra/Marino area. A patronage determination process for this school will be run later this year.

This school is being established to cater for a defined feeder area. The optimum location for the school will be decided upon on this basis, subject to site availability. Due to sensitivities generally associated with land acquisitions, it is not possible to provide further information at this time.

Emergency Works Scheme

161. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason her Department has not as yet provided funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare to address serious problems with a series of staircases where irregularities have been noted by an accident investigator and by a health and safety professional acting on behalf of the board of management; if she will accept liability in respect of any accident which occurs on these staircases arising out of the failure to date to provide the requisite funding to rectify the situation; if she will review the overall project at this school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6315/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding under my Department’s Emergency Works Scheme has recently been approved for the school in question with a view to having the works carried out during the summer holidays for health and safety reasons.

Pupil Data Collection

162. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department has been cognisant of concerns arising from the Data Protection Commissioner as far back as 2010 over the collection of personal information regarding students (details supplied); if she will provide a detailed copy of the legal opinion which her Department has utilised to justify the present primary online database scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6322/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2010 following discussions between my Department and the Data Protection Commissioner my Department issued circular 47/2010 which is a Fair Processing Notice to explain how the personal data of students enrolled at post primary schools as at 30th September and which is returned by post-primary schools to the Department of Education and Skills each year, is processed fairly and in compliance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2003. Similarly my Department issued circular 17/2014 which is a Fair Processing notice in relation to the Primary Online Database. A copy of both circulars are available on my Department’s website.

My Department is in ongoing contact with the Data Protection Commissioners Office in relation to the Primary Online Database. The Department has previously met with and received advice from the Data Protection Commissioners Office in this regard and no issues of concern were raised at that time. My Department will continue to closely consult with and seek the advice of the Commissioner’s office.

Individualised databases are now in place covering pre-primary, post-primary, PLC and third level education - the lack of individualised information on primary school pupils presents a very significant data gap for monitoring the progress of learners throughout the education system.

State Examinations

163. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will ensure that priority will be provided, when appointing examination supervisors for the State examinations, to recently qualified teachers, who are in non-permanent or short-hours teaching contracts, or who depend mainly on substitute work; if she will address the correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6326/15]

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.

Teaching Qualifications

164. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry city and guilds qualification in hairdressing should be listed on her Department’s circular CL47/00 (details supplied) and considered as an equivalent of the Department of Education senior trade certificate in hairdressing in view of the educational and trade relations between the UK and Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6327/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This query relates to recognition as a teacher. The Teaching Council, under the Teaching Council Act 2001, is the regulator and professional standards body for the teaching profession. It sets the conditions for admission to the register of teachers, including in relation to qualifications requirements. It is also a function of the Council to consider applications for registration as a teacher, including applications on the basis of qualifications awarded in another EU State. As this is an operational matter for the Teaching Council I am referring the correspondence to the Council for attention

as appropriate.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

165. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on resource hours for children with Down's syndrome and the Down's Syndrome (Equality of Access) Bill (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6333/15]

167. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if children with Down's syndrome will be allocated resource teaching hours in the new academic year as a matter of right; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6335/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 and 167 together.

The Deputy will be aware that the Equality of Access (Down's syndrome) Bill has been referred to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced yesterday that I intend to retain the current model for allocating resource and learning support teachers to schools for the coming school year, in order to ensure that sufficient time should be allowed for further consultation to take place with education stakeholders and in order to address a number of outstanding issues before the new model is implemented in schools.

I am aware that some parents, and organisations representing children with Down's syndrome, continue to have concerns that the existing system does not give them certainty as to the number of resource teaching hours that may be allocated to their child under the General Allocation Model, as these hours are distributed locally by schools.

I intend to meet with Down's Syndrome Ireland in the coming weeks in order to discuss the concerns that they may have regarding this issue.

Postgraduate Enrolments

166. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a diploma in special education (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6334/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department currently funds a number of Post-Graduate Programmes of Continuing Professional Development for teachers involved in Learning Support and Special Education. These programmes are specifically designed to assist all schools and educational services in meeting the needs of students requiring learning support and the teaching of students with special educational needs. The 2015/2016 programmes are governed by the following Department Circular Letters 0001/2015, 0002/2015 and 0003/2015 which are available at <http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/>.

Boards of Management are obliged to recruit and employ fully recognised and probated primary teachers for Learning Support and Resource Teaching positions in primary schools. The deployment of teaching staff in the school is, in the first instance, a matter for the school management authorities.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a maintenance grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6340/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which it will be permissible for local authorities to meet the ever increasing responsibility of the housing needs of families who find themselves homeless due to increased rent levels or re-possession/sale of the property; if he is satisfied that adequate provision will be made to meet this requirement, in view of the likelihood of a dramatically increased demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6216/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Social housing is a key priority for the Government, evidenced by the significant funding announced in Budget 2015 and the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November, 2014. The Strategy 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. The strategy targets the provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme. This level of ambition will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand. In committing to provide these 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.

