

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 8, inclusive, answered orally.

Closed Circuit Television Systems

9. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider putting in place funding for the provision and upgrading of closed-circuit television systems, with dedicated monitoring staff, to assist with policing for towns and villages throughout the country, which have experienced a reduction in Garda numbers and-or where Garda stations have closed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6967/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access, such as town centres, fall into two distinct categories: Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems.

Garda CCTV systems are planned and implemented on the basis of An Garda Síochána's identified operational needs and priorities. Accordingly, decisions in relation to the introduction or extension of such systems are a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I am advised by the Garda authorities that current Garda CCTV arrangements are kept under ongoing review in the context of An Garda Síochána's operational requirements.

As regards community-based CCTV, a scheme was launched in 2005 which provided financial assistance to qualifying local organisations towards meeting the capital costs associated with the establishment of a local community CCTV system. Two rounds of funding were advertised under that Scheme, most recently in 2007. All of the available funding provided under the previous two rounds was fully allocated. There are currently no plans to further extend the Scheme, but of course the issue will be kept under review in the context of the availability of funding and competing priorities.

The Deputy will be aware that the decision to close a number of Garda stations in 2013 was the result of a comprehensive operational assessment carried out by the Garda Commissioner, the objective of which was to ensure that Garda resources are used in the best and most efficient way possible. In particular, freeing up Gardaí from desk duties has increased the number of Gardaí available for frontline policing and confronting crime. More generally, in relation to Garda numbers, the Deputy will be aware that for the first time since May 2009 there are now 300 Garda recruits in training in Templemore.

Questions Nos. 10 and 11 answered orally.

Stardust Fire

12. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider a new inquiry into the Stardust tragedy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6968/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, following a long campaign on the part of the victims, Mr. Paul Coffey SC was appointed in 2008 by the then Government, with the agreement of the Victims Committee, to review the case made by the Committee for a new inquiry into the fire. His report was published in January 2009. He concluded that the original Tribunal finding of arson was a hypothetical one only and that no one present on the night can be held responsible. He further concluded that in the absence of any identified evidence as to the cause of the fire, the most another inquiry could achieve would be another set of hypothetical findings, which would not be in the public interest. The then Government accepted Mr. Coffey's findings and motions were passed in both Houses of the Oireachtas endorsing his conclusions and expressing sympathy with the families.

I accept, of course, that some of the victims and their relatives of this dreadful tragedy do not accept the conclusions of the Independent Examination, during which persons were free to make their case to Mr. Coffey. Indeed the concerns of the Stardust Committee in this regard were outlined to me when I met with representatives of the Committee last July. This meeting provided an opportunity for me to hear their concerns at first hand. At that meeting they set out, in some detail, their concerns in relation to the Inquiries into this matter that have been undertaken previously and some related financial issues that have arisen.

Since that meeting my Department has engaged in extensive communications with representatives of the Committee in relation to matters raised by them and these communications are ongoing.

I remain open to considering any material that the Committee or their representatives wish me to consider in this regard and my Department has, in its communications, made that clear. In saying this I should caution against raising unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved or appearing to suggest that the outcome of the Coffey examination can be set aside, simply on the basis that his conclusions are not accepted by some.

I wish also to inform the Deputy that allegations raised by the Stardust Relatives' and Victims Committee and their representatives in relation to certain matters are the subject of an ongoing investigation by An Garda Síochána. I am informed, by the Garda Commissioner, that this is a complex investigation and, you will understand, I cannot do anything that might cut across this investigation.

Garda Resources

13. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to increase recruitment of new gardaí to the Garda Síochána; if she will modernise the use of new technology in the Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6969/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The strength of the Garda Síochána on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 12,799. There were also 1,124 Garda Reserve members, with a further 48 in training. In addition, there were over 2,000 Garda civilian staff.

The Garda Síochána provides a vital public service, protecting the public from crime and safeguarding the security of the State. As with any such a service, there must be a twin-track approach of investment and reform. In that regard, the Deputy will be aware of the significant programme of Garda reform already under way.

Side by side with the reform process, I was very pleased my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform agreed to the resumption of Garda recruitment. Last September, 100 new Garda recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore, the first intake of Garda recruits since May 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 recruits in December and a third intake of 100 this month. This means that there are now 300 Garda students in training. I remain in discussion with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the timing of future intakes of Garda recruits.

In addition to investing in recruitment, I am committed to seeing that the Garda ICT infrastructure gets the investment it needs to enable the Garda Síochána to deliver an optimum policing service. The recent report of the Garda Inspectorate on Crime Investigation highlighted the importance of this. That is why I have established, in co-operation with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, a steering group to oversee the drawing up a Garda ICT strategy, which will identify the medium and longer term Garda ICT requirements, as well as more immediate priorities. The steering group, which has started work, is chaired by Josephine Feehily, the chairperson-designate of the Policing authority, and includes representatives from the Garda Síochána, the Garda Inspectorate, my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, as well as the Government's Chief Information Officer. This work is being taken forward with urgency, and will provide a clear basis for planned and sustained investment in Garda ICT.

Equality Issues

14. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the public refusal by landlords to accept tenants in receipt of rent allowance is a discriminatory act under the Equal Status Acts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6971/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): The Equal Status Acts 2000-2012 outlaws discrimination in the provision of goods and services on nine specified grounds. These grounds do not include income source.

While I do from time to time receive correspondence relating to this matter and while the general issues so raised may come to inform policy and legislative change, I am sure the Deputy will appreciate it would not be appropriate for me, as Minister of State, to provide an interpretation of the law.

However, I can confirm at this point in time, that the Government has decided, in principle, to bring forward amendments to the Equal Status Acts to prohibit discrimination in relation to residential tenants, or prospective tenants on the basis that they are assisted with their rent through rent supplement or social welfare payments.

Legislative amendments in this regard are being prepared by my Department in consultation with the relevant other Departments. These are expected to be ready soon and once approved by Government, I intend to publish them as amendments to the Employment Equality (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill. Committee Stage of that Private Member's Bill will resume in the Seanad later in this parliamentary term with a view to its early enactment.

Legislative Programme

15. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the mediation Bill 2012 will be introduced in Dáil Éireann. [6983/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The objective of the Mediation Bill, which is fully in line with the commitment given in the Programme for Government, is to promote mediation as a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings thereby reducing legal costs, speeding up the resolution of disputes and relieving the stress involved in court proceedings.

The Bill will provide that a solicitor or barrister advising or acting for a client must, prior to the commencement of any civil proceedings, including family law proceedings, provide the client with information about mediation as an alternative means of resolving disputes, details of bodies or individuals providing mediation services and an estimate of the costs likely to arise in the event of legal proceedings. It also provides that following commencement of any such proceedings, a court may on the application of a party, or of its own motion where it considers it appropriate, suspend proceedings in order to facilitate mediation.

The Government approved the General Scheme of the Bill in March 2012 and the Mediation Bill is being drafted in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. The Deputy will appreciate that the Government has a demanding schedule of urgent legislation at present and for that reason it is not possible to give a specific date for publication of the Bill at this stage. However, it is my intention to proceed quickly with enactment of the legislation following publication of the Bill later this year.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

16. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has given further consideration to requests by a person (details supplied) and that person's legal representatives for inclusion on the review panel into cases of Garda misconduct; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7115/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can confirm to the Deputy that the person to whom he refers is included amongst those whose complaints are under consideration by the panel of counsel appointed to operate the Independent Review Mechanism set up to consider allegations of Garda misconduct and inadequacy in the investigation of such allegations.

The review of each complaint will consist of an examination of the papers in the complaint by a counsel from the panel. Following the review of each complaint a recommendation will be made as to whether any further action is desirable and could practicably be taken.

I am aware of requests that the person concerned, her legal representatives and other third parties have made to have her complaints investigated by the Commission of Investigation recently established under Order No 38 of 2015 and being conducted by Mr Justice Kevin O'Higgins following the recommendations made in the Guerin Report.

Where counsel do recommend further investigations, I will be very strongly guided by that advice. Clearly, there are a number of possible options for further investigations, in particular by way of referral to GSOC, but any recommendation for referral of a case to a commission of investigation will be very carefully considered, including whether this could be achieved by

way of amending the terms of reference of an existing commission or the establishment of a separate commission.

I am clear that where further investigation is recommended by the review then that will occur. However I would also make the point that in many cases, counsel may recommend that no further action can reasonably be taken. This might be, for example, because a case has already been through due process even though the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome. The crucial point, however, is that every case will have been reviewed by independent counsel, who will have made an objective recommendation.

Garda Corruption

17. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied that the environment in An Garda Síochána is an appropriate one for whistleblowers; if she has formally discussed these matters in 2015 with the Garda Commissioner; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7106/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 came into operation on 15 July, 2014 as part of this Government's comprehensive approach to enhance the protection available to whistleblowers, including Garda whistleblowers. Section 19 of the Act inserted a new provision into the Garda Síochána Act 2005, which provides for the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) to be a prescribed person under the 2014 Act to investigate disclosures relating to the Garda Síochána, including disclosures from members of the Garda Síochána. The new provision also repealed the Garda Síochána (Confidential Reporting of Corruption or Malpractice) Regulations 2007. The Statutory Instrument (No. 339 of 2014) which prescribed GSOC as a body to receive protected disclosures was signed into law on 23 July, 2014.

Members of the Garda Síochána may now communicate their concerns to the Garda Commissioner (as their employer) or to GSOC (as a prescribed body) under the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 and are entitled to the protections provided by the Act.

I am satisfied that the legislative provisions now in place under the 2014 Act, including the protections afforded for whistleblowers, will prove to be an effective remedy for members who wish to report their concerns regarding potential wrongdoing.

As to the question relating to my discussions with the Garda Commissioner, the Deputy may be aware that I have regular discussions with the Commissioner across a wide range of issues that relate to our respective roles.

Garda Operations

18. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the policing of anti-water charges protests in the past month; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7110/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The statutory functions of An Garda Síochána include the preservation of peace and public order, protecting life and property and vindicating the human rights of individuals. Accordingly, Gardaí have attended routinely at water meter installations and protests where it has been necessary to perform these functions.

An Garda Síochána always endeavour as best they can to facilitate peaceful protests and demonstrations. This is clearly evidenced by the many peaceful demonstrations and protests that take place around the country on a variety of issues of public interest, including large demonstrations late last year with regard to water charges. These peaceful and dignified protests are in stark contrast to the other forms of protest against the installation of water meters where a small few have prevented workers from going about their lawful business through intimidation, obstruction and worse behaviour.

I am sure the House will agree that it is always unfortunate when a small number of individuals resort to means other than peaceful ones to express their views or to engage in protest. We have, unfortunately, seen examples of this in respect of some of the protest actions against water charges and the installation of water meters. In this context, the Gardaí are trained to defuse confrontation using a range of proportionate methods appropriate to the circumstances.

I have every confidence that this will continue to be the case.

Let me emphasise that there is also an obligation on the organisers of protest actions to ensure that they do not create situations which they cannot control. Such events can on occasion lead to the danger of breaches of public order. The role of An Garda Síochána in such instances is to ensure, insofar as it is possible, that this does not happen and that other members of the public may go about their lawful business. Indeed, the presence of An Garda Síochána is also essential to ensure the safety of protesters in such circumstances.

Of course, it is open to anyone to complain about the behaviour of an individual member of An Garda Síochána through the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) where they feel that such complaint is warranted. GSOC is an independent body which was set up to receive complaints made by members of the public concerning allegations of misconduct by members of the Garda Síochána. Any evidence to support these claims should also be brought to the attention of GSOC.

Garda Divisional Headquarters

19. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress in the establishment of a new Garda divisional headquarters in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7108/15]

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

In July 2012, the Government announced an economic stimulus package which included three major Garda construction projects, namely the development of new Divisional HQ Stations at Wexford, Galway and Kevin St, Dublin. Initially, these projects were to be financed by way of public private partnership (PPP), however the Office of Public Works (OPW) was subsequently requested to develop the new facilities by way of a traditional procurement process.

Included in Budget 2015 is a capital allocation of €42 million in 2015 for the provision of these three new Garda Divisional Headquarters.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the procurement process for the construction of

all three Divisional Headquarters is significantly advanced with work expected to commence on the Galway project in the coming months.

Legislative Measures

20. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to overhaul the Coroner Service's legislation currently in place in this State. [6982/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will know, the Coroners Bill 2007 provides for a comprehensive reform of the Coroners Act 1962 and of the existing coroner system, including the establishment of a new Coroner Service. It incorporates many of the recommendations made by the Coroners Review Group in 2000, and by the Coroners Rules Committee in 2003, as well as a detailed review of reforms to coronial systems in other common-law jurisdictions (particularly New Zealand and Northern Ireland).

The 2007 Bill needs review in the light of:

- the changed public finances;
- the increased emphasis on delivering leaner, better integrated and more customer-focused public services; and
- developing coroner practice and caselaw, particularly on the application to coroners' inquests of Art. 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

I can confirm to the Deputy that a review of the Coroners Bill 2007 has commenced, at my request, with a view to developing a plan for its progression.

As finalising the review is dependent on competing legislative priorities, I am not in a position, at present, to give a definitive indication on a timeframe for this project.

Garda Investigations

21. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has received a report from the Director of Public Prosecutions or her officials on the recent arrests in the Tal-laght area related to a protest in Jobstown, Dublin 24, in November 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7111/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of the arrests to which the Deputy refers.

These arrests took place in the context of an ongoing criminal investigation which is being carried out by An Garda Síochána at present. It would clearly be wrong of me to say anything which would interfere in any way with that investigation.

I am sure the House will appreciate that it is a matter for An Garda Síochána to investigate crime. It is exclusively a matter for An Garda Síochána to decide, in accordance with the law, who is to be arrested and detained as part of any given investigation. Equally, it is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide independently in accordance with the law whether persons are charged and it is a matter for the Courts to deal with persons who are facing charges.

Anybody who has a complaint about the manner in which they have been dealt with by An Garda Síochána can bring that complaint to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

which is entirely independent in the discharge of its functions.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

22. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of the increasing numbers of refugees drowning or being abandoned at sea while seeking entry into Europe, if she discussed the possibility of European Union governments, including this Government, agreeing to accept more refugees. [2134/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am acutely aware of the impact on ordinary lives resulting from the various conflicts around the world and that many people displaced by these conflicts have put their lives at risk by undertaking dangerous journeys by sea towards Europe.

Effectively addressing the implications of these global crises is one of the challenges facing the international community and these matters have been discussed at both Ministerial and Official level both here and in the EU.

Together with 25 other resettlement States worldwide, including 16 EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland and Switzerland, Ireland is working closely with the UNHCR to respond to the plight of the most vulnerable persons displaced by these conflicts.

Through the resettlement programme, and in co-operation with local agencies in the region, the UNHCR identifies the most vulnerable refugees and refers them to resettlement States, including Ireland, for consideration.

Since 2000, 1,185 vulnerable persons from 27 different countries, including Iraq and Syria, have been resettled in Ireland and 40 persons have been relocated from Malta. The refugees have been resettled in 21 different communities throughout Ireland.

Over the coming years, Ireland is committed to continuing to support the efforts of the UNHCR to respond to the plight of vulnerable refugees.

Resettlement is just one of a suite of responses to persons displaced by the Syrian conflict. In 2014, Ireland introduced a Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP). The SHAP offered naturalised Irish citizens of Syrian birth and Syrian nationals already legally resident in Ireland an opportunity to make an application for vulnerable close family members to join them in Ireland for up to two years under a sponsorship programme.

These are persons who are considered by their sponsoring family member present in Ireland to be most at risk. 114 beneficiaries have been granted admission under the programme. In addition, Syrians legally resident in Ireland, for example, students or persons on work permissions may apply for an extension of their permission to remain in the State while the crisis situation continues.

Of course, the opportunity to access Ireland's asylum procedures is open to any person who arrives at the frontiers of the State seeking protection or otherwise indicating an unwillingness to leave the State for fear of persecution. All applications for protection made in Ireland are processed in accordance with our international obligations and the granting of protection in Ireland is considered in accordance with a prescribed legal framework and exclusively on the merits of applications having regard to their subjective and objective elements. The protection system in Ireland is robust but fair and anybody who presents seeking protection and who is entitled to such protection will be granted it.

A total of 1,444 asylum applications were received in 2014 as compared with some 950 for 2013 equating to a 52% increase. This reverses the trend of recent years when application numbers were decreasing year on year. Applications have continued to trend upwards in 2015 with a further significant increase reported in January compared with the same period last year.

A total of 426 persons were declared to be refugees or persons eligible for subsidiary protection in 2014. This equates to a grant rate of 30%. Those granted protection were mainly from high risk countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Malawi.

Ireland has also made generous financial contributions (over 28 million euro) to countries in need through Development Aid at a time of severe financial constraints, and continues to provide support to those directly involved in humanitarian work in Syria and the wider region.

Same-sex Marriage

23. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will allow for the provision of a conscientious objection clause in order to safeguard the rights of persons, businesses and other institutions who may be compelled to participate in or provide services for the celebration of same-sex civil partnerships or same-sex marriage, in the event of the upcoming referendum on marriage equality being passed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6970/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will know, when the Government decided on 5 November 2013 that a referendum would be held on the question of enabling same-sex couples to marry, it reiterated its commitment that the freedom of religion of religious solemnisers would be guaranteed. My Department is engaged in the development of the Implementation Bill which will be brought forward if the referendum on the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution is passed by the people. That Bill will be designed to make the necessary adjustments in existing law, including marriage law, to ensure that the decision of the people is implemented. The issue of guaranteeing the freedom of religion of religious solemnisers will be addressed in that context.

I hope to be in a position to publish the General Scheme of the Implementation Bill in advance of the planned Second Stage debate on the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill 2015 so that there will be a clear indication as to the legislative changes that are intended to be brought forward if the referendum is approved by the people.

Garda Operations

24. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to assist children who are being intimidated out of their homes by criminal elements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2164/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy may be aware, An Garda Síochána have established a Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme and this programme is in operation in the area referred to. The programme is designed to respond to the needs of drug users and family members who are experiencing drug related intimidation as a result of financial debt which they may have incurred. In this regard, a Garda Inspector has been appointed to oversee the programme in the area and can provide confidential contact details for any member of the public seeking advice and support. Gardaí also maintain strong links to facilitate communication at community level, in particular through liaison with

the National Family Support Network, which supports families affected by substance abuse.

I am informed that local Gardaí have been in direct contact with the Deputy in relation to his concerns in recent weeks and provided him with information concerning the above programme. I understand, however, that local Garda management is not aware of any specific recent incidents in the area of the type referred to.

Garda Procedures

25. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the policies and procedures that exist for the arrest of minors, in particular the measures taken to ensure the use of force is proportionate, the questioning and length of detention is age-appropriate, and their education routine is not disrupted. [7112/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that policies and procedures that exist for the arrest of minors are set out in Part 6, sections 55-70 of the Children Act, 2001.

The full text of the Children Act, 2001 can be accessed via the website of the Irish Youth Justice Service at www.iyjs.ie under legislation.

Garda Remuneration

26. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to meet with the Garda Representative Association to discuss the pay of the new members of An Garda Síochána who are currently training in Templemore Garda College. [6985/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am always happy to meet with the Garda Representative Association or indeed any of the Garda associations, to discuss issues of concern to them and to their members.

The Deputy will be aware that the current Garda recruitment campaign commenced in late 2013 and attracted over 20,000 applications. Details of the remuneration package, ie basic pay and allowances were made available to all applicants prior to their recruitment.

Garda Strength

27. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the fact that in 2014 and 2015, almost 200 gardaí will have availed of the incentivised career break scheme, as set out in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016, and those figures are being counted as actively serving officers when Garda staffing levels are reported; if this is misleading; if she will commit to including such figures in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7120/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): 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 keeps 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 been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the strength of the Garda Síochána on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 12,799. There were also 1,124 Garda Reserve members, with a further 48 in training. In addition, there were over 2,000 Garda civilian staff. As of 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there were 98 members on Career Breaks which is included in the figure of 12,799. Members of An Garda Síochána availing of career breaks are not included in District or Station strengths. However the members are included in the overall strength of An Garda Síochána as they are entitled to return to their position.

Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy, are continually monitored and reviewed and this is determined by a number of factors including population, crime trends and as the policing needs of each individual division dictates. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

28. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when she foresees the independent review mechanism completing its work; her views on establishing a commission of investigation into serious cases which raise fundamental questions regarding the malpractice of certain members of An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6989/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This Government, as part of its response to the report by Seán Guerin SC, took the initiative to have an independent review carried out of the allegations of Garda misconduct which had been submitted to my Department, to the Office of the Taoiseach and a number of other public representatives. This unprecedented decision was taken with a view to getting an objective and independent legal view on whether further action might be warranted in any case.

As the Deputy is aware, a panel consisting of two senior and five junior counsel was established for that purpose. This independent review panel has been examining 315 cases referred to them. This is a significant number of cases, and somewhat higher than originally estimated, but I think it was important to refer to the Panel all of the allegations that have been made to me as Minister or to the Taoiseach, whether they came direct from complainants or through representative groups, with only the most minimal filtering out of cases which did not actually relate to the Garda Síochána. This does mean that counsel are examining a very wide range of cases, some of which deal directly with the Garda Síochána, but others of which extend to other aspects of the criminal justice system beyond my remit, such as the prosecution and trial of offences. It is also worth noting that the cases contain a very wide variety in the seriousness of the allegations.

The Panel has made significant progress and the submission of recommendations to me is being prepared by officials. Each recommendation will be very carefully considered, but as a matter of general principle let me say quite clearly that, in coming to a decision in each case, I will be very strongly guided by the independent advice of counsel. Quite clearly, having engaged counsel for this review it would be entirely appropriate to be guided by their advice.

Where counsel do recommend further investigations, I will as I say be very strongly guided by that advice. Clearly, there are a number of possible options for further investigations, in particular by way of referral to GSOC, but any recommendation for referral of a case to a commission of investigation will be very carefully considered, including whether this could be

achieved by way of amending the terms of reference of an existing commission or the establishment of a separate commission.

However I would also make the point that in many cases, counsel may recommend that no further action can reasonably be taken. This might be, for example, because a case has already been through due process, such as an investigation by GSOC or a court hearing, even though the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome. The crucial point, however, is that every case will have been reviewed by independent counsel, who will have made an objective recommendation. There will be no undue delay in the process of notifying complainants of the outcome of the reviews.

Legislative Process

29. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the extreme delay in advancing the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions) Bill 2012; the reason the legal advice from the Attorney General pertaining to an ongoing legal case in the United Kingdom has been deemed sufficient to halt the legislative progress of the Bill, when the case in question would not be covered by the terms of the Bill as drafted; if she will outline a timeframe for the resumption of the Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6972/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The current position is that the Bill has passed Committee Stage in the Dáil, having passed all stages in the Seanad. However, before the Bill could be taken at Report Stage, a 2013 UK Court of Appeal judgment necessitated a review of the disclosure provisions in both the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and the Spent Convictions Bill. That review has been completed and amendments to the Vetting Act and consequential amendments to the Spent Convictions Bill are currently being drafted. I expect the amendments to be brought before the Oireachtas before the summer.

The UK Court of Appeal found that the UK policy of disclosing all criminal convictions was in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court found that disclosure of old minor criminal records should not be automatic but should instead be based on consideration of the relevance and proportionality of the conviction. The Attorney General has advised that similar considerations should apply to disclosure of criminal convictions in this State.

Domestic Violence Policy

30. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to review the legislative gaps in access to safety and protection orders for family members and loved ones who are not residing with a person accused of alleged serious harassment, in view of recent tragic murders. [6973/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): While there is already a range of legislative provisions available for the protection of persons in domestic and other situations it is important that we learn from the particular circumstances of every such tragic death so that we might improve our legislative provisions where necessary.

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 this 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.

Domestic Violence Policy

31. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Istanbul Convention will be ratified and implemented here; the action that will be taken to address domestic violence further; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6991/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My intention is to seek Government approval for Ireland to sign the Istanbul Convention this year. This is a matter of priority for me.

My Department has been working to establish precisely the actions which would need to be taken in order to ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence - the Istanbul convention.

As the Deputy may be aware, I intend to bring the General Scheme of a consolidated bill on domestic violence to Government this year which will strengthen our protections in relation to such violence and along with other legislative amendments underway in my Department will assist in Ireland ratifying the convention.

Other legislation under development in my department which will assist us in becoming fully compliant with the provisions of the convention includes legislation to transpose the EU Victims of Crime Directive.