Over the 6 years of the strategy, I anticipate that the 35,000 units will be delivered as follows: some 22,300 units to be built and acquired utilising both current and capital monies; 11,000 units to be leased; and 2,300 units to be supplied through the refurbishment and bringing back into use vacant local authority stock.

The process of setting delivery targets on a local authority by local authority basis has commenced and the allocation of funding to local authorities, in the context of the increased funding

now available, will be based on the targets that are set and the plans of individual authorities to deliver on those targets.

In relation to homeless households, on 27 January, I issued a Ministerial Direction to each of the four Dublin local authorities and to each of the housing authorities in Galway, Cork, Limerick and Waterford, on prioritising homeless households and other vulnerable groups for housing in their respective areas. In the case of the Dublin authorities, this action will see at least 50% of the dwellings available for allocation, over the six-month period from 27 January to 26 July 2015, to such households that had qualified for social housing support on or before 1 December 2014. In the case of the other authorities, at least 30% of available dwellings must be so allocated. I expect that this intervention will deliver at least 500 homes for homeless households in the Dublin region and a similar amount for the other authorities combined.

Tribunals of Inquiry Reports

170. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the names of the persons, in relation to the 24 orders for reduced costs for persons on foot of findings of non-cooperation, made as part of a separate process, subsequent to the publication of the Final Report of The Mahon Tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6174/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments (the Mahon Tribunal) was established in October 1997 and published its Final Report in March 2012. The work of the Tribunal at present is largely focused on the settlement of the remainder of third-party and court costs incurred during the work of the Tribunal. It is anticipated that the day-to-day operations of the Tribunal will be completed during 2015. In relation to costs applications arising from the publication of the Tribunal's Final Report in March 2012, the Tribunal has to date reduced the cost orders of twenty one parties on the basis that they have not fully co-operated with the Tribunal in its inquiries. I am advised by the Tribunal that the following are the twenty one parties concerned:

1. Paddy Reilly
2. Bertie Ahern
3. David McKenna
4. John Kennedy
5. Colm McGrath
6. Michael Wall
7. Pdraig Flynn
8. Desmond Maguire
9. Joe Burke
10. Sean Gilbride (deceased)
11. John O'Halloran
12. Liam Cosgrave

13. Don Lydon
14. Richard Lynn
15. G.V.Wright
16. Riga Limited
17. Owen O’Callaghan
18. Edward Sweeney
19. Dorothy Flynn
20. Tim Collins
21. Frank Dunlop

Three further parties are still involved in this legal costs submission making process and a final decision on whether reduced cost orders will apply in these cases has not yet been made by the Tribunal.

Seniors Alert Scheme

171. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government regarding the proposed changes of the senior alert scheme, if consultation with any community groups and stakeholder has taken place; if there are plans to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6198/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department manages the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities by providing grant assistance towards the purchase and installation of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department. My Department undertook to consider new approaches to the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2014 and arising from this, it was decided that the scheme be managed by Pobal, given that organisation’s significant experience delivering programmes on behalf of Government.

Pobal’s management and administrative services for the Scheme includes an invitation to tender for the supply and installation of personal monitored alarms, which was publicly advertised on eTenders on 20 October 2014. The tender process, which is being led by Pobal, is almost complete. Following on from this, a panel of regional suppliers will be contracted to provide the equipment within specific regional areas. As the market for the equipment is well established, it was neither necessary nor appropriate to engage in consultations with the market on the matter prior to the tender process.

This new approach will reduce the administrative burden for the many hundreds of community and voluntary groups registered under the Scheme, who provide an excellent service for the elderly. It will enable the groups to concentrate on the main purpose of the Scheme, namely to support and interact with the elderly in the local community.

Local Authority Staff

172. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if local authorities can include a clause in employee contracts forbidding them contacting local elected representatives regarding grievances connected to their employment or work. [6203/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, local authority employee contracts are a matter for the Chief Executives.

Water Charges Administration

173. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his or his Department's attention has been drawn to a new connection fee for water set down by Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6208/15]

174. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the connection fee for water, by county, prior to 1 January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6209/15]

175. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the connection fee for water in 2015, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6210/15]

176. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if or when his or his Department's attention was drawn to changes to the connection fee for water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6211/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 to 176, inclusive, together.

With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water 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.