A further measure under development in my Department which will take cognisance of the requirements of the convention is a new strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence for 2015 onwards.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

32. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress of the work of the independent panel of counsel reviewing allegations of Garda malpractice; and when its recommendations are due. [6986/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This Government, as part of its response to the report by Seán Guerin SC, took the initiative to have an independent review carried out of the allegations of Garda misconduct, which had been submitted to my Department, to the Office of the Taoiseach and a number of other public representatives. This unprecedented decision was taken with a view to getting an objective and independent legal view on whether further action might be warranted in any case. As the Deputy is aware, a panel consisting of two senior and five junior counsel was established for that purpose. This independent review panel has been examining 315 cases referred to them. This is a significant number of cases, and somewhat higher than originally estimated, but I think it was important to refer to the Panel all of the allegations that have been made to me as Minister or to the Taoiseach, whether they came direct from complainants or through representative groups, with only the most minimal filtering out of cases which did not actually relate to the Garda Síochána. This

does mean that counsel are examining a very wide range of cases, some of which deal directly with the Garda Síochána, but others of which extend to other aspects of the criminal justice system beyond my remit, such as the prosecution and trial of offences. It is also worth noting that the cases contain a very wide variety in the seriousness of the allegations.

It is important that nothing arises which might detract from the integrity of the review mechanism. It is therefore considered inappropriate to place a time constraint upon the working of the Panel, although they intend to conclude their work as soon as is reasonably practicable. The crucial point is that every case will have been reviewed by independent counsel, who will have made an objective recommendation. The Panel has made significant progress and the submission of recommendations to me is being prepared by officials. Each recommendation will be very carefully considered, but as a matter of general principle let me say quite clearly that, in coming to a decision in each case, I will be very strongly guided by the independent advice of counsel. Quite clearly, having engaged counsel for this review it would be entirely appropriate to be guided by their advice. There will be no undue delay in the process of notifying complainants of the outcome of the reviews.

Garda Transport Provision

33. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of the investment in the procurement of vehicles to support the work of An Garda Síochána, if any such vehicles will be equipped with additional facilities and supports to assist An Garda Síochána in policing duties in rural areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7109/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Decisions in relation to the provision, allocation and fit out of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources.

In that context, the additional €10 million which I recently secured for investment in the Garda fleet will provide for a significant number of new Garda vehicles. I am advised by the Garda authorities that, to date, an order for 370 new vehicles has been placed. These vehicles will be allocated over the coming months, following fit out, in accordance with the Garda Commissioner's identified policing requirements.

I am further informed that Garda vehicles are designed to perform a range of duties and current vehicle specifications are deemed sufficient to meet operational demands.

Parole Boards

34. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her legislative plans to reform the Parole Board of Ireland, in view of recent criticism, particularly about the decision-making process and the extent of ministerial input into temporary release; her views on failures identified in a report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7069/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 415 dated 14 January 2015, which dealt with the report referred to by the Deputy.

In relation to the Parole Board, proposals are being prepared to put it on a statutory footing. In September last year, I published the report of the Penal Policy Review Group which was

tasked with carrying out a strategic review of penal policy. As an initial step, the Government agreed in principle last November to proceed with the implementation of a number of key recommendations, including the bringing forward of legislative proposals to establish the Parole Board on an independent statutory basis.

I believe this will help to strengthen the Board and improve its functions. My Department is currently considering the matter in more detail ahead of presenting proposals for legislation.

QUESTION NO: 415

The Question relates to an independent investigation by the Inspector of Prisons into the death in custody of a prisoner in the Midlands Prison on 30 January, 2012. I published the Inspector's report on 17 December, 2014.

I would like to begin by taking this opportunity to offer my sympathy to the family concerned on their loss. I would also like to thank the Inspector of Prisons, Judge Michael Reilly, for his very comprehensive investigation and report into the death in custody of the prisoner concerned.

Since 1 January, 2012, the death of any prisoner in custody or on temporary release is the subject of an independent investigation by the Inspector of Prisons. The Office of the Inspector is a statutory independent office established under the Prisons Act, 2007.

The Inspector's investigation and reports are part of a three pronged process, the other elements being investigations by An Garda Síochána, and investigations and inquests conducted by Coroners. The combination of the Garda inquiries, the Coroners' investigations and inquests, and the Inspector's reports mean that this country is in compliance with its national and international obligations and meets the criteria laid down by the European Court of Human Rights when interpreting the procedural requirements of Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is important for all concerned, where any issues or deficiencies arise, that we ensure they are addressed and that we learn from them. In that context, I am carefully studying the Inspector's report and am considering the issues involved.

These include the issue of temporary release for the category of offenders referred to in the report, which is currently considered on a case-by-case basis. Proposals are under consideration for a more structured approach of limited temporary release in such cases, where full and constructive engagement with the prison and probation services could lessen the risk of re-offending. In this consideration, the safety of the public, the importance of victims, and the goal of reducing re-offending will be the primary objectives.

In relation to the issue of Garda submissions on applications for temporary release, it is important, given the crucial role that Garda advice can have in the consideration of such applications, that this issue is addressed generally, and not simply in relation to any individual case. The Irish Prison Service is therefore being asked to engage with the Garda Síochána on agreeing a more structured format for the submission of advice on such applications, drawing on the findings of this report and their joint experience in managing this issue.

Services for People with Disabilities

35. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding training options and employment opportunities for persons with a disability

(details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7507/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Government recognises the importance of increasing participation of persons with a disability in training and employment and is committed to removing barriers that prevent persons with a disability from participating more fully in society. To this end, the Department provides a comprehensive range of employment supports for people with disabilities. These supports include:

- the EmployAbility service (formerly the Supported Employment Programme), which facilitates people with disabilities into paid employment in the open labour market; and

- a number of other supports specifically for employers, including the Wage Subsidy Scheme, which pays an employer a subsidy for employing a person with a disability; the Work Equipment Adaptation Grant, the Employee Retention Grant, and the Disability Awareness Scheme.

The national internship programme – Jobbridge – is also open to people with disabilities while the activation service managed by the Department – Intreo – is available to any person with a disability who wishes to avail of the service. People with disabilities may also be eligible to avail of wider social welfare schemes such as the Back to Education Allowance and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance. It should also be noted that persons in receipt of disability allowance (DA) can take up employment and avail of an earnings disregard of up to €120 per week without affecting their rate of DA payment. In addition to these supports, the Department of Education and Skills, through Solas and the Education and Training Boards provides a range of vocational training programmes in their mainline and specialist training provision to assist people with disabilities access the open labour market.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

36. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of recipients of the State contributory pension and the State non-contributory pension in each county on 31 December 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7425/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

37. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of recipients of the widow’s, widower’s or surviving civil partner’s contributory pension and the widow’s, widower’s or surviving civil partner’s non-contributory pension in each county on 31 December 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7426/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx

welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Invalidity Pension Data

38. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of recipients of the invalidity pension in each county on 31 December 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7427/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Illness Benefit Data

39. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of recipients of illness benefit in each county on 31 December 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7428/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Disability Allowance Data

40. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of recipients of disability allowance in each county on 31 December 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7429/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Blind Person’s Pension

41. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of recipients of the blind person's pension in each county on 31 December 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7430/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the "Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services" report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Respite Care Grant Data

42. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of the respite care grant in each county, on 31 December 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7431/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the "Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services" report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

43. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of carer's benefit; and a carer's allowance, in each county, on 31 December 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7432/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the "Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services" report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Data

44. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of domiciliary care allowance, in each county, on 31 December 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7433/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the "Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services" report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx

welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Family Income Supplement Data

45. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of recipients of family income supplement, in each county, on 31 December 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7434/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Farm Assist Scheme Data

46. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of payments under the farm assist income support scheme, in each county, on 31 December 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7435/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Rural Social Scheme Data

47. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of payments under the rural social scheme, in each county, on 31 December 2010, 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7436/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Back to Education Allowance Data

48. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance, in each county, on 31 December 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7437/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Data

49. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance, in each county, on 31 December 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7438/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is published annually by my Department in the “Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services” report. The reports for years 2010 to 2013 are available at www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-Statistical-Information-Reports.aspx or through the Oireachtas library. The corresponding data for 2014 are currently being collated by my Department, and will be published in the 2014 report as soon as they are finalised.

Question No. 50 withdrawn.

Disability Activation Projects

51. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the decision to withdraw funding from a project (details supplied) in County Roscommon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7455/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The project to which the Deputy refers is one of 14 Disability Activation Projects (DACT), which are being jointly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the department. The DACT projects commenced at the end of 2012 and will end on 30 April 2015, as the ESF portion of the funding was provided under the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007- 2013 and this programme has recently come to an end.

There is therefore no provision for ESF co-funding arrangements to continue beyond the end of April next. This position was recently communicated to the individual projects, and it was pointed out that the terms of the grant agreement with each DACT project stipulated that the project must be delivered and completed by the end of April this year.

I very much welcomed and supported the setting up of these projects as they set out to explore a variety of routes towards ensuring that people with disabilities are enabled to avail of progression, education and development opportunities within the world of work. However, the projects were not intended to become ongoing service delivery organisations.

The Department has now commissioned an independent evaluation of the projects and a key part of this evaluation will be to identify from the projects what works with regard to increasing the capacity and potential of people on disability/illness welfare payments to participate in the labour market, and which of those are capable, where appropriate, of being mainstreamed in the delivery of supports to people with disabilities in the future. In the meantime, the department is considering the position of those people who will still be participating in the projects at the end of April.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

52. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a detailed breakdown of reductions in the rates and the discontinuation of social protection payments issued by her Department in each year since 2007; if she will provide details of the amounts of expenditure reduced each year, in respect of each heading; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7490/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The following tables detail the Department's Budget measures over the period 2009 to 2014 inclusive, including reductions in rates and discontinuation of payments. There were no rate reductions or discontinuation of social protection payments in Budgets 2007, 2008 or 2015.

Table 1: Savings Measures - Budget 2009 and Supplementary Budget 2009

Summary description of adjustment	Effect of Measure 2009 €m	Effect of Measure 2010 €m	Full Year €m
1. (a) Reduce Jobseeker's Benefit entitlement from 15 to 12 months for recipients with 260 or more contributions and (b) Reduce duration of Jobseeker's Benefit from 12 months to 9 months where a person has less than 260 contributions paid.	53	86	86
2. Increase the current weekly earnings threshold for the payment of reduced rates of Illness Benefit, Jobseeker's Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit (known as graduated rates) from €150 to €300.	8	10	10

Summary description of adjustment	Effect of Measure 2009 €m	Effect of Measure 2010 €m	Full Year €m
3. Increase underlying number of paid contributions for entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit and Health & Safety Benefit, from 52 to 104 and introduce a condition whereby 13 paid contributions are required in the relevant tax year (and certain other tax years) for eligibility for Jobseeker's Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit.	11.7	23.1	23.1
4. Limit Illness Benefit to two years duration for new claimants.	0	0	101
5. Halve entitlement to Child Benefit for 18 year olds; Abolish in 2010 and recycle some CB savings for offsetting measures on children to protect social welfare families.	27.6	67.2	79
6. Discontinue provision for the Christmas Bonus.	156	171	171
7. Introduce a reduced personal rate of payment of €100 per week for new Jobseeker's Allowance claimants aged 18 and 19 years and new Basic SWA claimants aged under 20 years.	12	26	26
8. Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement measures including: Increase minimum contribution for Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement by €11 per week to €24 and Reduce maximum rent limits where appropriate by up to 10% for all new tenancies/renewals and reduce all existing Rent Supplements by 8%.	69	97	97

Summary description of adjustment	Effect of Measure 2009 €m	Effect of Measure 2010 €m	Full Year €m
9. Additional Control Savings	82	125	125
Total	419	605	718

Table 2: Savings Measures - Budget 2010

Summary description of adjustment	Saving 2010 €m	Full Year €m
1. Child Income Support A reduction of €16 per month in both the Lower and Higher Child Benefit Rates, bringing the Lower Rate from €166 to €150 per month and the Higher Rate from €203 to €187 per month.	221.10	221.10
Less Compensatory measures: An increase of €3.80 per week in the rate of Qualified Child Increase, from €26 per week to €29.80.	-84.03	-84.03
An increase of €6 per week per child in all Family Income Supplement weekly earnings thresholds.	-14.54	-14.54
Child Income Support Total	122.53	122.53
2. Weekly Rates of Payment Weekly Personal Rates of Payment – A reduction of €8.30 in the weekly personal rate of Jobseeker's Benefit and Allowance, Invalidity Pension (under 65 years), Widow/er's (Contributory) Pension (aged under 66 years), Widow/er's Non-Contributory Pension, Deserted Wife's Benefit (under 66 years) and Allowance, Illness Benefit, Incapacity Supplement, Health and Safety Benefit, Injury Benefit, Pre Retirement Allowance, Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Farm Assist, One-Parent Family Payment, Supplementary Welfare Allowance, Back to Work Allowance and Back to Education Allowance. Lowest rate of €196 per week down from €204.30. Reduction of €8.20 per week in the rates of Death Benefit Pension (aged under 66) and Carer's Benefit. A reduction of €8.40 per week in Disablement Pension and a reduction of €8.50 per week in the rate of Carer's Allowance. A €7.50 (4.2%) reduction in the rate of Guardian's Payment (both Contributory and Non-Contributory).	395.97	395.97
Weekly Qualified Adult Rates of Payment – A reduction of €5.90 per week for Invalidity Pension qualified adults aged under 66, from €149.70 to €143.80 per week. A reduction of €5.50 per week for all other qualified adults of working age schemes. Proportionate reductions for all persons in receipt of reduced rates.	29.50	29.50
Reduction of €10 (3.6%) in the maximum rate of Maternity and Adoptive Benefit from €280 pw to €270 and a as well as an €4.50 reduction in the minimum rate, from €230.30 to €225.80 per week. Reduction in the minimum rate takes account of the increase in the QCI.	11.10	11.10
Weekly Rates of Payment Total	436.57	436.57
3. Activation Measures Introduce a new rate of €100 per week for new recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance & Supplementary Welfare Allowance for persons aged 20 and 21 years of age.	37.89	97.13
Introduce a new rate of €150 per week for new recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance & Supplementary Welfare Allowance for persons aged 22 to 24 years of age, inclusive.	15.70	58.90
Introduce a lower rate of €150 for Jobseeker's Allowance/SWA for persons who do not avail of labour activation measures and training courses.	40.00	40.00
Activation Measures Total	93.59	196.03
4. Rent Supplement - Savings from a review of maximum rent levels.	20.00	20.00
Rent Supplement Total	20.00	20.00

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Summary description of adjustment	Saving 2010 €m	Full Year €m
5. Limit entitlements under the Treatment Benefit scheme in 2010 to the Medical and Surgical Appliances Scheme and the free examination elements of Dental and Optical Benefits.	54.00	0.00
Treatment Benefit Total	54.00	0.00
6. Additional Control Savings.	33.31	33.31
Control Savings Total	33.31	33.31
6. Agencies Reduction in grant to the Family Support Agency.	2.00	2.00
Reduction in grant to the Citizen's Information Board.	0.33	0.33
Agencies Total	2.33	2.33
Overall Total	762	811

Table 3: Details of DSP Budget Package 2011

Budget Measure	2011 €m	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m
1. €10 per month reduction on both lower and higher Child Benefit rates with an additional €10 per month reduction for 3rd child only. New rates of €140 (first and second child), €167 (third child only) and €177 (fourth and subsequent child).	149.38	149.38	149.38	149.38
2. Weekly Rates of Payment – a reduction of €8 per week in most payments to people aged under 66 with proportionate reductions for qualified adults. However, the rate of Supplementary Welfare Allowance was reduced by €10 per week and the rate of Jobseeker's Allowance for those aged 22 to 24 years was reduced by €6 per week. The rate of Jobseeker's Allowance for those aged 18 to 21 years was maintained at €100 per week.	384.51	384.51	384.51	384.51
3. The discontinuation of most elements of the Treatment Benefit scheme was extended over the period up to 2014.	76.75	76.75	76.75	76.75
4. Efficiency savings in the energy and communications elements of the Household Benefits Package.	30.00	30.00	30.00	30.00
5. Reform of the Rent Supplement scheme including €2 per week increase in the minimum contribution for all non SWA basic recipients - consequent on the extra €2 reduction in SWA.	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00
6. Activation Measures – enhanced activation.	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
7. Other Measures – various other measures	49.36	68.05	76.61	81.04
8. Savings from efficiencies in administration	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00

Budget Measure	2011 €m	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m
9. Savings on FÁS Employment Programmes. These savings are consequential on social welfare rates.	12.00	12.00	12.00	12.00
Overall Total	873	892	900	905
In addition, the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 included the provision that the State Pension Transition would be closed to new entrants from the 1st January 2014. Savings at the time were estimated at €30m in 2014 and €60m in 2015 and a full year.				30.00

Table 4: Details of DSP Budget Package 2012

BUDGET 2012 Measures	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year
1. Children & Families 1.1 Child Benefit: The grant of €635 paid at birth on all multiple births and further grants of €635 paid when the children are aged 4 and 12 was discontinued.	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9
1.2 Child Benefit was maintained at €140 per month for the first two children. The rate for third and subsequent children was standardised at €140 per child per month from 2013. In 2012, the monthly rate for the third child is €148 and for the fourth and each subsequent child is €160.	42.75	68.75	68.75	68.75	68.75
1.3 The age at which a child is eligible for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance increased from 2 to 4 years of age.	9.3	9.3	9.3	9.3	9.3
1.4 The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was reduced from €305 to €250 (children over 12) and from €200 to €150 (children aged 4-11 years).	17.0	17.0	17.0	17.0	17.0
1.5 The upper age limit of the youngest child for new claimants of the One-Parent Family Payment will be reduced to 7 years on a phased basis.	0.3	2.0	5.8	11.9	29.9

Questions - Written Answers

BUDGET 2012 Measures	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year
1.6 Where a person claiming Invalidation Pension, Carer's Benefit, State Pension (Contributory or Transition) or Incapacity Supplement has a spouse or partner with income of over €400 a week, payment of the half-rate increase in respect of a qualified child was discontinued.	0.4	3.1	4.9	5.5	8.0
Children & Families Total	71.65	102.05	107.65	114.35	134.85
2. Working Age Payments 2.1 Where a Jobseeker's Benefit recipient is working for part of a week, the payment entitlement is now based on a 5 day week rather than a 6 day week.	5.9	11.6	11.6	11.6	11.6
2.2 Sunday working will be taken into account when calculating the amount of Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance to be paid, from 2013.	0.0	16.0	16.0	16.0	16.0
2.3 New applicants for Disablement Benefit must have a disability classified at > 15% to qualify for the payment.	2.6	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
2.4 Restrict access to Exceptional Needs Payments.	8.5	8.5	8.5	8.5	8.5
2.5 New applicants for Carer's Allowance, who are not living with the person for whom they are providing care, are no longer entitled to the Household Benefits package.	1.0	2.2	3.7	5.2	5.9
2.6 The employer rebate of statutory Redundancy payments was reduced from 60% to 15%.	81.0	122.0	104.0	104.0	104.0
2.7 Fuel Allowance season was reduced from 32 to 26 weeks.	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0
2.8 Treatment Benefit - the frequency of the grant for hearing aids increased from 2 years to 4 years. Also, the maximum grant available for one hearing aid was reduced from €760 to €500 and for two, from €1,520 to €1,000.	2.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0

BUDGET 2012 Measures	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year
2.9 The training and materials grant for Community Employment participants reduced from €1,500 to €500 per participant per annum.	28.05	28.05	28.05	28.05	28.05
2.10 The Cost of Education Allowance, the annual grant which accompanies the Back to Education Allowance, was reduce from €500 to €300.	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.4
2.11 Discontinue payment of the training budget for participants of Jobs Initiative and reduce the materials allowance by 50%.	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
2.12 Farm Assist – the assessment of means from self-employment was raised from 70% to 85%. The deductions from income for children were halved to €127 per year for each of the first two dependent children and €190.50 per year for each subsequent child.	5.15	5.15	5.15	5.15	5.15
Working Age Payments Total	193.1	260.4	244.9	246.4	247.1
3. Securing Sustainable Pensions	0.50	2.80	5.50	8.20	25.0
3.1 A lower pension is payable to new applicants of State Pension (from Sept 2012) who have a yearly average of less than 48 PRSI cons.					
3.2 Currently, late claims for certain contributory pensions can be backdated for more than 12 months provided the relevant qualifying conditions are fulfilled. The backdating period will be reduced to a max of 6 months.	18.50	27.20	27.20	27.20	27.2
3.3 The total number of paid PRSI contributions needed to qualify for Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension and Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension will increase from 156 to 260 contributions.	0.00	0.50	5.11	10.16	20.28
Securing Sustainable Pensions Total	19.0	30.5	45.56	72.48	72.48

Questions - Written Answers

BUDGET 2012 Measures	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year
4. Concurrent Payments 4.1 Currently, a person who gets a Widow(er)'s Pension, Surviving Civil Partner's Pension or One Family Parent Payment may be entitled to half rate Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit or Incapacity Supplement. These half rate payments will cease for new applicants.	12.0	22.6	22.6	22.6	22.6
4.2 New participants on Community Employment schemes will not be able to claim another social welfare payment at the same time.	9.0	26.3	43.7	61.2	61.2
4.3 Payment of two qualified child increases where the person is on a Community Employment Scheme and One Parent Family Payment, Deserted Wife's Allowance/Benefit or Widow(er)'s Pensions will be discontinued for new and existing recipients.	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Concurrent Payments Total	27.25	55.15	72.55	90.05	90.05
5. Fraud & Control Measures	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0
6. Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplements 6.1 The minimum contribution by single tenants for Rent Supplement scheme increased by €6 to €30 per week. The minimum contribution payable by couples increased to €35 per week. Rent limits also reviewed.	55.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	55.0
6.2 The minimum contribution for the purposes of the Mortgage Interest Supplement (MIS) scheme increased by €6 to €30 per week for a single person, and by €5 to €35 for couple. In addition, payment of MIS will be deferred for 12 months while the person engages with the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process.	22.5	22.5	22.5	22.5	22.5
Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplements Total	77.5	77.5	77.5	77.5	77.5

BUDGET 2012 Measures	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year
7. Means Testing 7.1 For new and existing claimants, income from employment as a home help funded by the HSE is now assessed in means tests for Social Assistance schemes.	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
7.2 The amount of earnings disregarded for the purposes of the OPFP means test reduced from €146.50 to €130 per week in 2012 for all recipients. Further reductions will be introduced over the following 4 years.	14.2	32.0	50.0	63.0	76.1
7.3 Income from weekly carers payments is now included for the purposes of calculating entitlement to Family Income Supplement in line with other welfare payments.	0.5	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06
7.4 Transitional payment where One Parent Family Payment recipient's earnings exceed €425 per week was discontinued. Existing recipients not affected.	0.8	1.03	1.03	1.03	1.03
Means Testing Total	20.5	39.09	57.09	70.09	83.19
8. Miscellaneous Savings 8.1 Savings will be achieved on the Electricity/Gas Allowance of the Household Benefits Package.	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
8.2 The Administration cost to the Dept. of medical certs for illness and disability related schemes reduced by 10%.	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Miscellaneous Savings Total	18.0	18.0	18.0	18.0	18.0
OVERALL TOTAL	468	624	657	703	764

Table 5: Details of DSP Budget Package 2013

BUDGET 2013 Measures	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year €m
Expenditure Reduction Measures				
1. Jobseeker's Benefit: The duration of Jobseeker's Benefit has been reduced from (a) 12 months to 9 months for recipients with 260 or more contributions paid and (b) 9 months to 6 months for recipients with less than 260 contributions paid.	33.00	81.50	81.50	81.50

Questions - Written Answers

BUDGET 2013 Measures	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year €m
2. Farm Assist: The rate assessment of means from self-employment, including farming, was raised from 85% to 100%. The deductions from income for children are being discontinued (currently €127 per year for each of the first two dependent children and €190.50 per year for each subsequent child).	3.75	5.00	5.00	5.00
3. Redundancy Payments Scheme: The employer rebate element (15%) of the statutory redundancy scheme has been discontinued.	25.00	30.00	30.00	30.00
4. Supplementary Welfare Allowance: Reductions in expenditure on Exceptional Needs Payments.	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
5. Back to Education Allowance:- The €300 Cost of Education Allowance payable to Back to Education Allowance participants has been discontinued for new and existing participants.	7.80	7.80	7.80	7.80
- The up-rating of the Back to Education Allowance payable rate where the person was on a reduced rate of a qualifying payment because of means has been discontinued for new participants.	2.00	6.40	10.90	11.60
- The up-rating of the Back to Education Allowance payable rate from €188 per week to €160 where the person was on a reduced age related rate of Jobseeker's Allowance (€100 or €144 per week) has been reduced for new participants.	0.80	2.50	4.20	4.54
6. Respite Care Grant: The Respite Care Grant has been reduced by €325, from €1,700 to €1,375 for new and existing recipients.	26.15	26.15	26.15	26.15
7. Child Benefit: The monthly rate of Child Benefit was reduced by €10 per child in respect of the first, second and third child. From January 2013, the monthly rate for each of the first three children was €130. The monthly rate will reduce by €10 per child, to €120, in respect of the fourth and each subsequent child from January 2014.	136.00	142.47	142.47	142.47

BUDGET 2013 Measures	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	Full Year €m
8. Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance: The rates of BSCFA reduced by €50, from €150 to €100 (children aged 4 to 11), and €250 to €200 (children aged 12 to 17 or aged 18 to 22 in full time education).	16.80	16.80	16.80	16.80
9. Household Benefits Package: Gas and Electricity Allowance - The value of the Electricity/Gas element of the Household Benefits package has been restructured based on the average best rate available for an unchanged 150 units per month from Airtricity, Bord Gáis and Electric Ireland. The Allowance no longer covers the PSO contribution and the differentiated rates of payment (urban/rural) will no longer apply.	20.00	22.60	22.60	22.60
- Telephone Allowance – the value of the Telephone Allowance element of the Household Benefits package was reduced for new and existing recipients.	61.00	61.00	61.00	61.00
Fraud Control and Overpayment Measures: Additional fraud, control and overpayment measures were introduced.	60.00	60.00	60.00	60.00
Administrative Savings: The cost to the Department of medical certificates for illness and disability related schemes has been reduced. This is an administrative saving in the Department.	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Increased funding provision for activation programmes and school meal provision	-13	-28	-28	-28
Subtotal Expenditure Reduction Measures	390	445	451	452

Table 6: Details of DSP Budget Package 2014

BUDGET 2014 Measures	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m	2017 €m	Full Year €m
1. Bereavement Grant Discontinue payment of the €850 Bereavement Grant in respect of deaths on or after 1 Jan 2014.	17	22	22	22	22

Questions - Written Answers

BUDGET 2014 Measures	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m	2017 €m	Full Year €m
<p>2. Jobseeker's Allowance and SWA Apply the reduced €100 rate of Jobseeker's Allowance and SWA (currently applicable to 18 to 21 year olds) to persons without children who reach the age of 22 from Jan 2014 and to new claimants aged 23 and 24 also from Jan 2014. AND Apply the reduced €144 rate of Jobseeker's Allowance and SWA (currently applicable to 22 to 24 year olds) to persons without children who reach the age of 25 from Jan 2014. BTEA maximum rate for 25 year olds to be reduced to €160 per week for relevant new entrants. The lower rates of JA will apply to persons aged 25 and under who have exhausted their entitlement to JB.</p>	32	52	64	72	72
3. Activation Activation Savings.	10	10	10	10	10
4. Maternity & Adoptive Benefit Standardise the minimum and maximum rates of Maternity & Adoptive Benefit at €230 per week (this means an increase of up to €12.20 for those receiving the less than €230 per week and a reduction of up to €32 per week for all other claimants). Applies to new claimants only from Jan 2014. Existing claimants will not be affected.	30	36	36	36	36
5. Exceptional Needs Payments Reduce the expenditure on the exceptional needs payment scheme by €2.1m in 2014 and in each subsequent year by a general review of payments under the scheme to ensure consistency with regard to payment levels on a national basis.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1
6. Diet Supplement Discontinue the Diet Supplement Scheme for new recipients from 1 January 2014. Existing recipients are unaffected.	0.4	1	1.3	1.7	3.2

BUDGET 2014 Measures	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m	2017 €m	Full Year €m
7. Employment Supports Efficiencies in employment supports schemes.	12	12	12	12	12
8. Recovery of Social Welfare Payments Provide that welfare benefits paid by the department to individual, arising from an accident or injury are repaid to the department (by insurers) in those cases where the insured person has also been compensated for the same via a settlement.	21	22	22	22	22
9. Illness Benefits Increase the number of waiting days for entitlement to Illness Benefit from 3 days to 6 days, from Jan 2014.	22	22	22	22	22
10. Invalidity Pension In line with the abolition of the State Pension Transition from Jan 2014, discontinue the personal weekly rate of €230.30 payable to Invalidity Pensioners at age 65 and align with the personal weekly rate of €193.50 currently payable to Invalidity Pensioners aged under 65. This measure to apply to persons reaching their 65th birthday from Jan 2014. AND Discontinue the qualified adult weekly rate of €206.30 payable to qualified adults who are aged 66 or over of Invalidity Pensioners and align with the qualified adult weekly rate of €138.10 currently payable to qualified adults who are aged under 66 of Invalidity Pensioners. This measure to apply to qualified adults reaching their 66th birthday from Jan 2014.	5	9	9	9	10
11. Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance The abolition of payment of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) for children over the age of 18 years, other than those attending secondary school, for 2014 and subsequent years.	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5

Questions - Written Answers

BUDGET 2014 Measures	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m	2017 €m	Full Year €m
12. Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement Increase the minimum contribution for couples by €5 from €35 to €40 further aligning Rent Supplement contributions with the Local Authority rents structure, for new and existing recipients. This also applies to Mortgage Interest Supplement, from Jan 2014.	6	7.1	7.1	7.1	7.1
13. Mortgage Interest Supplement Discontinue the Mortgage Interest Supplement scheme for new applicants and allow a winding down of the current MIS recipient base over a four year period, from Jan 2014.	12	16	20	24	30
14. Household Benefits - Telephone Allowance Discontinue the Telephone Allowance for all recipients, from Jan 2014. The current value of the Allowance is €9.50 per month.	44	46.7	46.9	47.1	47.1
15. Household Benefits - Free TV Licence Reduce the annual payment to RTÉ for the Free TV Licence from €59.17 million to €54.17 million.	5	5	5	5	5
16. Fraud and Control Additional Fraud and Control Measures.	30	30	30	30	30
17. Administrative Savings Additional administrative savings.	5	5	5	5	5
18. ELS Technical Adjustment ELS Technical Adjustment	34	34	34	34	34
BUDGET 2014 NET EXPENDITURE REDUCTION	290	334.4	350.9	363.50	372

Jobs Data

53. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the current number of JobBridge participants working in each of the local authorities. [7534/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The number of interns participating in the JobBridge scheme with each Local Authority is set out in the following Table:

Table 1. JobBridge Interns with Local Authorities

Local Authority	Current
Athlone Town Council	0

Local Authority	Current
Bray Town Council	0
Carlow County Council	3
Cavan County Council	1
Clare County Council	2
Cork City Council	12
Cork County Council	3
Donegal County Council	11
Dublin City Council - Woodquay	10
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	2
Dungarvan Town Council	0
Fingal County Council	1
Galway City Council	0
Galway County Council	13
Kerry County Council	3
Kildare County Council	0
Kilkenny County Council	1
Laois County Council	2
Leitrim County Council	2
Limerick City Council	16
Limerick County Council	0
Longford County Council	0
Louth County Council	3
Mayo County Council	16
Meath County Council	1
Monaghan County Council	6
North Tipperary County Council	0
Offaly County Council	2
Roscommon County Council	3
Sligo County Council	10
South Dublin County Council	0
South Tipperary County Council	3
Waterford City & County Council	7
Waterford City Council	3
Waterford County Council	1
Westmeath County Council	5
Wicklow County Council	1
Grand Total	143

Redundancy Payments

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if,

and when, statutory redundancy is likely to be paid in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7553/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no record of receipt of a redundancy lump sum application in my Department in respect of the person detailed.

Exceptional Needs Payments

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment under the supplementary allowance scheme will be made in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, in respect of that person's electricity arrears; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7556/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of this Department a recent application for an exceptional needs payment has not been submitted by the person concerned. It is open to her to submit an application to her local Community Welfare Service.

Exceptional Needs Payments

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment under the supplementary allowance scheme will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7557/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of this Department, a recent application for an exceptional needs payment has not been submitted by the person concerned. It is open to her to submit an application to her local Community Welfare Service.

Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare

57. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on the implementation of the third report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare, which makes recommendations in relation to the extension of social insurance cover for the self-employed; if her Department will liaise with the Department of Finance to ensure that if there are changes to income tax affecting the self-employed, the report's recommendations could be implemented alongside those changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7599/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In September 2013, I published the Third Report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare on Extending Social Insurance Coverage for the self-employed. The Group was asked to examine and report on issues involved in extending social insurance coverage for self-employed people in order to establish whether or not such cover is technically feasible and financially sustainable, with the requirement that any proposals for change must be cost neutral.

The Group found that the current system of means tested jobseeker's allowance payments adequately provides cover to self-employed people for the risks associated with unemploy-

ment. In this context, the Group noted that almost 9 out of every 10 self-employed people who claimed the means tested jobseeker's allowance during the three-year period from 2009 to 2011 received payment. Consequently, the Group was not convinced that there was a need for the extension of social insurance for the self-employed to provide cover for jobseeker's benefit.

The Group found that extending social insurance for the self-employed was warranted in cases related to long term sickness or injuries. To this end, the Group recommended that class S benefits should be extended to provide cover for people who are permanently incapable of work, because of a long-term illness or incapacity, through the invalidity pension and the partial capacity benefit schemes. The Group further recommended that the extension of social insurance in this regard should be on a compulsory basis and that the rate of contribution for class S should be increased by at least 1.5 percentage points.

In addition to the above the Group identified a range of issues associated with the subject of social insurance for the self-employed that should be addressed and made a number of other recommendations in this regard. Among the issues identified by the Group was the simplification of the methodology for assessing means for jobseeker's allowance payments, credited PRSI contributions, modification of the eligibility criteria for non-income support based activation and training schemes to enable the self-employed to gain access to such schemes and the role that information campaigns might play in addressing information deficits, particularly with regard to entitlements to jobseeker's allowance and the importance of making voluntary contributions.

The position in relation to the means assessment applied to self-employed income is that income from the previous twelve months is used as an indicator of likely future earnings. Given the variety of self-employment situations, the means assessment procedures are applied in a flexible manner to ensure that any circumstances that would be likely to lead to a significant variation, either upward or downward, in the level of a person's income from one year to the next are taken into consideration. As in the case of a non-self-employed claimant for jobseeker's allowance or disability allowance, the means of husband/wife, civil partner or co-habitant are taken into account in deciding on entitlement to a payment.

The primary purpose of PRSI credits is to secure social welfare benefits and pensions of employees by covering gaps in insurance where they are not in a position to pay PRSI such as during periods of unemployment, illness, etc. The class at which a contributor paid his or her last PRSI contribution determines entitlement to credited contributions. Credits are usually awarded at the same rate as the person's last paid PRSI contribution. For example, class A PRSI contributions may entitle a person to all insured DSP benefits, provided they satisfy the qualifying conditions. Credits are not available to a person who has only class S contributions.

If income from self-employment falls below €5,000 in a contribution year or a person is unable to work, he or she may opt to pay voluntary contributions. To become a voluntary contributor a person must:

- have paid at least 468 weeks PRSI (since 6 April 2014) in either employment or self-employment,
 - apply within 12 months of the end of the tax year during which he/she last paid compulsory insurance or were last awarded a credited contribution,
 - agree to pay voluntary contributions from the start of the contribution week that follows the week in which he/she leaves compulsory insurance.
- To become a voluntary contributor on or after 6 April 2015 a person must have previ-

ously paid 520 weeks PRSI.

The annual voluntary contribution charge for the self-employed is a special flat rate payment of €500. The payment of voluntary contributions allows the self-employed to maintain their PRSI record and qualify for State pension (contributory), widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension and guardian's payment (contributory).

Self-employed people in receipt of jobseeker's allowance have access to the full range of activation measures available through the State. Given the scale of unemployment levels, the key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. This policy objective prioritises scarce resources to those in receipt of qualifying welfare payments. Accordingly the employment services and schemes provided by my Department are focused in the first instance on this cohort of unemployed people. However, many services are available to the formerly self-employed who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment.

Some employment services, such as assistance with job-search activities and the use of on-line job search tools, are available to people if they register with the Department's employment services offices, regardless of their social welfare status. Unemployed persons, including the previously self-employed, not in receipt of payments may also be eligible to avail of up-skilling opportunities but are not eligible to receive a training allowance while undertaking the course. Springboard courses are open to people who were previously self-employed, regardless of their social welfare status.

The Department undertakes advertising and awareness activities to ensure that all members of the public are made aware of their rights and entitlements and that they are kept informed of significant changes and improvements in schemes and services as they occur.

Information on the full range of social welfare schemes and services is available from the Department's INTREO/local office network and the nationwide network of Citizens Information Centres. In addition, many people access information on the Department's and Citizen Information Board's websites.

My colleagues in Government and I will continue to reflect on the findings of the Advisory Group on the various issues outlined above and will consider the recommendations contained in the report taking into account future developments in terms of the budgetary and fiscal situation.

Labour Activation Measures

58. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the amount spent on labour market activation over the past five years, in tabular form; the number of participants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7600/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The data requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled and will be forwarded to her as soon as it is available.

Departmental Properties

59. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans for Intreo offices in Dublin mid west constituency (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7601/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As part of the plan for the roll-out of Intreo Centres, the Lucan/Adamstown and Clondalkin areas have been designated by the Department for the provision of Intreo services in Dublin Mid West.

The Office of Public Works has been exploring options in both Lucan and Adamstown for an Intreo Centre, but given the limited choice of suitably sized and located offices, complex property and development issues, and third party interests, this process is taking longer than expected. The Department is anxious to see the Intreo service delivered in the area within a reasonable timeframe.

Works are currently ongoing in Clondalkin where Intreo services will be provided from both the existing Local Office and the former Motor Tax Office. These works are expected to be completed by the end of March/early April 2015.

Departmental Investigations

60. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her Department will carry out an investigation of the management of the IASS pension fund in recent years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7619/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Defined benefit pension schemes in Ireland are, in general, set up under trust law. The trustees of such pension schemes have a fiduciary duty to act in the best interest of all scheme members. In addition, the Pensions Act, 1990 provides for the regulation of occupational pension schemes and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts. The Pensions Act sets down clearly the duties and responsibilities of the trustee of a pension scheme. Section 18 of the Pensions Act provides that the Pensions Authority has the power to investigate the state and conduct of a pension scheme. Accordingly, I would advise that you formally bring any concerns you have about the management of the IASS pension fund to the attention of the Pensions Authority, which can be contacted at http://www.pensionsauthority.ie/en/Contact_us/

Pension Provisions

61. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to increase the State pension (contributory) and the State pension (non-contributory); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7623/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): State pensions account for the single largest block of social welfare expenditure, and while expenditure on pensions is increasing because of demographic pressures, this is being successfully managed within the overall welfare budget. This year, the Department of Social Protection will spend an estimated €6.675 billion on pensions – 34.4% of all welfare expenditure and an increase of €168 million over 2014.

In Budget 2015, the Government increased payments for certain pensioners by increasing the rate of the Living Alone Allowance in Budget 2015 to €9.00. This increases the maximum personal rate of the State non-contributory pension for a qualified person living alone to €228 per week, and the maximum rate for the State contributory pension to €239.30, when both the basic pension and the allowance are taken into account.

In addition I was pleased to restore a partial Christmas bonus last December, benefitting

over 575,000 pensioners, at a cost of over €31 million, and 1.23 million welfare recipients in total.

As with these changes, any future decision to increase the rate of the State pension would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

Question No. 62 withdrawn

Insurance Costs

63. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to stop the practice of Irish emigrants returning home being forced to pay exorbitant prices for car insurance because their no claims bonuses have expired after just two years, even if they have had an impeccable driving record while away; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7412/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In my role as Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland, as regulator, interfere in the pricing of insurance products. The provision of insurance cover, the price at which it is offered and the expiring of no claims discounts is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are accepting and adequate provisioning to meet these risks. These are considered on a case by case basis. Article 25 of S.I. No. 359/1994 European Communities (Non-Life Insurance) Framework Regulations, 1994 expressly prevents the Central Bank from requiring the prior approval of the pricing, or terms and conditions of an insurance product. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies to provide home insurance cover to specific individuals.

I contacted Insurance Ireland in relation to this matter and they have informed me that in general terms where there has been no motor insurance in an individual's name and there is a gap of cover of two years or more since their last insurance, the no claims discount is deemed invalid and that in the case of a returning emigrant the same principle would apply. However, Insurance Ireland have further informed me that if the individual can produce confirmation that they have been continually insured and are claims free in their own name whilst they were away this would be taken into consideration.

Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. Their service can be contacted at (01) 676 1914 or by email at iis@insuranceireland.eu.

Tax Code

64. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding an income tax amnesty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7643/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The query is with regard to a proposal for an income tax incentive for young farmers starting up farming. In Budget 2015, myself and my colleague Minister Coveney published an Agri-Tax Review, overseen by a working group made up of the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine,

and the Revenue Commissioners. This review examined agri-taxation measures and made recommendations to ensure resources were directed towards activities of maximum benefit to this sector. It also aimed to ensure tax policy was aligned with the objectives set out in Food Harvest 2020, and analyse the benefits of various tax measures versus the costs.

The Review included an independent cost benefit analysis, an international benchmarking exercise and a public consultation process. A number of recommendations were made by the working group to maximise the potential of the primary agriculture sector, and as appropriate, most of these were legislated for through the Finance Act 2014. These included measures to increase the mobility and productive use of land, to assist succession and to complement wider agriculture policies and schemes.

In addition to the taxation measures which are exclusively aimed at the farming community, I would also highlight that farmers are eligible to take part in the Start Your Own Business (SYOB) scheme, introduced by the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013, which provides for relief from Income Tax for long term unemployed individuals who start their own new unincorporated business. The scheme provides an exemption from Income Tax up to a maximum of €40,000 per annum for a period of two years to individuals who set up a qualifying business having been unemployed for a period of at least 12 months prior to starting the business. The relief is available from the 25 October 2013 to 31 December 2016 and may be claimed on the return of income filed with the Revenue Commissioners.

Taking all these elements into consideration, I am not minded to consider the proposal made here.

VAT Payments

65. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will initiate a full review of Ireland's VAT system in view of the inconsistencies that exist throughout the system, where some essential items carry the top rate, and some luxury items carry a lower rate; if he will provide the most up-to-date list of zero rated, 9% rated, 13.5% rated and 23% rated products and services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7523/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of the EU VAT Directive with which Irish VAT law must comply. The Directive provides that all goods and services are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23% in Ireland, unless there is a provision in the Directive that permits a lower rate. Settled case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) requires that the limited circumstances in which rates other than the standard rate are used be strictly interpreted and narrowly applied so as not to create or increase divergence of VAT treatment in the EU Member States. These limited circumstances are set out in the Schedules of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010

Schedule 1 of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 lists activities that are exempt from VAT and in respect of which the supplier has no entitlement to deduct input VAT. Schedule 2 lists supplies that are liable at the zero rate and in respect of which the supplier has an entitlement to deduct input VAT. Schedule 2 includes international services, human and animal oral medicines, children's clothing and footwear, books and a range of food and drink items. The range of food products that can benefit from the zero rating is constrained by Article 110 of the VAT Directive which permits the retention of the zero rate for "clearly defined social reasons" where the products were liable to VAT at the zero rate on 1 January 1991.

Schedule 3 lists the goods and services that are liable to VAT at the reduced rates of 9% and 13.5%. The goods and services currently liable to VAT at the 9% rate are ones listed in Annex III of the VAT Directive and Ireland was permitted under Article 113 of the Directive to apply a rate lower than 12% to these goods and services. The goods and services liable to VAT at the 13.5% rate are ones that are not listed in Annex III, but in respect of which Ireland is permitted under Article 118 to retain a reduced rate. The goods and services to which the 9% rate applies include the supply of food and drink (excluding alcohol, soft drinks and bottled water) in the course of catering

- hot take-away food and hot drinks
- hotel lettings, including guesthouses, caravan parks, camping sites etc.
- admissions to cinemas, theatres, certain musical performances, museums, art gallery exhibitions
- amusement services of the kind normally supplied in fairgrounds or amusement parks
- the provision, by a person other than a non-profit making organisation, of facilities for taking part in sport
- printed matter e.g. newspapers, magazines, brochures, leaflets, programmes, maps, catalogues, printed music (excluding books)
- hairdressing services

The goods and services to which the 13.5% rate applies include:

- The supply of gas, electricity, solid fuel and home heating oil
- The supply of new buildings, concrete block and ready to pour concrete
- The supply of photographic services, agricultural services and photographic services
- The hire of cars and boats
- Beauty services such as facials, nail treatments, tanning and sunbed services

The supply of goods and services not listed in the Schedules to the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 is liable to VAT at the standard rate. Where a good or service is not specified in the Schedules mentioned then the correct rate is the standard rate. Revenue does have a VAT rates database on its website (<http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vat/rates/index.jsp>) that lists thousands of product and services types and gives the correct VAT rate by reference to the Schedules.

It is widely recognised that there are anomalies in the rates applying to goods and services and I receive Parliamentary Questions concerning particular anomalies from time to time. Under the VAT Directive the apparent anomalies can generally only be eliminated through applying higher rates to goods and services currently liable at the zero- rate or at one of the reduced rates. I am not planning to undertake such a review at this time.

Tax Data

66. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of workers in the construction sector that were taxed on a pay as you earn basis in each year since 2008; the total

revenue earned by these workers in each of these years; the total amount of tax, universal social charge and employee's pay related social insurance paid by these workers in each of these years; the total amount of employer's pay related social insurance paid in respect of these workers in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7544/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the PAYE Income Tax and Universal Social Charge (USC) paid in respect of employees in the construction sector, as well as the numbers of employments for such workers, for the period 2008 to 2013 (the latest year for which figures are available), is shown in the Table. It should be noted that an individual PAYE employee may have one or more employments in a year. The number of individual PAYE employees in the construction sector for the same period is also shown in the table.

Year	PAYE Income Tax and USC €m	Number of Employments	Number of Employees
2008	714	251,244	149,938
2009	468	170,739	98,240
2010	289	132,144	77,789
2011	349	117,012	64,513
2012	355	107,992	52,011
2013	367	110,675	64,999

It is not possible to furnish the breakdown between Income Tax and USC. A breakdown of PRSI for the construction sector is not readily available to Revenue for the periods in question.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

67. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on concerns that a bank is putting undue pressure on persons (details supplied) in County Kerry regarding their property; if his attention has been drawn to the enormous emotional stress and anxiety being caused by the actions of the bank in failing to engage with the persons; if he will ensure that these persons are treated fairly and with dignity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7582/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): This Government has put in place a number of initiatives to assist homeowners in difficulty. Support and independent professional advice is available for borrowers in serious debt difficulty through the following channels:

- Insolvency Service of Ireland (www.isi.gov.ie)
- www.keepingyourhome.ie
- Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) www.mabs.ie

Borrowers in difficulty must engage with their lender as early as possible in order to identify the best solution to their debt situation. This will afford them the protection of the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) and ensure that the resolution arrangement that is finally agreed is both affordable and sustainable.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers struggling to keep up mortgage repayments are treated in a fair and transparent manner by their lender, and that long-term resolution is sought by lenders

with each of their borrowers. The Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP) framework, as set out in the CCMA, outlines the steps which lenders must follow:

Step 1: Communicate with borrower;

Step 2: Gather financial information;

Step 3: Assess the borrower's circumstances; and

Step 4: Propose a resolution.

A lender may only commence legal proceedings for repossession where the lender has made every reasonable effort to agree an alternative repayment arrangement under the Code with the borrower or his/her nominated representative and the specific timeframes set out in the Code have been adhered to or the borrower has been classified as not co-operating

If a borrower is not happy with the way that their lender is dealing with them or if they think they are not complying with the CCMA, the borrower can make a complaint to their lender.

Borrowers can also make an appeal to the lender's Appeals Board if they are not happy with the alternative repayment arrangement offered or where a lender declines to offer an alternative repayment arrangement or if they believe they have been wrongly classified as not co-operating.