In its decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan, published in October 2014, the CER stated that, until it made a decision on Irish Water's new connection charges, Irish Water should continue to apply rates equivalent to the water and wastewater related development levies which were applied by the local authorities at 31 December 2013. The CER intends to hold a public consultation on a new connection charging policy for customers of Irish Water. The relevant charges are available from Irish Water.

If the Deputy has individual queries about the levy charged in relation to a particular county, Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Authority Charges Application

177. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he or his Department was informed of changes to the developmental charges at local authority level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6212/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The charging of development contributions is intended to allow local authorities to recoup some of the costs to public funds of servicing land for private development. Without such contributions, this servicing would not proceed or the full cost would have to be borne by the taxpayer. Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, income from development levies must be ring-fenced to pay for facilities servicing new development, for example, for roads, footpaths, public lighting and open spaces.

Development contributions are levied by planning authorities on the basis of a development contribution scheme approved by the elected members which sets out how contributions are to be applied in their respective functional areas. The level of contribution, and the types of development to which development contributions should apply, is therefore determined at local authority level in accordance with the powers vested in elected members in this connection.

My Department issued statutory guidelines on development contributions to all planning authorities in January 2013. These guidelines emphasise the importance of promoting development through the application, where feasible, of reduced development contributions to facilitate development and promote economic activity and job creation in local areas. Further to the 2013 guidelines, 18 of the 31 local authorities have responded positively by adopting revised development contribution schemes - encompassing reduced charges – which have been notified to my Department subsequent to their adoption.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

178. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on funding for social housing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6250/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Social housing is a key priority for the Government, evidenced by the additional €2.2 billion in funding announced for social housing in Budget 2015 and the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November, 2014. The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand. In committing to provide these 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 process of setting delivery targets on a local authority by local authority basis has commenced and the allocation of funding to local authorities, in the context of the increased funding now available, will be based on the **targets** that are set and the plans of individual authorities to deliver on those **targets**.

While I have no proposals to introduce schemes along the lines referred to by the Deputy, it is open to housing authorities, in the context of implementing the Social Housing Strategy

2020, to explore the potential of such schemes to meet differing housing needs, having regard to local circumstances.

Water Charges Administration

179. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the way he envisages landlords are going to collect Irish Water payments from tenants; the rights and responsibilities of the tenants in this regard; his views that it is fair for some landlords to increase tenants deposits in order to cover expected charges; the way he plans to dissuade landlords from doing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6258/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 589 of 10 February 2015 which sets out the current position in the matter.

Foreshore Licence Conditions

180. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason a foreshore licence was not issued to complete the main drainage scheme in Youghal, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6318/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Under the provisions of Section 13A(1) of the Foreshore Act 1933 a request for supplementary information issued to Irish Water on 18 December 2014. My Department expects the supplementary information to be submitted shortly. Depending on the specific additional information provided, the consultation period of this application may need to be extended. Following completion of the consultation phase, the Marine Licence Vetting Committee (MLVC) who advise on foreshore consent applications will then finalise its report and recommendations prior to the application being submitted for my determination.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department is treating this application as a priority case.

Economic Data

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 1060 of 29 January 2015, if the information referred to as being available on the secondary education quality improvement website and the European Commission Oil Bulletin is also retained by the economic sector in his Department; if so, the extent to which he will make this available, through reply, to the relevant parliamentary question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6260/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): My Department has an Economic Unit which is responsible for the provision of economic analysis across the Department. It retains and has access to all relevant data, including energy data, required for that purpose. Where information requests are made by way of Parliamentary Question or otherwise and where the information sought is publically available, the policy and practise of Departments is to refer to the source of information in reply.

Broadband Service Provision

182. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the tender for the contract to provide fibre broadband to 700,000 rural homes and businesses, with a minimum speed of 30 megabits per second, irrespective of the location of the premises will be awarded; the number of companies that have tendered for this contract, together with their names; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6316/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided. The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades. Approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

On the 24 November last, a public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 was launched. The map can be accessed at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas on the map marked Blue will all have access to high speed broadband services of at least 30mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State. It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will also be delivered through the Government's intervention.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises / home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention. It also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands in every county in Ireland.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure, intervention cost and likely market impact.

My Department has engaged external advisors to provide legal, economic, technical and financial advice on the various aspects of the Plan over the next two years. The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015. The Intervention Strategy will be notified to the European Commission for State Aid clearance.