If the borrower is not happy with the outcome of the appeal/complaint made to the lender they can refer the matter to the Financial Services Ombudsman (FSO). Further information on how to make a complaint to the FSO is available at www.financialombudsman.ie.

The strong view of the Government is that, in respect of co-operating borrowers under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), repossession of a person's primary home should only be considered as a last resort. Every effort should be made to agree an acceptable arrangement as an alternative to repossession. Regretfully, however, it must also be accepted that due to the individual circumstances, not all mortgages can be made sustainable and that in these limited circumstances, it will be in the best interests of both parties to resolve the situation in a fair manner.

Of course, the Central Bank is also working to ensure that banks are fully complying with the codes of conduct. The Central Bank expects to see that mortgage lenders have taken the letter and spirit of the CCMA seriously. Where the Bank finds evidence of instances of non-compliance, it will continue to hold lenders to account for any deficiencies in their policies and practices in this regard.

Property Tax Exemptions

68. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 224 of 2 December 2014, in respect of exemptions from local property tax for home owners of pyrite-damaged homes, if a solution to this matter has been reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7586/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I made a commitment to examine the Local Property Tax (LPT) and any impacts on LPT liabilities as a result of property price movements. In that regard, Dr Don Thornhill has agreed to conduct a review to consider and make recommendations, in the context of property price developments, on what adjustments, if any, might be made to the system to achieve relative stability in LPT payments by liable persons. Dr Thornhill is a distinguished former public servant who chaired the Inter Departmental Group

on the Design of a local property tax in 2012. The review will address a number of other issues concerning the LPT including the relief from LPT for owners of pyrite damaged homes and how the anomalous issue that has arisen in this regard can be resolved satisfactorily. I expect the review by Dr Thornhill will be completed by summer 2015.

As I advised previously, resolution of the pyrite LPT relief issue may necessitate a change in the relevant provisions of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) and/or the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Pyrite Exemption) Regulations. If it is the case that legislative change is required, I will examine with the Revenue Commissioners the possibilities for applying any changes on an administrative basis, in advance of such legislative changes.

Tax Rebates

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when refunds of deposit interest retention tax will be processed for qualifying first-time buyers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7611/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Relief from DIRT on savings used by first time buyers towards the deposit on a home was introduced from 14 October 2014.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are currently developing an online system whereby those who qualify for the relief will be able to claim their refund. It is envisaged by Revenue that the online system and relevant guidance will be available at the end of next month.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Expenditure

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of lending activity supported by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7612/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is built on the foundation stone that was laid by the Taoiseach and Chancellor Merkel when they agreed that the German promotional bank Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) would help finance the Irish SME sector when Ireland was exiting the EU/IMF programme in late 2013.

I asked my Department and the National Treasury Management Agency to create the necessary mechanisms to construct the SBCI. Building on the initial funding offer from the KfW, the Government added funding from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (the new fund to which the assets of the National Pensions Reserve Fund were transferred). The Government approved this approach and legislation enabling the establishment of the SBCI was passed by the Oireachtas in July 2014.

The SBCI was incorporated in September 2014 and since then the SBCI has made considerable progress in building relations with lending partners and in constructing the complex operational capability required to bring products to market. These include establishing operational capability with funders and lending partners, building internal systems and business processes, and establishing a team to safely and effectively manage the funding provided on behalf of the State.

The SBCI drew down €200m of its funding from the European Investment Bank during De-

cember 2014 so that funds could be borrowed by its lending partners to be distributed to SMEs.

The SBCI launched its first product programme today, Thursday the 19th February, with lending due to commence in March. The Government's aim for the SBCI is to enhance the range and profile of SME finance providers in Ireland. The SBCI will achieve this by working with existing and new providers to develop specific funding products and by supporting new entrants to the SME lending market. Full details of how and where SMEs can apply for SBCI financing were provided at the launch today.

Tax Exemptions

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost in each year, from 2010 to 2014, of the tax exemption under section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act; the number of persons who availed of the scheme during each year; if he will provide details of their donations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7613/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the following donations have been made under the provisions of section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in the period 2010 to 2013.

2010

3 paintings, painted by Hughie O'Donoghue entitled: "Raft", "Medusa" and "The Narrow Sea" valued at €190,000, resulting in a tax credit of €152,000.

2011

The Seamus Heaney Archive valued at €1.75 million, resulting in a tax credit of €1.4m.

2012

The memorabilia of Major John McBride and Mr. Séan McBride valued at €152,350, resulting in a tax credit of €121,880.

2013

The Headfort Mirrors Collection valued at €375,000, resulting in a tax credit of €300,000.

Since 2009, the tax credit available to the donor of heritage items is an amount equal to 80% of the market value of such items. The total tax credit available as a result of donations made under section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in the period 2010 to 2013 is €1,973,880.

Details of donations for 2014, will be included in the Revenue Commissioners annual report to the Minister for Finance for that year, in accordance with the provisions of section 1003(12) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Home Repossession Rate

72. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the increase in the number of homes being repossessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7629/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): This Government has put in place a number of initiatives to assist homeowners in difficulty, including reform of Personal Insolvency legislation, the provision of independent advice to those dealing with debt issues and revision of the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers struggling to keep up mortgage repayments are treated in a fair and transparent manner by their lender, and that long-term resolution is sought by lenders with each of their borrowers. The Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP) framework, as set out in the CCMA, sets out the steps which lenders must follow:

- Step 1: Communicate with borrower;
- Step 2: Gather financial information;
- Step 3: Assess the borrower's circumstances; and
- Step 4: Propose a resolution.

The latest Mortgage Arrears and Repossession statistics published by the Central Bank are available on their website at <http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/mortgagearrears/Pages/releases.aspx>.

With regard to restructuring of mortgage loans, the CCMA requires lenders to explore all of the options for alternative repayment arrangements offered by that lender, for each particular case. There are many types of restructure available for borrowers including interest only mortgages, reduction in the payment amount, temporary deferral of the payment, term extensions and capitalising arrears.

In their most recent release, the Central Bank restructures data shows that split mortgages, term extension and arrears capitalisation are the most common types of arrangement and amount to over half of the total restructures in place. This shows that engagement works and is delivering results.

If the lender does not offer the borrower an alternative repayment arrangement, for example, where it is concluded that the mortgage is not sustainable, the lender must provide the reasons, in writing, to the borrower. The lender must also inform the borrower that a copy of the most recent Standard Financial Statement (SFS) is available on request, and provide the borrower with details as set out in Para 45 of the CCMA, in writing.

The same information must be given to the borrower if he/she does not accept the alternative repayment arrangement offered by the lender.

Under the CCMA, a lender may only commence legal proceedings for repossession of a borrower's primary residence, after the failure of all reasonable efforts to agree an alternative repayment arrangement and in accordance with the timeframes set out in the CCMA.

If a borrower is not happy with the way that the lender is dealing with his/her case or believes that the lender is not complying with the CCMA, the borrower can make a complaint to the lender.

Borrowers can also make an appeal to the lender's Appeals Board if they are not happy with the alternative repayment arrangement offered or if they believe they have been wrongly classified as not co-operating.

If the borrower is not happy with the outcome of the appeal/complaint made to the lender

they can refer the matter to the Financial Services Ombudsman (FSO). Further information on how to make a complaint to the FSO is available at www.financialombudsman.ie.

The strong view of the Government is that, in respect of co-operating borrowers under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), repossession of a person's primary home should only be considered as a last resort. Every effort should be made to agree an acceptable arrangement as an alternative to repossession. Regretfully, however, it must also be accepted that due to the individual circumstances, not all mortgages can be made sustainable and that in these limited circumstances, it will be in the best interests of both parties to resolve the situation in a fair manner.

Income Data

73. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on income inequality as outlined recently by the Think-tank on Action for Social Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7631/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I note the report by the Think-Tank for Social Change (TASC) which outlines their views on inequality in Ireland.

While inequality is an important issue, not just for Ireland but globally, the Deputy should be aware that the TASC report identifies high levels of inequality in respect of market incomes. When inequality in Ireland is looked at in terms of disposable income, in other words what people have in their pockets, Ireland is in very much line with the OECD average. This reflects, inter alia, the effectiveness of the Irish tax and social welfare system in reducing inequality of market incomes. This is evidenced by the fact that the tax and social welfare system in Ireland reduces the Gini-coefficient (which is a measure of income inequality) by more than any other country in the OECD.

The tax and social welfare is also highly effective at reducing poverty in Ireland. CSO data show that social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 49.8 per cent to 15.2 per cent in 2013. This was one of the highest reductions across the EU Member States in that year.

These outcomes reflect the highly progressive nature of the Irish tax and social welfare system. For example, the ratio of the tax wedge for an individual at 167% of the average wage compared with an individual at 67% of the average wage, a standard measure of the progressiveness of an income tax system, is the second highest in the OECD.

While the tax and welfare system plays an important role in achieving a relatively equal distribution of disposable income, this Government believes that the best way to combat inequality is to encourage job creation and to deliver employment opportunities for those at the bottom of the income distribution. This in turn will help to reduce the level of market income inequality identified in the TASC report.

Tax Code

74. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to deal with the anomaly, whereby, a self-employed person starts paying tax at €8,250 and a Pay As You Earn worker starts paying tax at €16,500; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7646/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, employees in

the PAYE system benefit from a PAYE income tax credit worth €1,650 per annum, to which the self-assessed are not entitled. The PAYE allowance, as it was then, was introduced in 1980 to improve the tax progression of PAYE taxpayers and to take account of the fact that the self-employed generally then had the advantage of paying tax on a preceding year basis. The argument was also made at the time that the general scheme of allowances for expenses discriminated against employees and in favour of other taxpayers.

There have been some changes since 1980. For example, the self-employed now pay tax on a current year basis. In addition, the PAYE allowance has become a tax credit. However, there are other aspects to how the self-assessed are taxed which can be beneficial to them. For instance, there are significant timing benefits, depending on the accounting period used by the taxpayer, which are available to the self-assessed but which are not available to PAYE workers. In addition, the expenses regime for self-assessed taxpayers remains somewhat more liberal than that afforded to employees and therefore the self-employed can actually pay less tax when compared to a PAYE worker on the same income.

All tax reliefs, incentives and credits are reviewed as part of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process. However, it is important to note that the changes to the Income Tax system introduced in Budget 2015 benefits all those who pay income tax and or USC equally, regardless of whether they are PAYE or self-assessed taxpayers.

State Properties

75. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will respond to a request (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7536/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): I have been advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that a provisional booking for the use of the State Apartments, Dublin Castle, has already been made for the Annual Ireland-U.S. Council Dinner on Friday 26 June 2015.

National Monuments

76. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an update on the works to King John's Castle in Carlingford, County Louth; when the works will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7454/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Carlingford is an historic town with a number of fine structures including two National Monuments in State care; the historic Mint building and Carlingford Castle, known popularly as King John's Castle, named after Richard the Lionheart's brother.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) has embarked on a programme of safety and access works at King John's Castle and the first phase, a pedestrian walkway outside the Castle was completed in the last few years. The next phase involves extending the accessible areas and allowing visitors to more easily enter the Castle site. A key aspect of the work will involve the careful dismantling of a 19th century wall and its reconstruction on a new firmer foundation with the addition of an access door through which members of the public will be able to pass. This will dramatically improve the current situation.

This next phase of works is a major conservation project in its own right. A large amount of preparatory work, design and careful Archaeological investigation and assessment has been carried out and the Minister for Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht has provided the necessary Archaeological Consent required under National Monuments legislation to allow the work to proceed. All that has been done, to date, at the Castle, though substantial, has been carried out to facilitate the major element that is yet to come.

The OPW intends to commence the next phase of works at this site in the summer of 2015. It is not possible just yet to say when all works will be completed.

Parliamentary Party Allowances

77. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide the up-to-date totals of the amounts paid to individual Independent Teachtaí Dála in the 31st Dáil Éireann under the Leader's Allowance category; or any other equivalent category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7483/15]

78. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if any Teachta Dála has claimed anything, other than the maximum available under the Leader's Allowance category or under any subsequent equivalent category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7484/15]

79. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a breakdown on the total individual amounts paid to Independent Teachtaí Dála in the 31st Dáil Éireann, which was vouchable; the amount that was unvouched under the Leader's Allowance category; or any subsequent equivalent category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7485/15]

80. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the amounts paid to Independent Teachtaí Dála in the 31st Dáil Éireann are still tax free under the Leader's Allowance category or any subsequent equivalent category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7486/15]

81. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a list of what qualifies as allowable expenditure, that would be provided, in respect of the vouchable payments paid to Independent Teachtaí Dála in the 31st Dáil Éireann under the Leader's Allowance category; or any subsequent equivalent category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7487/15]

82. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will confirm that the €137,000 plus payments paid to Independent Teachtaí Dála in the 31st Dáil Éireann under the Leader's Allowance category up to 1 July 2014 could have been used for any purpose without accountability, as these payments were all unvouched; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7488/15]

83. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a brief history of the way it came to pass that a Leader's Allowance is paid to Independent Teachtaí Dála; when this started; the Taoiseach at the time; the first Teachtaí Dála to benefit from this arrangement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7489/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 83, inclusive, together.

The Parliamentary Activities Allowance (formerly known as the Party Leader's Allowance) is provided for under the Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices Act 1938 as amended, most recently by the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices)(Amendment) Act 2014. Provision for payment of the allowance to Independent TDs was made under the Oireachtas (Miscellaneous Provisions) and Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices (Amendment) Act 1996. In relation to the first Independent TDs to receive payment of the allowance, as advised in previous replies on this issue the current data systems in use do not permit detailing the payments prior to 2001.

The legislation sets out the categories of expenditure for which the allowance may be used and provides that it is not liable to income tax. Under the provisions of the 2014 Act, and with effect from 1 July 2014, the same audit and reporting provisions applicable to Parliamentary Leaders now also apply to Independent Members in receipt of the allowance. For the first time, Independent Members must record and account to the Standards in Public Office Commission for expenditure from the allowance.

Details of the payments made in the 31st Dáil to each Independent TD up to 2013 are contained in my reply to the Deputy on 16 December 2014 under Question No. 253 (ref. 48134/14). The amounts paid for the periods 1 January to 30 June 2014; 1 July to 31 December 2014 and January 2015 are set out in the following table. Michael Fitzmaurice TD, elected to Dáil Éireann in October of 2014, has not yet claimed the allowance.

Independent TDs	1 January to 30 June 2014	1 July to 31 December 2014	January 2015
Catherine Murphy	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Finian McGrath	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
John Halligan	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Luke "Ming" Flanagan	€16,535.95	€0.00	€3,086.42
Mattie McGrath	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Maureen O' Sullivan	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Michael Healy Rae	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Michael Lowry	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Michael Wallace	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Noel Grealish	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Shane Ross	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Seamus Healy	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Stephen Donnelly	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Thomas Pringle	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Tom Fleming	€20,575.98	€18,518.52	€3,086.42
Michael Fitzmaurice	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
Totals	€304,599.67	€259,259.28	€43,209.88

Job Creation

84. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the net number of new jobs created in Enterprise Ireland client companies in County Kerry in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7522/15]

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

Ireland is the agency under my aegis to help companies throughout Ireland start and scale, innovate and remain competitive on international markets. The companies that Enterprise Ireland works with are a vital source of employment in every county and region across Ireland.

In 2014, EI assisted companies generated 19,705 new jobs. This resulted in a net increase of 8,476 in the total number of people employed by Enterprise Ireland supported companies, the highest net gain in the history of the Agency.

In terms of their overall contribution to the economy, Enterprise Ireland clients account for over €20 billion in expenditure in the Irish economy and support more than 300,000 jobs (direct and indirect) in Ireland – this is equivalent to approximately 16% of the total workforce.

Employment data for Enterprise Ireland is collected annually as part of the Annual Employment Survey which measures the number of jobs in Agency assisted client companies.

Table 1 identifies the net number of new jobs created in Enterprise Ireland client companies in County Kerry for the period 2005-2014.

Table 1 Kerry Net Change in employment 2005 to 2014

Kerry	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Job Gains	103	128	281	359	269	223	154	247	398	430
Job Losses	135	94	448	447	564	213	144	184	233	481
Total change	(32)	34	(167)	(88)	(295)	10	10	63	165	(51)

Job Initiatives

85. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding start-ups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7633/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Any barriers to entrepreneurship are of concern to this Government and we have studiously addressed this issue since March 2011.

In October 2014 I published the first ever National Entrepreneurship Policy Statement which sets out the Government's strategic objectives in key areas that impact on entrepreneurs and startups, and signposts the direction which policy will take in the coming years. The Policy Statement highlights that it is essential that entrepreneurs are not inhibited or discouraged by red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy. The Government has committed to continue with focused work on key areas such as reducing the administrative burdens facing startups, including the length of time it takes to register a new business and the burden of applying for licences.

Work is ongoing to significantly reduce the time and cost of company incorporations. Over the past three years alone the Companies Registration Office (CRO) has reduced processing time i.e. maximum number of days to register a new company by three days and the cost of registration by one third, achievements due to augmenting its online business registration facility. In 2013, the average processing time was 13 days. The target for 2015 is 7 days.

My Department's reduction of administrative burdens on business by 25% between 2008 and 2012 will benefit all businesses, but especially startup, micro and small businesses, for whom the burden of regulation is proportionally higher, due to their small size.

Successful initiatives include:

- Company Law, savings of €82.5 million per annum have already been realised, more than €33 million of which are due to the work of the Companies Registration Office (CRO), as companies can submit their annual returns online via the CRO website and can now use digital signatures for the B1 Form and Accounts.

- In Health & Safety Law, a total of €124 million in annual administrative savings for business has been delivered by the HSA via two key projects: the BeSMART online tool for preparing the Risk Assessment and Safety Statement (€60m), and the SMP20 Guidelines (€64m), which assist construction firms with fewer than 20 employees in establishing and maintaining an effective safety management system.

An integrated licensing system will also be introduced. A key goal of the proposed system is to support the licence application process through the provision of a single portal or website through which businesses will be able to apply for, and renew, a multiplicity of licences. The new licensing system will be developed for the retail sector in the first instance and rolled out to other sectors of the economy thereafter.

With regard to registering for tax, customer service standards for business tax registration require that 100% of such applications are completed within 5 working days, with the exception of 10 working days for VAT registration applications. In order to facilitate the prompt and efficient registration of business taxes, Revenue's online eRegistration system includes services for the online registration and cancellation of a number of business taxes. In all applications made through eRegistration with the exception of Value Added Tax (VAT) and Relevant Contract Tax (RCT), registration and risk assessment is an automated process which is completed within a single overnight period.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

86. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a payment under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7405/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2012 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 3) with effect from the 1st May 2013 and payment has issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks in respect of the 2014 scheme year an issue was identified in relation to the Conservation of Animal Genetic Resources. This issue has now been resolved and all validations have now been successfully completed. The 75% payment in respect of 2014 will issue shortly and the balancing 25% payment will issue thereafter.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

87. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7424/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was one of a number of applicants under the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases are impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011 and who applied for derogation in this regard. The person named subsequently submitted additional information to my Department, which following review unfortunately did not provide sufficient reasons to accept the application. The person named has previously been notified of the outcome in writing and advised of the option to appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman should he so wish. I have arranged for my Department to issue a copy of this letter to the person named for his information.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

88. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal is not receiving payments for 2014 under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7448/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 29 April 2014. Payment has not issued as yet, as the holding concerned has not satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. Immediately the holding is identified as meeting these requirements, the application will be further processed with a view to payment at the earliest possible date.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Applications

89. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment under the 2014 Rural Environment Protection Scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7449/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their 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. During the administrative checks in 2014 an area discrepancy was discovered between the Single Farm Payment application for 2014 and the REPS agri-environmental plan which required further clarification. This issue has now been resolved and the REPS payment for 2014 is now being processed and should issue shortly.

Fish Landings

90. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide, in tabular form, the total value and tonnage of landings of all fisheries from all vessels for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 in the port of Castletownbere, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7479/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority is the body within the State responsible for data recording and

reporting on the landings of sea fish by Irish Sea Fishing Boats. I have asked the Authority to respond directly to the Deputy with the data requested.

Installation Aid Scheme Eligibility

91. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the implications of recent progress on entitlements under the old young farmers scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry who was denied installation aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7481/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware that there is a group of young farmers who established their holdings in 2008 and 2009 and who missed out on the Installation Aid scheme which closed to applications in 2008. I intend to prioritise their applications under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation scheme (TAMS), with grant-aid payable at 40%, being introduced under the new RDP. EU Commission approval is awaited on the proposed schemes under TAMS.

Under Pillar 1 the Regulation provides that young farmers and new entrants are priority categories under the National Reserve. It also provides scope to 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'.

As a result of my direction and with the recent agreement of the Commission the group of young farmers who established their holding in 2008 and 2009, but who missed out on both the Young Farmer Installation Scheme which closed to applications in 2008, and the Young Farmer priority category under the National Reserve which includes young farmers who commenced since 2010, can be considered as a 'group suffering from specific disadvantage'. This development means that these young farmers will be eligible to apply under the 2nd phase of the National Reserve to be given new entitlements or be given a top-up on the value of existing entitlements.

Application forms will be made available in early April 2015. This is a very welcome outcome that I feel will address an anomaly in the system and allow for fair and equal treatment for this particular category of young active farmers.

Hardship Grant Scheme Applications

92. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a hardship grant relating to tuberculosis restrictions will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7499/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application was received from the herdowner concerned under the TB Hardship Grant Scheme (which applies in the period 1 November to 30 April) following the restriction of his holding on 13 November 2014 as a result of a lesion detected at slaughter plant level. This grant is payable in monthly tranches in arrears where the period of restriction exceeds two months (i.e. the initial two-month period of the restriction is not eligible). Accordingly, in this case, the initial reckonable period for the Hardship Grant is 13 January to 12 February 2015.

The case is currently being processed and, if it is established that all of the conditions of the

scheme have been met, payment will be made shortly.

Forestry Sector

93. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if consideration will be given to extending the reconstruction scheme to include plantations destroyed by storm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7509/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The frequency and ferocity of storm events last winter, compounded by waterlogged soils on many forest sites, led to extensive damage on private and State owned forest lands. In order to establish the most appropriate response for forest owners and the forest industry a taskforce, chaired by Mr Tom Hayes TD, Minister of State, and comprising relevant forestry stakeholders was put in place to assess the damage nationally and to identify the various issues arising. The taskforce issued a guidance note for forest owners, laying down the steps to consider in safely harvesting and selling the fallen trees and giving advice on a range of other associated issues.

Teagasc, in association with Coillte and my Department held two very successful events on managing storm damage in farm forests. These events were attended by over 400 forest owners. Teagasc forestry advisers continue to be available to discuss the issue with forest owners affected. Forest owners are also urged to get professional advice from qualified foresters to guide them through this process.

In relation to your specific point regarding a reconstitution scheme for forests damaged by last winter's storms, I can report that this matter is under consideration.

Animal Welfare Bodies

94. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will increase annual funding to an animal welfare organisation (details supplied) in County Kerry; if he will set out his views on whether animal welfare organisations operate on shoe-string budgets, are under-resourced and rely heavily on the work of volunteers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7518/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has provided funding to organisations involved in animal welfare since 1995 in order to enable these organisations provide a valuable service in the area of animal welfare. Applications for funding from animal welfare organisations are assessed by my Department and awards made on the basis of certain criteria, including the *level and type of assistance provided by the organisation in the delivery of care and welfare services to animals* and the level of funding raised by organisations from other sources to support welfare activities.

I accept that organisations in the voluntary sector face challenges in raising funds and many rely on support of volunteers to assist in the delivery of services. This is one of the reasons why financial assistance is being provided by my Department. Since December 2012, the organisation in question has been awarded funding amounting to almost €22,000, including €7,200 allocated in December last to support its work over the coming year. I am satisfied that this represents a reasonable level of support having regard to the current budgetary constraints.

Milk Quota

95. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry received a small amount of milk quota; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7547/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The named person was an applicant under my Department's recent Animal Disease Scheme.

This Scheme involves the allocation of milk quota, from the National Reserve, to milk producers who have incurred milk quota difficulties as a direct result of animal movement restrictions caused by an animal disease outbreak.

Quota allocations are granted on the basis of recommendations made by an independent Milk Quota Appeals Tribunal. The tribunal make their recommendations on the basis of the information provided by the applicant, the timing and duration of the restriction, and the producer's historic quota management performance.

It was on this basis that the named person received the allocation granted.

Due to the high number of applications received under the Scheme and the limited volume of quota available for distribution, it is not possible to increase the volumes allocated.

Air Corps

96. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Defence to provide details on the weapons that two Russian military aircraft which entered Irish-controlled air space in January 2015 were carrying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7470/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware that, on 28 January 2015, two Russian military aircraft were in an area for which the Irish Aviation Authority has air traffic control responsibility.

The Air Corps is not tasked or equipped to monitor military aircraft overflying Irish controlled airspace. This position is in accordance with the Air Corps' roles as set out in the White Paper on Defence (2000). Therefore, I am not in a position to provide further information in relation to these aircraft.

Direct Provision System

97. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding will be sourced to establish an art therapy service for children in direct provision accommodation centres (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7416/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department is responsible for the provision of full board accommodation and certain ancillary services to asylum seekers in accordance with the Government policy of direct provision. There are currently approximately 4,300 asylum seekers in 34 centres around the State. Aside from full board accommodation services provided by RIA, services to residents of direct provision centres are mainstreamed i.e. they receive a range of State services - education, health, community welfare supports and so on - in the same way as the general population.

It is not clear if the Deputy has a particular centre in that county in mind. Without further

detail it is not clear as to whether the issue is general art therapy provided through the mainstream education system or whether it refers to a service provided by local community groups or NGO's for children in Direct Provision centres. If a specific request is made to RIA the issue can be examined in detail.

As to the issue of services to asylum seekers generally, the Deputy may wish to note the establishment in October, 2014 of an independent Working Group to report to Government on improvements to the protection process, including Direct Provision and supports for asylum seekers. The terms of reference and membership of the Working Group, under the chairmanship of former High Court Judge Bryan McMahon, is published on RIA's website - www.ria.gov.ie. This Group is examining, inter alia, the provision of improved supports to asylum applicants, aimed at showing greater respect for the dignity of persons in the system and improving their quality of life.

Deportation Orders

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determining the current residency status permission to remain in the country, in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7441/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that following a comprehensive and thorough examination of the asylum claim and application for subsidiary protection, and a detailed examination of the representations she submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), a Deportation Order was signed on 18 December 2012 in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy.

The person concerned initiated judicial review proceedings challenging the Deportation Order made in respect of her. Those proceedings were struck out in favour of the Department on 01 December 2014 and accordingly, the Deportation Order stands.

Representations were received from the person concerned pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by Email 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.

Proposed Legislation

99. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made in regard to introducing the gambling control Bill 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7447/15]

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, at which point it was published on my Department's website.

The Scheme was subsequently referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting. As per the Government's current Legislative Programme it is not possible to indicate when the Bill is likely to be published.

Prisoner Data

100. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average daily cost of holding a prisoner in jail; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7456/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Irish Prison Service calculates the average annual cost of an available staffed prison space for inclusion in the Annual Report. For 2013, the latest year for which a figure is available, the cost was €65,542. This equates to an average daily cost of €179.57 per available staffed prison space.

Once finalised, the 2014 figures will be published on the Irish Prison Service web site and in the 2014 Annual Report.

Prison Committals

101. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons, by gender, who were committed to prison for non-payment of fines for each year since 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7458/15]

102. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the category of offences committed by persons who were committed to prison for non-payment of fines in 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7459/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that a breakdown of the number of persons by gender who were committed to prison solely for non-payment of fines for each of the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 is set out in the following table.

In the case of 2014, these figures are provisional pending the publication of the Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2014 which is subject to change.

Year	Male	Female	Total
2007	1,075	159	1,234
2008	2,036	307	2,343
2009	3,721	629	4,350
2010	5,053	942	5,995
2011	5,536	1,191	6,727
2012	5,940	1,536	7,476
2013	5,625	1,740	7,365
2014	5,984	2,156	8,140

I can advise the Deputy that the number of such persons held in custody at any one time

is a tiny fraction of the overall prisoner population. To illustrate this point, on 18 February, 2015, 3 people, 0.1 percent, out of a prison population of 3,755 in custody that day fell into this category.

The information in relation to the category of offences committed by the 8,140 persons who were committed to prison for non payment of fines in 2014 is not readily available. I will forward the information to the Deputy as soon as it is to hand.

Crime Prevention

103. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has researched the methods to reduce bicycle theft that are employed in other jurisdictions, including the random parking of bait bikes fitted with a global positioning systems, and that these have proven successful in some instances. [7524/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the examination of crime prevention measures such as the one mentioned by the Deputy is a matter in the first instance for the Garda authorities, including with respect to any legal issues arising in relation to such schemes.

An Garda Síochána is proactive in encouraging the public to protect their property, including bicycles, and a range of measures are in place to prevent and tackle the theft of bicycles.

In this regard I am informed by the Garda authorities that a range of operational measures are pursued to combat bicycle theft and to target those who engage in it, and there is ongoing provision by An Garda Síochána of crime prevention information, and awareness raising among the general public and bicycle retailers in relation to bicycle theft.

I am further advised by the Garda authorities that analysis is conducted to determine areas of high volume theft and to identify the main offenders for these crimes so that a targeted operational approach is taken to prevention and detection.

The range of measures being pursued by An Garda Síochána include working with bicycle retailers and communities to encourage and promote bicycle registration. In addition, information leaflets on bicycle theft have been circulated and a bicycle sticker campaign has also been operated in areas where bicycles are locked by their owners. Gardaí also provide presentations to Neighbourhood Watch schemes, policing forums, schools, places of employment, and consult with apartment and building management companies on bicycle security and safety generally.

Crime Data

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details with regard to burglaries in Galway city; and if she will provide statistics regarding the number of burglaries reported from June 2010 to May 2012, June 2012 to May 2013, June 2013 to May 2014 and June 2014 to date in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7551/15]

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 available statistics directly to the Deputy.

Residency Permits

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or potential residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7555/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is currently registered in the State under Stamp 4 conditions granted to them on the basis of their marriage to an Irish national. This permission is valid until 11 August 2015 and is renewable by attending at their local immigration office accompanied by their Irish spouse.

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.

Organised Crime

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which sufficient provision is being made in terms of resources, technology and appropriate staffing levels, to facilitate An Garda Síochána in tackling the new emerging criminal gangs, who appear to have achieved a high level of criminal professionalism, learned from their predecessors; if a specific response is required in this situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7561/15]

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which she remains satisfied, regarding the ability of An Garda Síochána to respond to new challenges from the criminal world, with particular reference to the availability of modern technology, or other resources required, such an increased strength of the force to cope with new and emerging challenges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7564/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 109 together.

Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of available Garda resources. This includes personnel, Garda vehicles and the various technologies utilised to support frontline Gardaí and intelligence led operations against organised crime. This process takes account of annual policing priorities determined by me as Minister for Justice in consultation with the Commissioner as provided for under Section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

The first intake since 2009 of 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College, Templemore, on 15th September 2014. As part of Budget 2015, a further intake of 200 recruits in two batches was announced. On 15 December 2014, the first 100 of these batches commenced their training and a further 100 entered the college in early February. This will bring to 300 the number of recruits in the Garda College and is a measure of the Government's commitment to

ensure that recruitment to An Garda Síochána continues seamlessly. The September intake will attest as members of the Garda Síochána in May 2015 and the December intake will attest in August 2015. On attestation they will be assigned to Garda stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner.

The strength of the Garda Síochána on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 12,799. There were also 1,124 Garda Reserve members, with a further 48 in training. In addition, there were over 2,000 Garda civilian staff. I remain in discussion with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the timing of future intakes of Garda recruits.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they are continually looking to ensure that the latest information, communications and forensic technologies are sourced and deployed to achieve their strategic objectives as set out in the context of their annual policing plans, as provided for in section 22 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, which includes commitments to target individuals and groups engaged in organised criminal activity and terrorism. This policy is designed to ensure that the Garda Síochána will be in a position to meet the evolving needs of a modern effective police force and take advantage of proven up to date technological developments in crime detection and prevention as they occur.

In terms of existing technology, the Deputy will be aware that a considerable amount of new Garda ICT solutions has been delivered over the past number of years. These include the deployment of a secure national digital radio system (NDRS), the deployment and support of Garda and Community CCTV systems, an automated number plate recognition (ANPR) system, and the addition of many new functions to the PULSE system, which itself is further supported by a dedicated Garda data entry service in Castlebar.

In the area of forensics the situation is that the Garda authorities currently employ state-of-the-art automated fingerprint and ballistics identification systems which I am informed are at least on a par with those used by police forces in other EU jurisdictions. The Deputy will also be aware that the forensic capacity of An Garda Síochána will be further enhanced by a new national DNA database, scheduled to become operational shortly, which was established on foot of the Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database System) Act, 2014.

I have also clearly signalled my intention to support the Garda Síochána in its efforts to address deficits which were identified in the recent Garda Inspectorate report on crime investigation. However, the Deputy will appreciate that the issues raised in the report are widespread, varied and far-reaching and, when taken together with the review of the Garda Síochána under the Haddington Road agreement, will demand significant structural reform within the Garda Síochána. The need for additional resources across a number of areas will be examined within that context. Furthermore, I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Commissioner has commenced an in-depth examination of all recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate Report with a view to determining what can be implemented in the short, medium and long term. I also look forward to the significant contribution to this process of reform that will be made by the new policing authority which is to be established shortly.

Garda Strength

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent she expects to be in a position to increase Garda strength, in line with demographics, in view of the availability of new Garda recruits; if specific crime blackspots will be targeted in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7562/15]

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 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.

The strength of the Garda Síochána on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 12,799. There were also 1,124 Garda Reserve members, with a further 48 in training. In addition, there were over 2,000 Garda civilian staff.

I was very pleased that my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform agreed to the resumption of Garda recruitment. Last September, 100 new Garda recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore, the first intake of Garda recruits since May 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 recruits in December and a third intake of 100 this month. This means that there are now 300 Garda students in training.

The first intake of recruits will attest as members of An Garda Síochána in May of this year and will be assigned to Garda Stations by the Garda Commissioner. The Garda Commissioner, will of course, continue to keep the of all Garda Stations under review within the overall context of the needs of Garda Stations throughout the country.

I remain in discussion with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the timing of future intakes of Garda recruits.

Garda Deployment

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which she expects to be able to replenish Garda strength in stations in County Kildare, with particular reference to specific crime blackspots, and stations that have experienced a reduction in Garda strength, over the past six years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7563/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, 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.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of each Garda Station in the Kildare Garda Division on 31 December 2009 to 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, are set out in the following table.

I was very pleased that my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform agreed to the resumption of Garda recruitment. Last September, 100 new Garda recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore, the first intake of Garda recruits since May 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 recruits in December and a third intake of 100 this month. This means that there are now 300 Garda students in training. The Garda Commissioner, will of course, continue to keep the needs of Kildare Garda Division under review within the overall context of the needs of Garda Divisions throughout the country.

I remain in discussion with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the timing of future intakes of Garda recruits.

Garda Station	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Athy	27	29	31	34	32	30
Ballytore	2	2	2	1	Closed	Closed
Castledermot	3	3	3	3	4	4
Kildare	32	33	26	27	29	30
Monasterevin	4	4	5	4	4	4
Newbridge	44	45	47	50	49	47
Rathangan	4	4	3	3	3	3
Carbury	5	4	4	5	6	5
Celbridge	18	18	17	17	14	13
Kilcock	8	8	9	10	9	9
Leixlip	33	35	34	30	38	34
Maynooth	15	15	13	14	13	13
BallymoreEustace	1	1	2	2	Closed	Closed
Clane	8	10	11	9	8	7
Kilcullen	3	2	2	2	4	4
Kill	3	4	2	2	Closed	Closed
Naas	107	101	101	103	100	96
Robertstown	4	5	6	2	2	2

Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 106.

Organised Crime

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps she will take to address the ongoing issue of unlawful killings, generated by organised crime, with particular reference to shootings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7565/15]

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which specific steps will be taken to impede the development of organised criminal gangs, with particular reference to paying special attention to new entrants into this field of activity, and the likely consequences if this is not vigorously challenged; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7566/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 and 111 together.

The Policing Plan 2015 of An Garda Síochána sets out the continued commitment of An Garda Síochána to pro-actively target groups and individuals engaged in criminal activity, including organised criminal activities.

It is unfortunately the case that gun crime has for some time been an inherent part of organised criminal activity in Ireland, as it is in other similar jurisdictions. I am in regular contact with the Garda Commissioner in relation to the challenges presented by this type of crime and the Commissioner has outlined the substantial efforts being made by An Garda Síochána to identify and target those involved. Such crimes demand a robust response, and this is precisely what is happening. Gardaí tackle this type of crime through a range of targeted and intelligence based operations, often disrupting and preventing incidents, as well as detecting and prosecuting those involved.

Heavy penalties are provided for weapons offences in our criminal law and mandatory minimum penalties have been introduced for certain firearms offences. The considerable powers already available to Gardaí have been supplemented further by the DNA Database legislation enacted last year, which provides for the establishment of a Database which will have the capacity to link suspects to unsolved crimes using forensic evidence, and will greatly assist Gardaí in investigating a whole range serious offences.

The various Garda operations which target armed and organised criminals are complemented and supported by Garda engagement with local communities, including a range of community local fora, to address local concerns relating to crime, community safety and the impact of organised crime on community life. Support for young persons who may be at risk of becoming involved in crime is particularly evident in the Garda Youth Diversion Programme and in particular the 100 Garda Youth Diversion Projects which operate nationwide and which are funded and overseen by my Department's unit within the Irish Youth Justice Service. These projects are community-based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives run by community based organisations in partnership with An Garda Síochána which aim to reduce youth crime and seek to stop young people from progressing into adult crime.

Garda Policing Plans

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the degree to which policing methods in this jurisdiction remain in line with those in other European Union and other non-European Union jurisdictions, with particular reference to the need to achieve best practice, efficiency and effectiveness; whether comparison continues to be made with the best, in this context; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7567/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 contains provisions the purpose of which are to endeavour to ensure that the Garda Síochána operates to the best standards in line with the police services of other comparable jurisdictions.

Section 24 of the Act provided for the establishment, by the Garda Commissioner, of a Garda Professional Standards Unit (GPSU) with the specific remit to examine and review the operational, administrative and management performance of the Garda Síochána at all levels and to propose measures to the Commissioner to improve that performance, and further, to promote the highest standards of practice, as measured by reference to the best standards of comparable police services, in operational, administrative and management matters relating to the Garda Síochána.

The Act also provided for the establishment of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate (GSI). The objective of the Inspectorate, as stipulated under section 117 of the Act, is to ensure that the resources available to the Garda Síochána are used so as to achieve and maintain the highest levels of efficiency and effectiveness in its operation and administration, as measured by reference to the best standards of comparable police services.

Garda Transport Provision

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which Garda transport continues to be updated, in line with requirements, and in keeping with best practice internationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7568/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Decisions in relation to the provision, allocation and fit out of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources.

In that context, the additional €10 million which I recently secured for investment in the Garda fleet will provide for a significant number of new Garda vehicles. I am advised by the Garda authorities that, to date, an order for 370 new vehicles has been placed. These vehicles are equipped with a varying range of technology to take account of the relevant Garda operational requirements, including state-of-the-art communications equipment.

The vehicles will be allocated over the coming months, following fit out, in accordance with the Garda Commissioner's identified policing requirements.

Garda Resources

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which cold cases continue to receive attention and follow-up; if sufficient resources remain available to An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7569/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the function of the Serious Crime Review Team (SCRT) is to assist Senior Investigating Officers assigned to the case in question in bringing investigations to a successful conclusion by identifying further investigative opportunities and ensuring that investigations conform to approved best practice guidelines.

At the conclusion of each review a substantive report is provided to the Senior Investigating Officer who considers the opportunities for further investigation for dissemination back into the investigative and operational units. Any recommendation of organisational effect is disseminated within the Garda organisation to improve the overall investigative capability of An Garda Síochána.

As the Deputy will be aware, the provision and allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of identified operational demands. In this regard I am informed that the SCRT continues to review serious cases that remain unsolved and continues to identify evidence and witnesses to assist in the development of these cases.

Bail Law

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the efforts that continue to be made to combat recidivism, with particular reference to crime committed while on bail, more than once; the extent to which resources are available to combat this trend; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7570/15]

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of occasions on which crime was committed by those on bail in the past six years to date, by category of crime; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7571/15]

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which the law on bail continues to be abused by the criminal fraternity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7572/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Ques-

tions Nos. 115 to 117, inclusive, together.

Tackling recidivist and prolific offending is a key focus for An Garda Síochána and the criminal justice system generally. Garda operations such as Operation Fiacla identify and target prolific offenders and arrangements are in place for the case management of such offenders so that all relevant information is co-ordinated by An Garda Síochána and available when such persons come before the courts.

The Deputy will also be aware that both the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service work through a variety of programmes to address offending behaviour and to promote desistance from future criminal activity. In this regard my Department has published two studies on recidivism rates for offenders who were given a community sanction or a custodial sentence in recent years. The findings of these reports, and it is hoped future studies on recidivism rates, provides invaluable information to both the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service in identifying the interventions that are most effective in changing offending behaviour.

In relation to bail, the Deputy will be aware that a decision to grant bail in a particular case is a matter for the court, which is, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of its judicial functions. There is a constitutional presumption in favour of bail because, in the eyes of the law, a person is innocent until proven guilty. The provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights also restrict the extent to which the right to bail can be limited.

Prior to the Sixteenth Amendment of the Constitution, bail could be refused essentially only on the grounds that the accused person would be likely to abscond or interfere with witnesses or evidence. Section 2 of the Bail Act 1997, which gave effect to the Sixteenth Amendment of the Constitution, permits the courts to refuse bail to a person charged with a serious offence where refusal of bail is reasonably considered necessary to prevent the commission of a serious offence by that person. A “serious offence” is an offence listed in the Schedule to the Bail Act that is punishable by at least five years imprisonment.

Section 11 of the Criminal Justice 1984 as amended by section 22 of the Criminal Justice Act 2007 provides that any sentence of imprisonment for an offence committed while on bail shall be consecutive but if imposed in the District Court the aggregate term of imprisonment shall not exceed two years.

As regards reform of the bail laws, I can inform the Deputy that the preparation of the General Scheme of a Bail Bill to modernise the law on bail is at a very advanced stage and I intend to bring proposals to Government on the matter in the coming weeks.

While the primary aim of the proposed Bail Bill is to consolidate and update bail law, I wish to take the opportunity to seek, as far as is possible, within the constraints of the Constitution and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, to focus the legislation on the protection of the individual and of the public. The intention is that the new provisions will provide better guidance to the courts on how such protection might be provided. The new Bill will seek to improve the operation of the bail system and make the law as effective as possible in protecting the public against the commission of offences by persons on bail.

In relation to the information sought about crimes committed while on bail, I have asked the Central Statistics Office, as the national statistical agency responsible for the publication of crime statistics, to provide relevant information directly to the Deputy.

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which any drop in Garda strength, through retirement, dismissal and resignation, is being addressed by way of recruitment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7573/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The strength of the Garda Síochána on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 12,799. There were also 1,124 Garda Reserve members, with a further 48 in training. In addition, there were over 2,000 Garda civilian staff.

I was very pleased that my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform agreed to the resumption of Garda recruitment. Last September, 100 new Garda recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore, the first intake of Garda recruits since May 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 recruits in December and a third intake of 100 this month. This means that there are now 300 Garda students in training.

I remain in discussion with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the timing of future intakes of Garda recruits.

Garda Promotions

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which various promotional posts remain to be filled throughout An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7574/15]

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.

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.

Promotion competitions to fill a number of vacancies at the ranks of Chief Superintendent and Superintendent have been completed and the Government has 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.

An open competition to fill the two vacancies at Deputy Commissioner level is currently underway under the auspices of the Public Appointments Service.

Garda Divisional Headquarters

120. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality where the new Garda Síochána headquarters for the south-eastern region will be located; the rationale behind the selection of this location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7575/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Garda authorities that a new Garda Division of Kilkenny/Carlow was established in 2008 with Kilkenny designated as the Divisional HQ Station. Kilkenny Garda Station has been upgraded and extended to meet the requirements of a Divisional HQ Station and to provide for the office of the Assistant Commissioner, South Eastern Region.

In that context, I am advised that the office of the Assistant Commissioner, South Eastern Region has been located at Government Buildings, Hebron Road, Kilkenny since November, 2013.

Firearms Licences

121. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality regarding the proposed new legislation restricting certain licensed firearms, the current efforts to tackle the high number of illegal firearms, which is estimated to be more than 100,000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7585/15]

122. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the protection local businesses affected by the proposed new firearms legislation will be offered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7587/15]

125. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the compensation to be provided to persons affected by the proposed new firearms legislation, who will have to surrender or destroy their weapons and recreational equipment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7636/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 121, 122 and 125 together.

I should say initially that my Department is not aware of any reliable basis for the figure quoted in the Deputy's question as representing the number of illegal firearms here.

In light of public safety concerns highlighted by An Garda Síochána, a joint Department of Justice and Equality/An Garda Síochána Working Group was established by the Department of Justice and Equality to review firearms licensing. The report of this Working Group was published on 13 November 2014 and submissions on the report were sought from stakeholders and the public by 31 January 2015. The consultation process gave individuals and groups an opportunity to contribute to the development of firearms policy and legislation and will enable consideration to be given to the future direction of such legislation.

The submissions received are currently being examined and incorporated into a report for me. The Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality has also sought submissions and held hearings with interested parties in relation to the Working Party report. It is expected that their report on the issue will be available in a number of weeks.

I understand the Deputy's Question No 122 relates to what effects, if any, proposed changes to firearms licensing will have on firearms dealers. I wish to advise that the majority of licensed and licensable shotguns and rifles in this State will not be affected by the proposals to amend the firearms licensing system.

The issue of compensation which the Deputy raises is dealt with at Section 13 of the Working Group Report. The report states that the Courts have held that the possession of a firearm is not a right but a privilege. The Courts have in the past taken the view that what is in the State's

gift cannot be required to be compensated if it is withdrawn.

I have already given a commitment that I will not make any final decisions until I have considered all the submissions which have been made and have met the key stakeholders, including the organisations who represent those who use firearms for sporting purposes. These meetings will take place following receipt and consideration of both my Department's and the Oireachtas Committee reports.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for a report in relation to specific measures being taken to tackle illegal firearms. I will reply further to the Deputy when that information becomes available.

Parking Regulations

123. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the laws that are being broken when persons park their cars on council green areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7625/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be appreciate it is not within my remit to provide legal advice or to interpret the law. If, however, the Deputy has specific instances of concern, I will have inquiries made regarding the particular circumstances in question.

Garda Operations

124. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to deal with gun crime; her views on the first gun murder of 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7632/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I do of course share the Deputy's concern about gun and other violent crime, and deplore the brutal shooting he refers to. He will appreciate, however, that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on any specific crimes which are currently under Garda investigation.

It is unfortunately the case that gun crime has for some time been an inherent part of organised criminal activity in Ireland, as it is in other similar jurisdictions. I am in regular contact with the Garda Commissioner in relation to the challenges presented by this type of crime and the Commissioner has outlined the substantial efforts being made by An Garda Síochána to identify and target those involved. Such crimes demand a robust response, and this is precisely what is happening. Gardaí tackle this type of crime through a range of targeted and intelligence based operations, often disrupting and preventing incidents, as well as detecting and prosecuting those involved.

A range of Garda operations is in place to target and confront armed and organised criminals. In addition to these enforcement measures, An Garda Síochána also engage extensively with communities in a range of fora to address local concerns relating to crime and community safety, including the impact that organised crime can have at a community level.

Heavy penalties are provided for weapons offences in our criminal law and mandatory minimum penalties have been introduced for certain firearms offences. The considerable powers already available to Gardaí have been supplemented further by the DNA Database legislation enacted last year, which provides for the establishment of a Database which will have the

capacity to link suspects to unsolved crimes using forensic evidence, and will greatly assist Gardaí in investigating a whole range serious offences.

I should also advise the Deputy that, in view of public safety concerns raised by the Garda Commissioner, a joint Review of operational, legislative and administrative issues governing firearms licensing was conducted by my Department and An Garda Síochána. The report of this working group review was published in November 2014 and submissions on the report were sought from stakeholders and the public by 31 January 2015. The submissions received are currently being examined and incorporated into a report for my attention.

Question No. 125 answered with Question No. 121.