Following the public consultation, a detailed procurement process will be undertaken towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016. It will then be incrementally rolled out over a period of three to five years.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

National Roads Authority Projects

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he

expects to be in a position to approve the capital project in respect of the M7 Naas to Newbridge bypass upgrade scheme incorporating Newhall interchange-Sallins bypass-M7 Osberstown interchange within the confines of expenditure guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6220/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I outlined to the Deputy in my response to PQ 4347/15 of 3 February 2015, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding regarding the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, such as the Naas Bypass widening, is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. The assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter for the NRA within its capital budget and in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Owing to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure in recent years. The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work that needs to be done to maintain existing road infrastructure or address demands for new road improvement projects. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €730 million for the national, regional and local road network. Unfortunately, the current financial realities are such that the budgets proposed for my Department for 2016 and 2017 indicate that capital funding will continue to be very tight, and my ability to progress new projects and PPPs is limited.

I acknowledge it is important to restore over time capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that infrastructure is maintained but, as of now, I am not in a position to give a commitment in regard to funding of the projects in question, although I acknowledge their national and local importance.

Aviation Policy

184. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the draft National Aviation Policy in view of the anticipated International Airlines Group bid for Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6185/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am currently in the process of finalising a National Aviation Policy and I intend to publish it in the near future. The National Aviation Policy will address all aspects of aviation policy from safety, security and economic regulation of the industry to airlines and airports policy. Regarding Aer Lingus, no formal offer has yet been made by IAG and both companies have indicated that there can be no certainty that a formal offer will be made. Discussions are ongoing.

Cycling Facilities Provision

185. **Deputy Michael Conaghan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of money his Department has allocated for the development of cycle ways in 2015; the amount of funding that will be allocated to the Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6191/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department awarded €6.3m under the National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016 for the delivery of 3 Greenway projects in Kerry, Galway and Waterford. €1,392,868 is currently profiled across the 3 projects for expenditure in 2015, though this figure may change during the year.

A further 11 cycleway/greenway projects shared in funding from the €200m Government Stimulus Package 2014 for infrastructural development, €10m of which was earmarked for the development of greenways. Projects funded under this package are due for completion in 2015. €1.3m was expended in 2014 with the remainder (€8.7m) to be drawn down in 2015.

Details of the above projects can be viewed on www.smartertravel.ie.

The National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with Dublin City Council is responsible for the delivery of cycling infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area. I have forwarded your request to the NTA for direct response to you regarding this element of your question. If you have not received a response within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Driver Licences

186. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding eyesight tests for driving licences (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6192/15]

187. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if employers have any legal requirement to ensure that their employees are not driving with significantly impaired vision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6193/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 and 187 together.

The operation of the driver licensing service, including the application of fitness to drive criteria, is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore forwarded 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.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

188. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will disclose reports that his Department may have on whether deficient eyesight is a contributing factor in road accidents here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6194/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The function of investigating road traffic collisions rests with An Garda Síochána. The Road Safety Authority (RSA), which receives data from An Garda Síochána, publishes reports on statistics relating to collisions, which may be consulted on the RSA website. I have forwarded the Deputy's Question to the RSA for direct reply and would ask him to contact my office if he has not received a response within 10 working days.

Local Authority Services

189. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for a further community involvement scheme in 2015 for public roads around the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6207/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The pilot Community Involvement Scheme has been completed and it has been decided that there will be no separate allocation under this grant category in 2015. Instead the scheme will revert back to allowing local authorities to set aside 7.5% of their Restoration Improvement (RI) and Restoration Maintenance (RM) grants for CIS schemes if they so wish. Local authorities were notified of the above in Circular RW 2/2015 which issued to local authorities on 3 February 2015.

Departmental Funding

190. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the specific purpose of the funding he has allocated towards a road project (details supplied) in County Cork in 2015; if he will confirm the funding his Department has thus far paid out in respect of the project; the estimated cost of constructing the road; when the construction of the road will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6281/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department gave a commitment in 2010 to contribute a maximum of €3.7 million of the estimated land acquisition costs of €7.4 million related to the proposed Carrigaline Western Relief Road or 50% of the cost, whichever is the lesser, and this commitment is being honoured.

To date €2.05 million has been paid to Cork County Council in respect of the Carrigaline Western Relief Road. An allocation of €1.65 million is being given this year which represents the balance of the outstanding commitment.

Due to the constrained budget available to my Department for roads, it has been necessary to curtail the Strategic Roads Grants Scheme for the moment. There is, therefore, no commitment in place to provide grant funding towards the cost of construction for this project.

It is important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement the resources of Councils. It is, therefore, open to Cork County Council to fund this project from its own resources.

Departmental Schemes

191. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the overall and county take-up of the new rural hackney scheme; if more will be done to encourage and easily facilitate greater take-up of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6283/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle industry, including the licensing of local area hackneys, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.