Garda Operations

126. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will support a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7639/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of the proposed demonstration to which the Deputy refers. I am informed by the Garda authorities that they have met with organisers of the demonstration and they remain in ongoing discussions. It is the responsibility of An Garda Síochána to put in place appropriate and proportionate operational plans for parades and similar events in the public arena, taking account of the needs of all stakeholders and the requirement to ensure public safety.

Child and Family Agency Services

127. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason Empowerment Plus, a youth and family support service for the west of Ireland, has had its Health Service Executive contract terminated; the reason there was no advance notice and no discussion with social workers or families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7414/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Empowerment Plus service is contracted by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in Galway only. Services provided by this organisation were previously offered to ten families.

I am advised by Tusla, that there were emerging concerns about the level and quality of the services being provided.

An audit was undertaken by the Agency and the findings were that the service was not fit for purpose. Subsequently a decision was made to re-allocate the ten families to Tusla services.

Tusla's primary concern was that no families would be inconvenienced or left without a service. The service was not terminated until this re-allocation had taken place and the Social Work service was informed throughout the process.

In relation to the Galway and Roscommon, Tusla will be commissioning a new Family Support Service in these areas and Empowerment Plus have been invited to tender for this contract.

Preschool Services

128. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on difficulties currently being experienced by child care providers (details supplied); if he will liaise with the Department of Justice and Equality, with a view to working towards a solution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7527/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The provision of pre-school services is regulated the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations. These Regulations require that a person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure appropriate vetting of all staff, students and volunteers who have access to a child.

The Department of Justice and Equality has responsibility for the vetting legislation which sets out the requirements in relation to the vetting of persons who work with children. I have asked officials in my Department to consider the issues raised by the Deputy and to bring these matters to the attention of Department of Justice and Equality officials in future discussions on the application of the vetting requirements.

Health Services Provision

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when much needed occupational therapy will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7406/15]

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

Health Services Provision

130. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding treatment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7409/15]

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

Disability Services Provision

131. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding potential changes proposed in the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7411/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive is currently engaged in a major reconfiguration of its existing therapy resources for children with disabilities into multi-disciplinary geographically based teams, as part of its *National Programme on Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18 years)*. The key objective of this Programme is to bring about equity of access to disability services and consistency of service delivery, with a clear pathway for children with

disabilities and their families to services, regardless of where they live, where these children go to school or the nature of the individual child's difficulties.

The Programme is a key priority for the HSE's Social Care Directorate. An additional €4m was allocated in 2014 to assist in implementing the Programme, equating to approximately 80 additional therapy posts. Further investment of €4 million will also be made to support the development of therapy services in 2015 (equating to €6 million in a full year). The transition to this new service model is taking place on a phased basis and includes consultation and engagement with stakeholders, including service users and their families.

My Department has asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in respect of the specific operational issue that he has raised. 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.

Social Workers Recruitment

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a social worker will be assigned to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7413/15]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

133. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health the policy that exists on the presence of automated external defibrillators in Health Service Executive health centres; the monitoring procedures that are in place to ensure defibrillators are present and in working order; if the Health Service Executive is satisfied that all its health centres currently have working defibrillators on-site; the names of any health centres that do not have working defibrillators on-site; if all health centre staff are receiving regular cardiopulmonary resuscitation training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7417/15]

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

Orthodontic Service Provision

134. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when a consultant orthodontist will be appointed to the Midland Health Board, in view of the delay of providing orthodontic treatment to a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7419/15]

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 the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Groups

135. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made by the Health Service Executive and hospital groups in developing three-year strategic plans; the measures that will be included to facilitate staff who wish to transfer between hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7445/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The reform of our acute hospital services into Hospital Groups is an absolute priority for the Government. As the Deputy is aware, one of my Department's priorities for 2015 is to get all of the Hospital Groups up and running as single cohesive entities.

A key step in this regard will be the development of Hospital Group Strategic Plans. The Strategic Advisory Group, established to provide objective advice and expertise on the implementation of Hospital Groups, is currently finalising a guidance paper on developing the strategic plans. This guidance will ensure a coherent approach nationally and will be provided to the Hospital Group Chairs to inform and assist them in developing their strategic plans in 2015. I understand that the Systems Reform Division in the HSE has also been engaging with the Group Chairs and Group CEOs and will be providing them with assistance in the development of their plans.

Essentially, in developing their plans, Hospital Groups will be expected to demonstrate a co-ordinated approach to the planning and delivery of services within and across the hospital groups, with an increased focus on small hospitals managing routine urgent or planned care locally and more complex care managed in the larger hospitals and appropriate deployment of staff is key to achieving this. Hospital Groups are subject to the Employment Control Framework and Public Service Pay Policy in respect of staff numbers, pay, terms, conditions and other relevant matters. However, as part of the drive to empower management, encourage innovation and ensure autonomy with real accountability, it is intended that the HSE will devolve authority to the Hospital Groups to recruit and deploy staff across the Group.

Cancer Incidence

136. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the number of children who have high medical and / or care needs, while they are fighting cancer, and attending children's wards, in Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal and Sligo Regional Hospital. [7460/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Cancer treatment for children in Ireland is led and directed by Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, Dublin, who operate a Shared Care Model system with other hospitals.

I am advised by the Saolta University Hospital Group that four children who have cancer are being treated in Sligo Regional Hospital and nine children in Letterkenny General Hospital under the direction of Our Lady's Children's Hospital.

Medical Card Eligibility

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card has been withdrawn in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7461/15]

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.

HSE Staffing

138. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the intern panel for care assistants in Mullingar General Hospital, County Westmeath, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [7466/15]

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

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7467/15]

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.

Health Services

140. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive will provide clarification on a matter (details supplied) regarding phone calls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7491/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to investigate the matter and to reply directly to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

HIQA Remit

141. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) from ALONE regarding the extension of the powers of the Health Information and Quality Authority to investigate unsolicited complaints about persons in care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7500/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Information and Quality Authority is the independent authority established under the Health Act 2007 to drive continuous improvement and to monitor safety and quality in Ireland's health and personal social care services. Since 2009 all nursing homes - public, voluntary and private have been registered and inspected by HIQA.

The functions of the Minister for Health in relation to HIQA, and the Chief Inspector of Social Services are prescribed in the Act, and in this respect the Chief Inspector is independent in the exercise of these functions.

As regulator, HIQA's remit operates at the level of facilities rather than that of individual complaints, but the requirements at facility level impact very directly on how individual cases are dealt with.

Nursing home operators must ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to protect residents from all forms of abuse. These measures include staff training in relation to the detection and prevention of and responses to abuse. Any incident or allegation of abuse must be investigated and operators must have policies and procedures in place for the prevention, detection and response to abuse. Furthermore, they must notify HIQA of any allegation of abuse or serious adverse incidents that occur in a nursing home.

All nursing homes are required to have an accessible and effective complaints procedure, including an appeals process. They must investigate all complaints promptly, and following investigation put in place any measures required for improvement. Records of complaints made are required to be kept. These are available for inspection, thus enabling the HIQA inspector to determine whether the complaints system is sufficiently robust.

HIQA takes into account and uses all information received to inform and plan its regulatory activity, and information on individual cases can provide useful pointers in this context. HIQA's programme of both scheduled and unannounced inspections helps to ensure that standards are maintained and where issues of non-compliance arise, that these are addressed and rectified. If a nursing home is found not to be in compliance with the Regulations it may either fail to achieve or lose its registration status. HIQA also has wide discretion in deciding whether to impose conditions of registration on nursing homes.

My Department, in consultation with both HIQA and the service providers, is working on an ongoing basis to improve and update the requirements that apply to nursing home care. Any request from HIQA for an extension of their remit on the lines suggested by the Deputy will be carefully considered.

I would also like to point out that Ireland has a highly developed and effective system in place in relation to elder abuse. In particular, within the HSE there are 30 Senior Case Workers for the Protection of Older People who assess all referrals of alleged abuse reported to them.

Hospital Staff

142. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health the number and types of consultant posts which have been approved for Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe, County

Galway; if there are consultant posts planned for the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar, County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7501/15]

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.

Appointments to State Boards

143. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding persons with a disability in respect of a board of management appointment (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7504/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Central Remedial Clinic (CRC) provides a range of services for people with a disability on behalf of the Health Service Executive (HSE) under Section 38 of the Health Act 2004. I understand that Boardmatch Ireland were engaged to assist with identifying replacement candidates for appointment to the Board of the CRC in 2014. I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Services for People with Disabilities

144. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding services for persons with a disability in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7506/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Each Local Health Office area in the Health Service Executive (HSE) has a dedicated Disability Manager to coordinate the delivery of services to people with disabilities. It is open to the individual and their family to pursue this matter with the Disability Manager for their area who can be contacted at Coolock Health Centre, Cromcastle Road, Coolock, Dublin 5, telephone 01-8164292.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

145. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health in relation to the Long-Term Illness Scheme, his plans to review the terms provided to certain qualifying medical conditions; if his attention has been drawn to the offensive nature of certain terms, listed as being covered by the scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7508/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme.

The term “mental handicap”, as used in the Regulations made in 1971 (S.I. No. 277 of 1971), encapsulates such conditions as Down’s Syndrome and Global Development Delay etc. The Consultant or GP who signs the patient’s application for a LTI book outlines which condition is relevant for the patient.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme or to amend the terminology used in the Scheme at this time.

Health Services Funding

146. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will provide the necessary capital funding to keep a facility open (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7517/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as it is the statutory body with responsibility for delivering health and personal social services. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office who will follow up on the matter.

Hospital Facilities

147. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if progress has been made on developing a helipad at Cork University Hospital; if he will provide the up-to-date position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7520/15]

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.

Tobacco Control Measures

148. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his plans for legislative proposals that would have implications for cigarette vending machines; if so, his proposals; the aims of any such proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7533/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In June 2014, the Government approved the drafting of legislation to provide for measures in relation to the sale of tobacco products and non-medicinal nicotine delivery systems, including e-cigarettes. My Department recently conducted a public consultation on this legislation and the results of this process will inform the Regulatory Impact Analysis and the General Scheme of a Bill. It is expected that Heads of Bill will be published during 2015.

Respite Care Services

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which respite or residential care will be made available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7552/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if, and when, the Fair Deal provisions will be made available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7554/15]

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

General Practitioner Services

151. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when it was decided to terminate payments, under the Rural Practice Allowance, for general practitioner practices, when the principal retires, and is replaced by another doctor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7559/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Where a General Practitioner (GP), who holds a General Medical Services (GMS) contract, lives and practices in a centre with a population of less than 500 and where there is not a town with a population of 1,500 or more within a 4.83 km (3 mile) radius of that centre, the GP is entitled to a Rural Practice Allowance.

Issues relating to the filling of vacant GMS panels are a matter for the HSE; therefore, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this 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 Appeals

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress, to date, in respect of an appeal for a medical card, in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, which was submitted on 9 December 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7560/15]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

153. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a charge, per item, for holders of the long-term illness card; his views on the potential negative impact of the charge on the health of the card holders, with a consequential increased cost in hospital fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7578/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI scheme, which are as follows: Acute Leukaemia; Mental handicap; Cerebral Palsy; Mental Illness (in a person under 16); Cystic Fibrosis; Multiple Sclerosis; Diabetes Insipidus; Muscular Dystrophies; Diabetes Mellitus; Parkinsonism; Epilepsy; Phenylketonuria; Haemophilia; Spina Bifida; Hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide.

The LTI scheme enables persons suffering from the above prescribed conditions to be provided with drugs, medicines and medical and surgical appliances for the treatment of their condition, free of charge. While from time to time the Department examines policy options regarding the application of the GMS and community drugs schemes, there are no plans to introduce a co-payment for the LTI scheme.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

154. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a portable oxygen cylinder will be returned to persons (details supplied) in County Carlow; when a back-up battery for a bilevel positive airway passage machine will be provided, as prescribed by the persons' consultant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7580/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the issues raised by the Deputy relate to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to you. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

155. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if she will intervene on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry, so that the person is not transferred from Killarney to the mid-Kerry area for services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7596/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. I have asked the HSE to look into the particular matter raised and to reply directly to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Ambulance Service Provision

156. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement the Health Information and Quality Authority recommendation that by-pass protocols be amended, to allow 999 ambulances to transport patients to facilities, such as medical assessment units, and minor injury units, where appropriate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7597/15]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

157. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the reason Galway Roscommon Primary Community Continuing Care failed to spend up to 10% of its allocated budget for mental health services in 2014; the reason its budget was cut by a further 5% in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7598/15]

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

Medical Card Data

158. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health as of 1 February 2015, the number of medical cards issued; the number of general practitioner cards issued; and the number for each type of card issued on a discretionary basis. [7614/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The medical card and GP visit card figures, as requested by the Deputy, are provided in the following table:

-	1 February 2015
Card Type	No. of Cards
Medical Cards	1,766,432
of which granted involving discretion	78,932
GP Visit cards	160,2796
of which granted involving discretion	35,776

National Treatment Purchase Fund Waiting Times

159. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason his predecessor's instruction that the National Treatment Purchase Fund publish its monthly waiting list report, at the same time as the Health Service Executive publishes its monthly performance report, is no longer in force. [7615/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The publication of the NTPF reports arises from the NTPF reverting to its previous practice in this regard which facilitates the early publication of waiting list information.

The previous arrangements whereby the NTPF published waiting list information at the same time as the equivalent HSE monthly report was agreed with the HSE.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Waiting Times

160. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the National Treatment Purchase Fund published a waiting list report for December 2014. [7616/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Information in respect to the December waiting list was published by the NTPF and overwritten as is necessary to present January 2015 information. The NTPF is currently working on a new format for publication that will include historical information and trend analysis information.

Maternity Services

161. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form all public-voluntary hospitals that conduct pre-natal tests; if he will provide for each month in 2014 the number of such tests in each of those hospitals; and if he will provide for each hospital in each month in 2014 the number of tests where the hospital was required to seek the test results abroad. [7617/15]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

162. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the fair deal scheme; if participant costs will be increasing soon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7622/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme is expected to be finalised at the end of this quarter after which it will be made publicly available. Among other issues, the Review is examining the on-going sustainability of the Scheme and it will make recommendations for the future management and operation of the Scheme. However, it should be pointed out when contributions towards the cost of nursing home care increased in the past, the increases only applied to new applicants to the Scheme.

General Practitioner Services

163. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the roll-out of free general practitioner care for children under six years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7628/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, a universal GP service without fees, as set out in the Programme for Government. The Government has commenced this process in respect of all children under 6 years. The Health (General Practitioner Service) Act 2014, which provides an entitlement for all children aged under 6 to a GP service without fees, was enacted on 25 July 2014.

Under a Framework Agreement, the Department of Health, the HSE and the IMO are en-

gaged intensively on the introduction of GP services without fees for children aged under 6. The aim is to have the under-6's phase implemented by Quarter 2, 2015, subject to the conclusion of those discussions and the conclusion of the fee-setting process.

Diplomatic Representation

164. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the protocols or agreements that are in place to allow for the entry into Irish controlled air space, or Irish sovereign air space of British military aircraft; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7471/15]

165. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the Russian response to Irish concerns over the recent episode involving the flight of a Russian bomber off the west coast; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7525/15]

167. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with the Russian Ambassador, or the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, regarding the circumstances where two Russian military aircraft entered Irish-controlled airspace in January 2015; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these aircraft were going to enter-Irish controlled airspace; the details he knew of this situation at the time; the details regarding the episode now; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7473/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164, 165 and 167 together.

The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952 gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in Ireland and in Irish airspace. However, as the aircraft in question did not at any time enter Irish sovereign airspace there was no requirement to seek permission in accordance with the Order.

The aircraft were in an area for which the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) has responsibility for the provision, operation and management of air navigation services for civil aviation. In the discharge of its operational mandate, pursuant to the Irish Aviation Authority Act, 1993, issues relating to entry into Irish controlled airspace are accordingly a matter for the IAA, which operates under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Given this mandate and the potential impact of this incident on civil aviation, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and the IAA monitored this incident closely.

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has since relayed its concerns about the incident to the International Civil Aviation Organisation. It is emphasised that the IAA coordinated closely with its UK counterparts at all stages during the incident so as to avoid a risk to any civil aircraft during the incident. Although there was no such risk on this occasion, such non-notified and non-controlled flight activity is not acceptable.

The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport consulted with me and with other members of the Government in relation to the incident and on the development of an agreed response.

As part of that agreed response, and at my instruction, a senior official from my Department met with the Russian Ambassador. The official conveyed the serious concerns of the Government about the unacceptable safety risk which could be posed by non-notified and non-controlled flight activity. The Ambassador undertook to bring the concerns expressed to the attention of his authorities in Moscow.

Consular Services Representations

166. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number and location of representations made to the State's embassies and consulates, between 9 and 16 February 2015, seeking an end to the arrest of those who attended a protest in Jobstown in Tallaght, Dublin 24 in November 2014. [7442/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Between 9 and 16 February 2015, three Irish missions abroad received letters of protest relating to the policing response to incidents at a protest at Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24.

These were our Embassies in London and Stockholm and our Consulate General in Edinburgh. In addition, a peaceful protest was held outside the Embassy of Ireland in Vienna.

Question No. 167 answered with Question No. 164.

Departmental Expenditure

168. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the total cost of producing the Global Island policy document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7474/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Together with the Taoiseach, I launched the Government's review of Foreign Policy *The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World* on 13 January 2015 at the conference organised by my Department on "Representing the Global Island". The purpose of the review was to provide a progressive and forward looking statement of Ireland's foreign policy written in clear and accessible language. The document includes features which communicate simply and effectively what is delivered across Government to achieve Ireland's foreign policy goals.

As I outlined in my foreword to the review, through our foreign policy we safeguard our peace, security and economic prosperity, and promote reconciliation and cooperation at home. At the core of this foreign policy are the protection of our citizens and the promotion of our values abroad. The Global Island considers the challenges and opportunities for Ireland's foreign policy under five interconnected themes: Our People, Our Values, Our Prosperity, Our Place in Europe and Our Influence.

The Global Island is the result of a wide-ranging process of consultation involving other Departments, State agencies, the Oireachtas, civil society and members of the public. I will be bringing forward a series of initiatives to implement the vision and goals set out in review in the period ahead.

The electronic version of the review was prioritised both to reduce costs and ensure broad accessibility, including overseas. This version was made available from the launch date in accessible electronic formats in both official languages and eReader versions will be available shortly. A limited print run of *The Global Island* was commissioned and is being distributed to key contacts and decision-makers at home and abroad.

The total cost for the production of the Foreign Policy Review is estimated at €40,069. This includes design, layout and preparation of both English and Irish versions as well as printing, translation and electronic versions in both official languages. As some items have yet to be invoiced, the cost outlined is approximate at this stage.

International Terrorism

169. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the attacks on Chad, by the group called Boko Haram, from Nigeria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7475/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Boko Haram carried out its first reported terrorist attack in Chad on 13 February. The attack took place in the village of Ngouboua, on the shores of Lake Chad. Reports suggest that the militants killed and wounded a number of Chadians and destroyed most of the village before being pushed back by the Chadian army.

I utterly condemn the appalling acts of violence being perpetrated in Nigeria and its neighbouring countries by Boko Haram. These include the recent killing of a large number of civilians in an attack by militants in the north-eastern state of Borno in Nigeria. I share the horror at reports of the group's use of innocent young children to carry primed explosives. I have previously also condemned the abduction of more than 200 young girls from a school in the Nigerian town of Chibok last April.

The attack in Chad, as well as the recent attacks on Kerawa in Cameroon and Diffa in Niger, confirm the regional nature of the threat now posed by Boko Haram and the need to tackle it on a regional basis. The EU Foreign Affairs Council, which I attended in Brussels last week, noted that the responsibility to address the immediate security challenge lies primarily with the countries most affected, and called upon them to urgently intensify cooperation and coordination. The Council commended the Chadian army's recent assistance to the Cameroonian forces already engaged in the fight against Boko Haram. We also welcomed the decision of the States in the region, endorsed by the African Union, to deploy a multinational force, which will also be endorsed by the UN Security Council. Experts from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Benin met at Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 5-7 February to finalise operational issues for the multinational force.

The Council also expressed concern about the humanitarian consequences of the Boko Haram attacks on Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger and pledged to continue providing immediate relief to those in need and to increase supports at regional level. Ireland provided €1 million in December 2014 to the UNHCR to support its work for Nigerian refugees in Chad.

Ukrainian Conflict

170. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the conflict in eastern Ukraine; his position regarding military assistance from other States; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7476/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The conflict in eastern Ukraine has escalated rapidly in recent weeks. The upsurge in violence and the increasing number of casualties, in particular innocent civilians caught up in the fighting, has been deeply troubling.

I welcome the agreement reached in Minsk on 12 February, following all-night talks involving Chancellor Merkel, President Hollande, President Poroshenko and President Putin. The package of measures signed by the parties to the conflict offers hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Ukraine, which has claimed over 5,400 lives and forced almost a million people to flee their homes. The agreement provides for a ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons

in eastern Ukraine. It also provides a timetable for the implementation of key parts of the September Minsk Agreements, including those relating to elections, border control and prisoner exchange.

The true test of last week's accord will be in its full implementation. The ceasefire came into effect at midnight on Saturday, and the OSCE has reported that it is largely holding, except in the Debaltseve area where attacks continue. It is crucial that the parties abide by their commitments to end the fighting as the next step involves the withdrawal of heavy weapons and it is important that this process begins without delay.

A comprehensive and lasting ceasefire remains central to a de-escalation of the conflict. I support the calls on Russia to exercise its influence on the separatists to fully implement the commitments they entered into in Minsk.

At the informal European Council held on 12 February, Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande briefed EU leaders on the outcome of the Minsk talks. President Poroshenko also addressed the meeting and provided a realistic assessment of what was agreed. Leaders assured President Poroshenko of the EU's full backing for his efforts to restore peace in Ukraine and to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity. They also considered practical ways of supporting implementation of the agreement, including through further humanitarian assistance and strengthening of the OSCE Mission.

Unity and consistency has characterised the EU's actions in response of the Ukrainian crisis to date. It is crucial that this unity is maintained as it is key to our influence and our effectiveness.

We have consistently stated that there can be no military solution to the crisis in Ukraine. The initiative undertaken by Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande was aimed at reviving the September Minsk Agreements and bringing an end to the current spiral of violence. The focus must now be on implementing the commitments in last week's accord, including the withdrawal of heavy weapons. Providing lethal military equipment would risk undermining these diplomatic efforts to find a political resolution to the crisis.

Consular Services Availability

171. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the coming to power of the Houthi group in Yemen; if there are any Irish citizens in Yemen; if consular assistance has been provided to these Irish citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7477/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): At the Foreign Affairs Council on 9 February, I and my EU colleagues expressed our grave concern at recent developments in Yemen, including the seizure of control in Sana'a by Houthi militia and the consequent collapse of the transitional national government. The Council called for the release from house arrest of the former President and Ministers, who have all resigned. Yemen urgently needs an end to political violence and the restoration of a central government which can command wide support and attempt to rule on behalf of all Yemenis. The Council expressed EU support for UN efforts to resume an inclusive dialogue among the various political forces.

My Department's travel advice for Yemen, accessible on www.dfa.ie, advises Irish citizens against travel to Yemen. Through our on-line citizens' registration facility we are aware of a very small number of Irish citizens there, working with international aid agencies, who we can keep in contact with as needs be. However, the Consular Assistance Section in my Department

is not currently dealing with any requests for consular assistance from Irish citizens in Yemen. Any Irish citizen who wishes to request consular assistance can contact the Consular Assistance Section of my Department at 01 408 2000.

Congressional Medals

172. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise the matter of the Massacre at Wounded Knee with his counterparts in the United States of America (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7532/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The history of the US government's relationship with Native Americans presents a complex and challenging legacy. This legacy has become a matter of much debate in the United States and I am aware, in particular, of the campaign surrounding the awarding of Congressional Medals of Honor to members of the US Army's Seventh Cavalry who were involved in the tragic event referred to by the Deputy.

However, as the granting of Congressional Medals of Honor is a matter solely within the remit of the United States Government, it would not be appropriate for the Irish Government to intervene in this matter. Ultimately it is for the people of the United States to determine how best to address this sad legacy in their history.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

173. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the income details of a person's parent are being requested by Student Universal Support Ireland, when that person is a mature student (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7420/15]

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

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

Schools Designation

174. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Kerry will be entitled to island status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7450/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the school referred to by

the Deputy is accessible by road, it does not qualify therefore to be categorised as an “island” school.

Physical Education Facilities

175. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of sports facilities in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7451/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the Department has already provided significant P.E. facilities at the newly constructed primary and post-primary schools at the educational campus of the school referred to in County Meath. Two General Purpose rooms, three external Ball courts and two Junior Play areas were provided at the new primary school. In addition, a P.E. hall and six External Hard Play areas were provided at the post primary school. Similar facilities will also be provided at the remaining primary school due to be constructed in the area.

I understand that the former VEC has also previously developed a one acre pitch on the campus.

In the circumstances and taking also into account the competing demands on my Department’s capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise the funding available for the provision of essential classroom accommodation, it is not possible to provide an indicative timeframe for the provision of further sports facilities at the school in question at this time.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland Accreditation

176. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the qualifications of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5, that are recognised under the recognition of prior learning programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7452/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the individual in question has been in direct contact with my Department and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) about this issue. A letter of reply providing advice and information on the options available to the individual in relation to the recognition of prior learning was sent on 16th February 2015.

Third Level Fees

177. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an exemption from the three-year residency clause, applied to the Free Fees Scheme, will be provided to siblings of returning Irish emigrants, from countries outside of the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7462/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware the Exchequer funds tuition fees costs in respect of eligible students who are pursuing full-time undergraduate courses of study under my Department’s Free Fees Initiative. The main conditions of the scheme are that students must be first-time undergraduates, hold inter alia EU/EEA/Swiss nationality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course.

Where full-time undergraduate students do not qualify for free fees funding they must pay the appropriate fee as determined by their third level institution. Third level institutions are autonomous bodies and it is therefore a matter for the institution to determine the rate of fee payable by students (EU or non-EU).

However, in the case of students who do not meet the residency clause, higher education institutions have been requested to charge the more moderate EU fee to EU/EEA/Swiss nationals who have completed at least five academic years of study (Primary or Post-Primary level) in the EU/EEA or Switzerland.

Apprenticeship Programmes

178. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the commitment, at official level, to retain and enhance the provision of the high standard of third level input to the education of apprentices, at phases 4 and 6, at Dundalk Institute of Technology; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7465/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As SOLAS have statutory responsibility for the operation of the Apprenticeship Programme I have asked them to contact the Deputy directly in relation to the question he has raised.

Capitation Grants

179. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount that has been lost to schools, through cuts in the capitation grant; if she will provide an annual breakdown, since the start of these cuts, and a size-category breakdown; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7482/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015. That increase has provided funding for 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs to be recruited for our schools, as well as funding important reforms. However, it was not possible to secure the funding which would be required to also increase the rates of capitation paid to our schools.

The school funding measures introduced in Budget 2011 provided for a 5% reduction in funding for capitation and related grants to primary and second level schools. This was applied to schools by a 5% reduction across the range of per capita grants.

The multi annual school funding measures introduced in Budget 2012, provided for a 6% overall reduction in the funding for capitation and related grants to primary and second level schools. The reduction was introduced on a phased basis and applied by a 2% reduction in 2012 and 2013 and a further reduction of 1% in 2014 and 2015.

In total these measures have resulted in primary school per capita funding being reduced by €38 per pupil since 2011 and post primary per capita funding being reduced by €66 per pupil since 2011.

I am determined that education will be prioritised for further investment in future years, and I believe that increasing the staffing and funding of our schools should be priorities for such investment.

The following table contains a breakdown of the annual per capita grants rates as requested by the Deputy.

-	Voluntary Post Primary						Primary	
-	Capita- tion	SSSF	SSSF Secretary	SSSF Caretaker	Secretary	Care- taker	Capita- tion	Ancillary
2010	€345.00	€212.00	€25.39	€19.05	€38.10	€31.75	€200.00	€155.00
2011	€328.00	€201.00	€24.00	€18.00	€36.00	€30.00	€190.00	€147.00
2012	€317.00	€201.00	€24.00	€18.00	€36.00	€30.00	€178.00	€147.00
2013	€306.00	€201.00	€24.00	€18.00	€36.00	€30.00	€176.00	€147.00
2014	€301.00	€201.00	€24.00	€18.00	€36.00	€30.00	€173.00	€147.00
2015	€296.00	€201.00	€24.00	€18.00	€36.00	€30.00	€170.00	€147.00

Special Educational Needs Data

180. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school leavers in 2014 with an intellectual disability (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7505/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that, while there is not presently a distinct disability category of Asperger’s Syndrome for resource allocation purposes, such children are generally supported through the resourcing mechanisms which are in place for supporting children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

As such, the specific information requested by the Deputy is not available. However, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has advised that the number of post primary students categorised as ASD accessing resource teaching hours and identified as leavers at end of the 2013/14 school year was 375 students.

It is important to note that this does not include pupils with Asperger’s Syndrome who attend Special Schools, or pupils attending mainstream school who have not been allocated Resource Teaching support by the NCSE, or who are supported by a school’s allocation of additional teaching resources for pupils with high incidence special educational needs.

Special Educational Needs Data

181. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children with special needs who are being brought to and from school by bus, in situations where a place is not provided for, or available, in their local school; the cost of providing such transport in 2014; the number of children involved in 2014; if an evaluation was done to predict special education needs, in order to provide, as locally as possible, a school space, and reduce long commutes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7512/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): My Department’s policies focus on ensuring that all children can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

A range of placement options for children with special educational needs is provided, in order to ensure that all children can receive a school placement. Many children with special educational needs will be able to attend a local mainstream school, whereas for children who

have needs which require more specialist interventions, special class and special school placements are provided for.

As such, a child may have access to a number of different placement options in a locality. However, the enrolment of a child to a school is a matter in the first instance for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), engage with schools annually in order to plan for specialist provision, and to open new special classes each year in various geographical areas, as required, in order to ensure there are sufficient special class placements available at primary and post primary school level to meet demand in a given area.

The NCSE will continue to plan and coordinate the provision of education and support services to ensure that the educational requirements of children with special needs can be met in all areas.

In general, under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs children are eligible for school transport where they are attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

The level of detailed information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I can confirm that there are currently almost 10,000 children availing of school transport services under the terms of the above scheme at an annual cost of some €50m.

School Accommodation

182. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding for additional accommodation will be provided to a school, further to a recent sanction of accommodation (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7519/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application for major capital funding that includes for the upgrading of existing classrooms and ancillary accommodation.

As the Deputy will appreciate, due to the competing demands on my Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise the funding available for the provision of essential school classroom accommodation, it is not possible to provide an indicative timeframe for the progression of a major project for the school in question at this time.

However to meet the school's immediate needs, my Department recently approved devolved funding to this school for the provision of a resource room.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

183. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a student (details supplied) in County Kildare will be assisted in accessing specialised education to assist with their needs, as the student is currently attending mainstream playschool, with the support of a teaching assistant, and would benefit from a more specialised environment; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [7548/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The policy of my Department is to secure the maximum possible level of inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, in order to ensure that as many children as possible can be educated with their peers within their own community.

My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs in order to ensure that, wherever a child is enrolled, they will have access to an appropriate education.

Children with special educational needs may be enrolled in a mainstream school and attend all mainstream classes and receive additional teaching support through the learning support and/or resource teacher. If they have assessed care needs they may be supported by a special needs assistant.

In respect of children who cannot be accommodated in mainstream education, they may be enrolled in special classes or special schools where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided.

As such, a pupil may have access to a number of different placement options in a locality. However, the enrolment of a child to a school is a matter in the first instance for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) can assist parents to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs.

Parents may contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child’s special educational needs and to seek assistance in identifying placement options, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie. The SENO can also advise parents in relation to supports which may be available to support children with special educational needs, including special transport arrangements which may be made available.

The NCSE has published a Guide for Parents and Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs on Choosing a School. This guide is also available at www.ncse.ie

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

184. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will locate the funds to re-open a special needs playschool (details supplied) in County Kildare that was closed down in June 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7549/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I have made enquiries about the special needs playschool referred to by the Deputy and I understand that it was wholly funded by the HSE. My Department had no role in the funding of or closure of the playschool and I suggest that the Deputy contacts the Department of Health concerning this closure.

Teacher Redeployment

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a teaching transfer in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7595/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The core function of the redeployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers to other schools that have vacancies. The redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers is key to the Department’s ability to manage within its payroll budget and ceiling on teacher numbers. Thereafter, schools are required under the panel arrangements to fill permanent vacancies from supplementary panels comprised of eligible fixed-term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers. The redeployment arrangements are published annually in the staffing circular which is placed on the Department website.

The redeployment arrangements for the 2015/16 school year are set out in Circular 0005/2015 which is available on the website. Redeployment panels are drawn up on a diocesan basis for Catholic panels, diocesan/united diocesan basis for Church of Ireland panels and on a national basis for other patron bodies. The detail relating to numbers on individual redeployment panels is placed on the Department website when the panels are published each year. My Department updates the progress of the panels on the website on a regular basis.

The teacher referred to by the Deputy is a permanent teacher who is currently not surplus to the school in which she is employed. She does not therefore come within the redeployment arrangements for the 2015/16 school year.

School Accommodation

186. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the location of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7620/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the school to which the Deputy refers is not due to commence operation until September 2016, start-up accommodation for it has not yet been secured. Subject to the availability of appropriate start-up accommodation, it is intended to locate the school within the feeder area it is being set up to serve.

The details supplied by the Deputy suggest that patronage for the school has already been awarded to a particular patron body. This is not the case. As a first step to establish the school, an open patronage determination process will be run later this year to decide which patron body will operate the school.

Schools Building Projects Status

187. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding capital works in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7621/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The major building project for Howth Road National School is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b.

Stage 2b includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certificate, Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of tender documents. Stage 2b was received in the de-

partment and reviewed by the Departments Technical Division. A letter was issued to the Board of Management requesting additional information, my Department is awaiting a response.

Due to competing demands on my Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements it was not possible to include this project in the 5 year construction programme announced in March 2012.

School building projects, including the project for Howth Road National School which have been initiated but not included in the current five year construction programme will continue to be progressed to final planning stages in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to my Department in the future.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

188. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the further details required for an appeal, in respect of an application for a student grant, to be considered (details supplied); if all supporting documentation supplied to Student Universal Support Ireland, with the initial application, has been forwarded to the Student Grants Appeals Board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7638/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Student Grants Appeals Board (Appeals Board) is independent in the performance of its functions.

The appeal of the student referred to by the Deputy was considered by the Appeals Board on 3rd February 2015 and the Appeals Board wrote to the student requesting further information to assist it in making a decision on the student's appeal. The file has been received from Student Universal Support Ireland. The student should reply as comprehensively as possible to the questions put by the Appeals Board so that it may make its final determination.

School Accommodation

189. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No.174 of 24 September 2014, regarding the shortfall of 200 school places in the Lucan area of County Dublin, for second level education for September 2015, if she will provide the results of the analysis of the latest demographic data, specifically in relation to the examination of the Lucan area; and the arrangements that will be made to make accommodation available where it is needed. [7640/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The nationwide demographic review at post-primary level is an extensive exercise which is on-going in my Department. It will be completed as quickly as possible.

School Transport Provision

190. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide copies of written commitments made by her Department to schools (details supplied), which amalgamated in previous decades, that their bus service would be safeguarded in the future, which was broken under the last Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7642/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): School transport arrangements under the Central/Closed School Rule originated from the last major amalgamation of schools in the late 1960's. Given the time lapse it is not feasible to provide copies of agreements, where they exist, reached between the Department and the School Authorities at the time of amalgamation.

In any event, changes to my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme which were finalised for the beginning of the 2012 school year mean that children are now eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kms from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

The terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis and I am satisfied with the current policy and criteria for determining eligibility.

My Department must always seek to ensure that every service that is funded by the public is operated in a manner that delivers for children, parents and taxpayers alike.

Foreshore Issues

191. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if an on-site consultation regarding a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7496/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The removal of gravel from the foreshore requires a licence under Section 3 of the Foreshore Act 1933. Details of how to make such an application can be found on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Foreshore/ApplyingforaForeshoreConsent/>.

A prospective applicant can request a pre-application consultation with the Marine Planning and Foreshore Section of my Department. Contact details can be found at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Foreshore/>.

Planning Issues

192. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on allegations, in connection with the actions of Limerick County Council, regarding certain planning matters at Ardagh, County Limerick. [7407/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): While it is not entirely clear, I assume that the Deputy is referring to the matter raised in Question No. 430 of 9 December 2014.

As I stated in the reply to that Question, from enquiries made of Limerick County Council, it is understood that a number of pre-planning meetings took place with the person concerned before he lodged his first planning application for proposed development works (planning ref 06/3641). The Council has indicated that there were a number of planning issues with this application and after a number of further meetings with the person concerned at which these issues were discussed, he withdrew the application.

The person concerned subsequently submitted a further application for planning permission on 20 June 2008 for revised development works (ref 08/1288). This application was refused

by Limerick County Council and the person concerned did not appeal that decision to An Bord Pleanála even though the availability of this option was brought to his attention.

The person concerned subsequently made a complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman alleging that he had suffered losses due to maladministration by Limerick County Council arising from the handling of his planning applications. However, after conducting an in-depth investigation into the matter, the Ombudsman found that there was no basis for this allegation.

Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular planning case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned. Accordingly, I have no function in relation to this matter.

Planning Issues

193. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 18 of 28 January 2015, when the findings and outcomes of the investigations, under the planning review of the performance of planning functions, will be released; if he has received a copy of the finished report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7410/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): MacCabe Durney Barnes Consultants were appointed in February 2014 to carry out an independent planning review on the performance of planning functions in six selected planning authorities (Carlow, Cork, Galway and Meath County Councils and Cork and Dublin City Councils) in accordance with section 255 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. I expect to receive the final report from the consultants shortly and I subsequently intend to publish it having considered its contents.

Departmental Statistics

194. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if annual statistics are still compiled by his Department, on the ranges of mortgage loan terms, and loan-to-value ranges, as was done until 2008; if so, the reason they are no longer published on his Department's website; and if not, the reason a decision was taken to stop collecting this information. [7443/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of housing policy. Due to the significantly reduced mortgage activity since 2009, concerns about the quality of the data and the availability of statistics referred to in the question from other sources, a decision was taken to cease my Department's publication of the statistics concerned.

The Credit Reporting Act 2013, under the remit of the Department of Finance, provides for the establishment of a Central Credit Register (CCR) to be operated by the Central Bank of Ireland. *The Act aims to address weaknesses identified in the current credit reporting system in Ireland.* The CCR will be a database of personal and credit information to be created by means of a national mandatory credit reporting system. Credit is defined broadly and includes mortgages. *The obligations to report are likely to be introduced on a phased basis.*

The Banking and Payments Federation of Ireland (BPFI) produce a quarterly Mortgage Market Review which is also of relevance in this context and is available at - <http://www.bpfi.ie/news/new-mortgage-lending-q4-2014/>.

Housing Adaptation Grant Applications

195. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is not being provided with funding to allow proper facilities to be provided at their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7468/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department allocates funding to local authorities towards the cost of adaptations and extensions to social housing to meet the needs of tenants with a disability or to address serious overcrowding.

All aspects of the administration of this funding locally are matters for each local authority and my Department is not involved with the selection or prioritisation of individual projects.

Planning Issues

196. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the legal status of the recently published Planning Policy Statement 2015 (details supplied); his plans to issue a ministerial policy directive to planning authorities, under section 29 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7472/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Planning Policy Statement 2015 which I recently published jointly with my colleague, Minister Alan Kelly, and which is the first policy statement on planning ever published by an Irish Government, is intended to act as an overarching non-statutory general guiding document for our planning system.

It outlines and re-affirms in a clear and concise way the key values and core principles that the Government believes should underpin the operations of the planning system so that the highest standards are applied, and adhered to, by all parties engaged in the planning system, including planning authorities, public bodies, practitioners, private interests as well as the general public. This is also intended so that proper planning and sustainable development of our urban and rural areas is achieved and with a view to delivering quality in planning outcomes.

As the policy statement is addressed to a wider audience than planning authorities, it is not proposed to issue a Ministerial policy directive to planning authorities under section 29 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. However, as indicated, it is expected that the key values and core principles outlined in the Planning Policy Statement will be applied, and adhered to, by planning authorities in the performance of their functions.

Departmental Funding

197. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of public funding that has been provided to An Taisce, each year,

in the past five years; if he will provide details of the way this public funding is spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7492/15]

198. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of public funding that has been spent by An Taisce, each year, in the past five years, in the act of legal challenges, judicial reviews, and so on, against State bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7493/15]

199. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views that public funds may be used to obstruct State agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7494/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 to 199, inclusive, together.

A total of €3.78 million, as set out in the following table, has been provided by my Department to An Taisce over the past five years.

DECLG Funding to An Taisce

Source	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
	€	€	€	€	€	€
DECLG Vote	0	0	0	0	275,492	275,492
Environment Fund	834,424	766,014	753,200	736,800	415,000	3,505,438
Total	834,424	766,014	753,200	736,800	690,492	3,780,930

This funding was used primarily to support a range of environmental activities and public awareness initiatives, including the National Spring Clean initiative; a contribution to the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) National Litter League; the Green Schools initiative; implementation of the Bathing Water Quality Regulations; and the Blue Flag Awards. Funding also supported an All-Ireland Clean Coast Symposium; provision of Merit Awards to heighten awareness of coastal amenities and encourage participation in Coastcare groups; and raising awareness of marine environmental issues.

The funding provided also supported An Taisce in building an effective capacity to engage in the policy formulation aspect of the planning process in accordance with its prescribed role. An Taisce is specifically precluded, however, from using this funding, which totalled €150,000 over the five years concerned, in relation to participation in individual planning applications.

Seanad Elections

200. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of correspondence from the Chancellor of the National University of Ireland to graduates (details supplied), stating that it is unlikely there will be a single university constituency before the next general election to Seanad Éireann, if he, or officials in his Department, have informed the National University of Ireland of this, or of a time frame for legislation; if reforms to the university constituencies will take place prior to the election; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7539/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):

ly): The Government Legislation Programme for the Spring/Summer 2015 session provides for publication of the Seanad Electoral (University Members) (Amendment) Bill in 2015.

In 2014, the General Scheme of the Seanad Electoral (University Members) (Amendment) Bill was published for consultation. The General Scheme is part of the legislative process to implement the 1979 constitutional amendment to extend the Seanad franchise to graduates from institutions of higher education in the State that heretofore did not form part of the Seanad university constituencies. The Statement of Government Priorities published in July 2014 provides for the enactment of this legislation.

I am currently considering issues raised in submissions made as part of the public consultation process on the General Scheme of the Bill and observations made by the Technical Working Group set up to examine and make observations on operational matters. These are informing the further development of the General Scheme, which has not yet concluded.

Noise Pollution

201. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will introduce legislation to allow local authorities vary the permitted noise levels from ice-cream vans, so that excessive noise levels, in terms of volume and length of playing time, can be addressed. [7542/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Currently, a person experiencing noise nuisance may contact their local authority, which may initiate proceedings on grounds of noise nuisance under the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992. This Act also provides for any person, or group of persons, to seek an order in the District Court to have noise giving reasonable cause for annoyance abated. The procedures involved have been simplified to allow action to be taken without legal representation.

A public information leaflet A Guide to the Noise Regulations, outlining the legal avenues available to persons experiencing noise nuisance, is available on my Department's website: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Environment/Miscellaneous/FileDownload,1319,en.pdf>.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to take further steps to address noise pollution, inter alia, through consideration of the introduction of fixed payment notices (also known as on-the-spot fines). The development of new noise legislation by my Department is being considered in the context of this commitment. However, as indicated in the Government's Legislation Programme published on 14 January 2015, it is not possible at this time to indicate when such a Bill might be published, having regard to the broad range of legislative priorities to be progressed across my Department's remit. In the interim, I have no plans to legislate specifically in relation to noise levels from ice-cream vans.

Local Authority Staff Data

202. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of whole-time-equivalent and full-time staff in each local authority, at the end of December in 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; and 2014. [7581/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kel-

ly): The number of staff employed by each local authority at the end of each year since 2008 is set out in the following table on a whole time equivalent basis (WTE). From 2013, a combined staffing figure was returned for Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council. From 2014, a combined staffing figure was returned for Waterford City Council and Waterford County Council and for Tipperary North County Council and Tipperary South County Council. It should be noted also that the 2008 and 2009 figures include Regional Authority staffing numbers; these have been reported separately from September 2010 onwards.

LOCAL AUTHORITY	December 2008 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2009 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2010 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2011 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2012 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2013 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2014 Quarterly Return (Total wte)
Cork City	1,493.00	1,420.00	1,374.00	1,336.00	1,272.42	1,247.02	1,210.06
Dublin City	6,931.50	6,480.45	6,298.30	6,072.35	5,772.70	5,570.75	5,445.70
Galway City	535.00	487.50	442.80	438.34	435.33	419.86	410.10
Limerick City	554.90	528.30	485.41	465.14	443.54		1,008.14
Limerick County	793.60	738.60	686.38	656.65	619.33	1,035.89	
Waterford City	464.00	410.32	379.93	367.09	344.18	335.58	773.13
Waterford County	600.50	565.50	503.61	476.00	447.06	446.06	
Carlow	357.50	331.00	297.24	285.41	276.09	265.37	264.86
Cavan	479.90	446.35	434.09	416.30	380.90	370.10	360.55
Clare	907.90	828.36	810.19	785.50	750.98	749.88	712.81
Cork County	2,643.00	2,364.37	2,255.16	2,184.11	2,088.19	2,020.87	1,947.31
Donegal	1,193.30	1,007.86	999.11	959.14	911.00	873.31	832.33
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown (DLR)	1,242.00	1,195.90	1,143.40	1,063.60	1,028.30	994.90	951.00
Fingal	1,589.79	1,490.39	1,441.90	1,391.90	1,330.70	1,296.33	1,250.66
Galway	1,066.23	934.27	846.87	811.61	770.28	746.02	752.08
Kerry	1,347.20	1,225.29	1,194.63	1,165.77	1,119.56	1,101.61	1,050.34
Kildare	1,094.50	946.50	925.40	880.90	843.62	815.40	793.70
Kilkenny	615.67	568.04	545.24	529.09	507.46	494.02	486.86
Laois	438.27	405.50	392.79	368.88	342.70	341.93	348.57
Leitrim	330.15	302.50	294.85	279.13	266.15	258.98	253.09
Longford	381.70	330.20	306.01	299.94	289.75	289.80	272.85
Louth	733.83	691.90	674.64	652.64	652.51	634.98	606.05
Mayo	1,296.30	1,177.80	1,103.65	1,061.50	1,000.53	963.73	927.01
Meath	800.04	702.58	668.82	640.64	623.58	611.56	621.98
Monaghan	454.57	433.99	412.72	404.69	385.05	369.83	362.74
Offaly	499.00	478.00	418.50	399.00	388.60	379.70	376.00
Roscommon	581.50	550.50	487.12	461.07	434.80	414.59	407.89
Sligo	586.80	529.92	510.45	488.74	453.98	429.28	414.44
South Dublin	1,472.25	1,402.55	1,344.70	1,277.60	1,176.47	1,098.79	1,055.69

LOCAL AUTHORITY	December 2008 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2009 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2010 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2011 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2012 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2013 Quarterly Return (Total wte)	December 2014 Quarterly Return (Total wte)
Tipp North	512.15	504.22	515.57	468.83	450.36	447.85	1002.33
Tipp South	707.00	654.30	651.10	632.26	606.31	576.53	
Westmeath	537.36	487.92	480.43	462.79	447.26	431.59	458.54
Wexford	863.47	804.51	788.38	765.76	723.60	715.65	699.90
Wicklow	903.65	827.25	789.45	747.05	716.65	709.65	678.65
OVERALL TOTAL	35,007.53	32,252.64	30,902.84	29,695.42	28,299.94	27,457.41	26,735.36

Litter Pollution

203. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has new policy plans regarding tackling dog fouling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7624/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Litter Pollution Acts 1997 to 2009 provide the statutory framework to combat littering and include provisions relating to dog fouling. Under the Acts, the primary management and enforcement response to littering (including dog fouling) is a matter for local authorities.

It is a matter for each local authority to determine the most appropriate course of action to tackle litter pollution locally within the legislation provided, including the most appropriate public awareness, enforcement and clean-up actions in relation to litter and dog fouling, taking account of its own local circumstances and priorities.

Section 16 of the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 and 1992 set out the powers of dog wardens. In addition, section 28 of the Litter Pollution Acts provides that a dog warden, within the meaning of the Control of Dogs Act 1986, may issue a notice or on-the-spot fine to an individual believed of committing a prescribed offence under the Act. It is also open to a member of An Garda Síochána or a litter warden under the Litter Pollution Acts 1997-2009 to issue a notice where an offence is believed to have been committed. Local Authority Performance Indicators, including those pertaining to litter enforcement, are available at: <http://www.lgma.ie/en/search/node/service%20indicators>.

I am of the view that there are sufficient penalties in place under the Litter Pollution Acts and that the powers are conferred on appropriate personnel to deal with the issue of dog fouling, when enforced, and I have no plans to introduce further legislation at this time. I believe that raising awareness of the litter problem and educating our young people is key to effecting a long-term change in society's attitudes towards litter disposal. Ultimately, however, it is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that they play their part in preserving the environment for others through the responsible disposal of their litter, including in relation to dog fouling.

Private Rented Accommodation Costs

204. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for a rent cap in view of rent prices soaring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7630/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In the third quarter of 2014, rents were 5.6% higher nationally than in the same quarter of 2013, according to the most recent rent index from the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB). Rents for houses were 4.3% higher while apartment rents were 7.3% higher than in the same quarter of 2013. In Dublin, which is seeing the highest rates of increase nationally, overall rents were higher by 9.5% although the rate of annual increase was down slightly.

A report by DKM Economic Consultants, Rent Stability in the Private Rented Sector commissioned by the PRTB and published last autumn considered a number of options in relation to rent control, including a rent cap. A review of the literature for the report found that in every jurisdiction where it was introduced, a rent cap led to a reduction in the supply of rental units due to an increase in demand for the 'lower' priced units. As the main reason behind increasing rents is a shortfall in housing supply, caution must be exercised in relation to measures which, *prima facie*, would seem to offer a solution.

Fundamentally, the main cause of rising rents is a lack of supply in the market. The implementation of the range of actions under the Government's Construction 2020 Strategy will support increased supply in the wider housing market. New house completions in 2014 amounted to 11,016 units nationally, up 33% on the 2013 figure. Similarly, in the third quarter of 2014 planning permissions were granted for 2,144 dwelling units, compared with 1,409 units for the same period in 2013 - an increase of 52%.

In addition the recently published Social Housing Strategy 2020 sets out clear, measurably actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the housing list. In 2015 we will provide over 7,000 new social housing units and a further 8,400 units will be secured under the HAP scheme.

The Government is monitoring the rental market closely and is considering policy options in relation to achieving greater rent certainty. The options put forward in the DKM report form part of these considerations.

Coastal Protection

205. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details of the nature of the ongoing dredging works at a beach (details supplied) in County Donegal; if he will provide details of the total amount spent to date on dredging works since this beach was redeveloped back in 2002; his plans to erect a breakwater, or similar offshore barrier, at this beach; if he has received a request from the local authority to erect additional sea defences at the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7644/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): A draft foreshore licence to cover proposed dredging works at Magheraroarty issued to the County Council's legal advisers in May 2014 and to date has not been returned to the Chief State Solicitor's Office. My Department has advised the County Council that dredging works should not commence in the absence of an executed licence.

Funding for such works is a matter for Donegal County Council as are any plans for any other works on the foreshore at Magheraroarty which may also be subject to the provisions of the Foreshore Act 1933.

Gas Exploration Revenue

206. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of revenue the Exchequer has received from the exploitation of national natural oil and gas reserves in each year for the past three years; and the estimate for revenue in this area in the current year and the next five years and beyond. [7422/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Ireland has three producing gas fields namely the Kinsale, Ballycotton and Seven Heads fields off the coast of Cork. There is no commercial production of oil in the Irish offshore. The revenue generated for the State from the production from these gas fields is received in the form of acreage rental fees, royalty payments (with the exception of the Seven Heads Gas field) and corporation tax.

Profits from the three producing gas fields are taxed at a corporation rate of 25% (double the standard rate of corporation tax for trading income). In addition, royalties from the Kinsale and Ballycotton gas fields are payable to the State at a rate of 12.5% of the fair market value of the gas at the well head. The combination of tax, royalties and acreage rental fees currently provides for a State take of 40% of net income from these two fields.

Royalties are not payable on production from the Seven Heads Gas field as Ireland moved away from a royalty based payments system to a tax based system in 1987.

The direct financial return to the State from the Corrib gas field, which is expected to come into production in 2015, will be through acreage rental fees and the 25% corporation tax on profits.

In June 2014 Government approval was received to revise Ireland's oil and gas fiscal terms along the lines recommended by international energy consultants Wood Mackenzie. A key recommendation of Wood Mackenzie was that tax rates in respect of new licences should be revised to ensure a higher share for the State from the most profitable fields. This would result in the application of maximum rate of 55% in the case of new licences. My Department is working with the Department of Finance and Revenue Commissioners to give operational effect to this approach.

The acreage rental fees figure for 2012, 2013 and 2014 for the three producing gas fields were, respectively €0.77 million, €0.73 million and €0.77 million. The forecast acreage rental fees figure for the three gas fields for 2015 is €0.77 million.

The royalties received in 2012, 2013 and 2014 from the two gas producing fields were, respectively, €3.96 million, €4.59 million and €1.98 million. The forecast royalty figure for the two gas fields for 2015 is €1.5 million.

The amount paid in taxation in respect of Ireland's producing gas fields is a matter between the companies concerned and the Revenue Commissioners and not one in respect of which I have a function.

Several factors impact on the level of State take from a producing gas field, such as the wholesale price of gas, which is subject to significant movement over time, as are production levels. As such attempting to accurately estimate State receipts in the next five years and beyond would be a speculative exercise.

Broadband Service Provision

207. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are large areas of County Cavan with inadequate broadband telecommunications infrastructure; his plans to bring this infrastructure up to modern standards, at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7593/15]

208. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are large areas of County Monaghan with inadequate broadband telecommunications infrastructure; his plans to bring this infrastructure up to modern standards, at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7594/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 and 208 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) 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.

A public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 which was launched last November, closed on the 12th February. 27 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks in terms of the overall intervention strategy. The map continues to be available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises or 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 throughout the entire country including Counties Cavan and Monaghan.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

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 and likely market impact.

Following a public consultation process on the draft Intervention Strategy during next summer, I hope to move to formal procurement phase 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. I anticipate that the first homes and businesses will be connected in 2016 and connections will continue thereafter, with the intention of having all

premises connected within a 5 year period.

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

Aviation Issues

209. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the circumstances in which two Russian military aircraft entered Irish controlled air space in January 2015; if his attention had been drawn to the fact that these aircraft were going to enter Irish controlled air space; the details that he knew of this situation at the time; the details regarding the episode now; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7469/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) has confirmed that two Russian Bear military aircraft flew at 10° west in Irish controlled airspace on Wednesday 28th January, 2015. The IAA coordinated closely with its UK counterparts and there was no risk to commercial aircraft operating in the area during the incident. The Russian aircraft did not enter Irish sovereign airspace (over the land territory of the State and 12 nautical miles from the Irish coast) at any time but were in an area under IAA air traffic control (which extends to 256 nautical miles from the Irish coast). The Russian aircraft were approximately 50 nautical miles from the Irish coast at their nearest point.

In line with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) rules, it is normal practice for the IAA to be informed by the relevant State of any military flights operating in Irish controlled airspace. Ensuring the application of this practice is an important consideration and as this did not occur in this particular instance my Department has raised the issue with ICAO and outlined concerns arising.

Traffic Calming Measures

210. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of any plans to introduce traffic calming measures along the N15 outside two schools (details supplied) in County Donegal; his views on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7645/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

National Car Test

211. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is an average waiting time of three months for National Car Test testing; the steps he is taking to alleviate the issue; if ardaí will employ discretion in dealing with drivers who, due to this backlog, cannot secure an appointment before their

National Car Test certificate expires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7439/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006), the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has overall responsibility for the operation, oversight, development, quality assurance and delivery of the National Car Testing Service (NCTS).

I understand from the Road Safety Authority (RSA) that any car owner should receive an NCT appointment within 28 days and that in order to meet this standard, in some cases, the National Car Testing Service (NCTS) holds requests on a waiting list until a suitable slot is found. In the majority of cases, customers are given a slot within the required timescale.

The RSA has also repeatedly emphasised that the availability of appointments on the NCTS website is not a reflection of the total number of test slots available to customers. If a person requires an early test, they should follow the advice on that website which clearly advises that if a suitable slot cannot be obtained online, to contact the NCTS call centre directly on (01) 413 5992 or to log a request for an appointment through the website.

The RSA is encouraging people to book early, as the test may be undertaken up to 90 days in advance of the due test date without affecting the expiry date of the new certificate. This system is to ensure that owners have ample time to have their vehicle tested before their current NCT certificate expires.

Enforcement of the relevant legislation is a matter for An Garda Síochána. If a person's NCT test date is imminent, it will be a matter for the Gardaí to use their discretion. However, responsibility rests with owners and users of vehicles to ensure their vehicles are in compliance with the law.

Tourism Capital Investment Programme

212. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Fáilte Ireland's capital plan will include greenway funding avenues for local authorities, either for feasibility studies, or construction funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7516/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport provides funding for investment in tourism, the allocation of these funds is a matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland.

An allocation of €17.35 million has been made to Fáilte Ireland in 2015 to administer the Tourism Capital Investment Programme, which provides support for investment in visitor attractions, visitor activities and tourism infrastructure. The funds available under that the programme are fully committed to the end of 2016. Accordingly, Fáilte Ireland is unable to accept new applications for funding.

The point at which Fáilte Ireland will be in a position to consider new proposals for capital funding is dependent on the annual estimates and budgetary process but I am hopeful that we will be in a position to progress a range of developments as funding becomes available in coming years.

Similarly, all transport funding available to my Department for the delivery of greenways is fully committed to end 2016.

However, given the success of greenways already delivered, I feel optimistic that funding

may become available from other sources over the coming years. The EU Structural Funds Programme 2014-2020 is currently being finalised and there may be significant opportunities for cycle infrastructure development under Interreg and the Rural Development Programme. I would also encourage Local Authorities and Community Groups seeking to promote Greenways to see if funding from LEADER companies may be available.

I am also encouraging Local Authorities to attempt, where possible from within their own resources, to bring their plans for Greenways through Part 8 planning so that, when funding does come available again, they will be best positioned to apply for funding.

Wild Atlantic Way Project

213. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the precise route of the Wild Atlantic Way will be reviewed; the advice he will provide for a community, not on the current route that wishes to be included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7521/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism offerings such as the Wild Atlantic Way, it is not directly involved in developing or managing these. The development of the Wild Atlantic Way is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

The Deputy should be aware that the route of the Wild Atlantic Way was developed with the assistance of consultants, Paul Hogarth and Company and, using a collaborative approach, regional steering groups were also convened to inform route development. The steering groups comprised Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, local LEADER and Development companies and other key agencies such as Udarás na Gaeltachta, the Western Development Commission and others as relevant to each particular region.

For those communities that are not on the route it is important to note that the actual route is not simply a touring route but is rather a means to guide and attract visitors, and that all villages, businesses and geographic areas within close proximity of the route are in essence part of the geography of the Wild Atlantic Way. The purpose of the Wild Atlantic Way is to give guidance to visitors as to what there is to see on our western coast, and provide easy access to a range of experiences along the route and so enable local businesses to take advantage of the benefits of the Wild Atlantic Way. My advice to communities on and near to the Wild Atlantic Way is to focus on how to use the route to generate more tourism revenue and not to focus on specific details of the route.

National Roads Authority Projects

214. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom Road in County Cork is a priority area of investment; if he will include the road in a forthcoming capital investment programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7526/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road

projects (including the N22) is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget the NRA has to prioritise expenditure.

As I have indicated previously priority has to be given to the maintenance and upkeep of existing infrastructure. The capital allocations proposed for my Department in 2016 and 2017 indicated that funding will continue to be constrained in the next number of years. The scope for progressing new projects will depend on the level of longer term funding available to my Department and the NRA.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

215. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all moneys allocated to a club (details supplied) in County Kerry, in the past, under the sports capital programme, have been fully drawn down; the reason the club's most recent application was unsuccessful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7528/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): According to the Department's records, all allocations made to the club referred to by the Deputy have been fully drawn down.

The club made an application under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme. Unfortunately, this application did not meet the minimum requirements and was found to be invalid. I do not consider it appropriate to publish details of why individual applications were deemed invalid. However, a letter issued to the club contact clearly outlining the reasons. If the club wishes to have a copy of this letter resent, they should contact my staff in Killarney who will be happy to help.

The club did not make an application under the 2014 Programme and I would urge them to register on www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie if they wish to apply under the 2015 round of the Programme.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

216. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a recent application (details supplied) in County Kerry, under the sports capital programme, was unsuccessful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7529/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): There is no application on record for this organisation under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme. However, it was possible to identify this project, which was applied for by another organisation and I will answer in respect of this application.

Unfortunately, this application did not meet the minimum requirements for the 2014 Programme and was found to be invalid.

I do not consider it appropriate to publish details of why individual applications were deemed invalid. However, a letter issued to the club contact outlining the reasons. If the club wishes to have a copy of this letter resent, they should contact my staff in Killarney who will be happy to help.

I hope to announce details of the 2015 round of the programme in the near future and I would

urge any organisation that wishes to apply to register first on www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie.

National Car Test

217. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a review of National Car Test policy for vintage cars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7530/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Government's 2013-2020 Road Safety Strategy, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) was tasked with conducting a review of the roadworthiness testing of vintage vehicles to determine the safety case and cost benefits, if any, for inclusion in roadworthiness testing.

The RSA has completed this review which included a public consultation exercise that attracted in the region of 2,000 submissions. The scope of the RSA's review covered those vehicle types for which roadworthiness testing regimes currently exist namely, passenger cars, ambulances, motor caravans, buses, goods vehicles and their trailers.

My Department has received the RSA's review findings and proposals recently. They will be examined with a view to submitting early recommendations to me which I will consider in due course.

Public Transport Provision

218. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will amend legislation to require changes to existing bus routes to be subject to a public consultation process by the National Transport Authority before such proposals are sanctioned in view of the implication of such changes for residents, bus users, other road users, street character and the long-term planning and development of areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7541/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the case of commercial bus routes, commercial bus services are licensed in accordance with the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009 and in line with the NTA's published *Guidelines for the Licensing of Public Bus Passenger Services*. The Guidelines are published on the NTA website. The Guidelines were prepared in accordance with the detailed provisions set out in section 23 of the 2009 Act.

Where operators apply to withdraw or curtail commercial bus services, the NTA will grant such amendments as it has no legislative powers to refuse them. It should also be noted that the 2009 Act provides that the NTA must undertake a review of the operation of the licensing of public bus passenger services within 5 years. I understand that the NTA intends to engage in a public consultation this year in relation to this issue and I will examine carefully any proposed changes to the licensing regime arising from that review that might require legislative amendment.

PSO subvented bus services operated by Dublin Bus and Bus Eireann are governed by public service contracts with the NTA and any changes to services require approval of the NTA under the terms and conditions of the contracts, which can be viewed on the NTA's website.

I have requested the NTA to discuss with the deputy directly the suggestions on public consultation with a view to teasing out the practical implications for licensed commercial and PSO

subvented bus services.

Taxi Regulations

219. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, and by year and by county, the number of rural hackney licences that have been awarded since the scheme's inception; if he is satisfied with the uptake of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7543/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle sector including the issue of rural hackney licences is a matter for the National Transport Authority under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

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

Tourism Promotion

220. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he envisages potential for operators to begin offering round-Ireland cruise holidays, stopping at major ports around Ireland over seven days; if the viability of the idea will be pursued by Fáilte Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7583/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The promotion and development of cruise tourism are primarily matters for the boards and management of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland as well as individual ports themselves.

That said I know that the cruise ship tourism sector is growing worldwide and international demand for the product remains strong. Irish ports continue to capitalise on the global rise in cruise tourism and a number of ports are enjoying a steady increase in the number of cruise vessels calling at their facilities in recent years. Despite the recent recession, continued growth in cruise tourism has led operators to invest in capacity expansion and to continually seek new destinations to satisfy guests' experiences. Operators believe Ireland is well positioned geographically for inclusion in a number of Transatlantic, Northern European and British Isles itineraries.

I will ask the tourism agencies to set out in detail for the Deputy the steps they are taking to support cruise tourism.

Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Project Funding

221. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Fáilte Ireland will support a project (details supplied) in County Kerry that aims to market Kerry and Ireland around the globe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7584/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issues raised by the Deputy are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Tourism Ireland Limited is the agency with responsibility for promoting the island of Ireland as a holi-

day destination overseas while Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority. I have referred the Deputy's Question to the tourism agencies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Irish Airlines Superannuation Scheme

222. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration has been given to carrying out an investigation, regarding the management of the Irish airlines superannuation scheme, IASS, pension fund in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7618/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Responsibility for the management of the IASS pension fund rests with the Trustees of the Scheme.

Pension schemes are closely regulated under Irish and European law and the Pensions Authority is the national statutory regulatory authority in Ireland. It is a matter for the Pensions Authority to consider if an investigation is required and I am not aware of any such consideration.

Road Traffic Legislation

223. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reduce the speed limit in housing estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7627/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The legislative basis for speed limits in this jurisdiction is in the Road Traffic Act 2004. This Act sets out a number of default speed limits for certain classes of roads, and permits local authorities to apply special speed limits in particular circumstances.

The default speed limit for built-up areas is 50 km/h. However, local authorities have the option of applying a 30 km/h - the lowest special speed limit under the current legislation - where they feel it is appropriate. I have been active in encouraging local authorities to adopt this 30 km/h limit where possible. Earlier this month, I made an additional €2 million available in funding to this end.

The House this week debated a Private Members Bill to amend the legislation on speed limits, proposed by Sinn Féin Deputies. That Bill proposed a 20 km/h speed limit for residential roads, and a new 20 km/h special speed limit. As I indicated in the debate on that Bill, I can agree in principle to a 20 km/h limit, but am concerned about the practical implications of making it obligatory.

Further work on the practicalities and implications of such a change is, I believe, also necessary, in order to be sure that we get the legislation right.

Work is now underway on the drafting of a Road Traffic Bill 2015, the General Scheme of which was approved by the Government last week. I intend to examine the issue of speed limits in residential areas with a view to including proposals in that Bill.

Sport and Recreational Development

224. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on developing blueways; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7531/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Waterways Ireland is currently pioneering the development and promotion of Blueways on the inland navigations which it manages.

Having formulated design specifications and standards with the National Trails Office in 2012/2013 for the development of Small Vessel Trails, and having adopted the design standards for the development of walking and cycle trails, Waterways Ireland, together with Leitrim County Council and with support from the rural recreation division of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, developed Ireland's first multi-activity inland Blueway, the Shannon Blueway.

In addition, Waterways Ireland, in cooperation with the National Trails Office and Canoeing Ireland, also formulated a classification and grading standard, as well as a signage and branding standard for Blueways.

Departmental Funding

225. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she will announce local funding under the structures at risk fund and the built heritage jobs leverage scheme for 2015, considering the great success of these schemes over the past few years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7440/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 9 February last, I announced an allocation of €624,000 for the Structures at Risk Fund 2015, to enable conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, which are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration and are protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended. This Fund, which will be administered through the local authorities, encourages the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and helps to secure the preservation of protected structures, which might otherwise be lost. Since 2011, over 100 structures have been safeguarded for the future as a result of the Structures at Risk Fund.

In 2014 my Department was provided with a special allocation of €5m from Capital Stimulus funding for a new Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme to assist with works to safeguard structures, in private and civic ownership, protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended. A total of €15m was invested in 540 historic structures across the country and information provided by the local authorities indicates that 175 jobs were created as a result of this scheme. The operation of a similar scheme in the future would be contingent on dedicated funding being made available to my Department.

Business Parks

226. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans regarding a business park (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7495/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will appreciate the constraints that apply in replying to a "details supplied" Question of this nature.

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I am fully aware of the importance of the availability of high quality and affordable services of the nature referred to by the Deputy. I understand that the relevant service provider has indicated that it intends to upgrade its existing infrastructure, resulting in a significant increase in service at the business park in question. I am advised that the upgrade is scheduled to be completed by September 2015.

I share the views of the Deputy on the importance of services of the nature referred to by the Deputy in business parks in the Gaeltacht and I will continue to engage with the relevant stakeholders in this regard.

Departmental Funding

227. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7497/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In July 2012, a Steering Group involving representatives of the key stakeholders in the project referred to by the Deputy was convened and charged with the planning and development of the project. The Steering Group meets regularly and good progress is being made on bringing this complex multifaceted project to fruition.

Because of the associated ecological issues, the task of delivering the project will require careful consideration and planning. To ensure that the project is delivered as efficiently and quickly as possible, it has been broken down into various modules, which will allow the advancement of some sections, while the necessary consultations, assessments and planning and any land acquisitions as may be required for the more complicated aspects of the plan are moved along in parallel.

On 29 January 2015, the local authority granted permission, with some conditions, to my Department for the provision of an access route and car park in connection with the development of the project.

Departmental Funding

228. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7514/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The project referred to by the Deputy commenced in July 2014. The European Union has agreed to provide almost 50% co-funding for this €5 million project, which is being led by my Department in partnership with relevant stakeholders.

The project team was appointed late last year and is now established in offices at the location referred to in the Deputy's Question. The team will work in collaboration with members of the farming and forest-owning communities in the relevant catchments on a wide range of conservation actions over the remaining 5 years of the project. Participation by local farm and forest owners in the project will be entirely voluntary.

Important outreach initiatives will also be undertaken to add value to local enterprises and raise awareness amongst the local communities. To that end, a project website will be estab-

lished in the coming weeks and more detailed information will be available there in due course.

Wildlife Protection

229. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the numbers of seals in Irish waters; her views that seal population numbers may be posing a threat to other species numbers such as wild salmon; if the matter is receiving attention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7515/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are two species of seal in Irish waters - the Harbour or Common Seal and the more numerous Grey Seal. Both are protected under the EU Habitats Directive and Ireland is obliged to monitor their populations and report to the European Commission on their conservation status. A standardised monitoring programme has been in place for both species since 2009. The most recent report on their conservation status was submitted to the European Commission in June 2013 and is available on the website www.npws.ie.

The current national minimum population estimate for Grey Seal, derived from survey data gathered in 2009-2012, is 7,284-9,365 animals. There is some evidence of a modest level of population growth in this species over the past 10 years. Overall, however, numbers in Ireland remain low compared with the UK.

Comprehensive nationwide surveys for the Harbour Seal have been undertaken on two occasions - in 2003 and 2011-2012 - in order to provide minimum population estimates for the country as a whole and to update information on the national distribution of the species. The 2011-2012 data produced a national minimum estimate of 3,489 Harbour Seals. While this is slightly higher than the 2003 estimate, variability in breeding success between sites and between years does not allow for a robust population trend to be determined at this stage.

Seals have a broad diet which varies depending on fish species availability. Studies of the interactions between seals and salmon are ongoing at Inland Fisheries Ireland. The outcomes of this research, together with recently published studies from Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Marine Institute concerning seal depredation (fish eaten by seals during fisheries operations) and bycatch of seals in set nets, will require careful consideration. All of these studies will continue to inform policy in relation to seal protection.

Departmental Correspondence

230. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry has been progressed by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7545/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I understand officials of my Department facilitated an initial meeting with the group in question in May of last year in order that the group could outline their proposals. The group were advised to submit a formal proposal for my Department's consideration. My Department awaits receipt of this proposal, and remains willing to engage with the group should they wish to progress the matter.

Planning Issues

231. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry has been progressed by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7546/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is not currently considering any application in respect of the development in question. It is my view that such a development would require planning consent in accordance with the Planning and Development Acts. Under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, I am precluded from exercising consent functions where such functions fall under the responsibility of another public authority.

Commemorative Events

232. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to run a programme of activities to mark the centenary of the birth of a noted author; the reason no reply was sent on correspondence regarding this matter to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7576/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has been charged with the co-ordination of commemorative events constituting the centenary programme, which is a comprehensive exploration of the period from 1912 keeping pace with the centenary timeline. These have focused on events commemorating for example, aspects of the Irish Revolutionary Period including the Home Rule Bill; Cumann na mBan; the Howth gun-running, the 1916 Rising, as well as events to commemorate the outbreak and progress of World War 1.

My Department has received proposals to support many events and programmes and it is not possible to support them all, and this is the position in this case. It should be noted that the outline proposal was raised with the Expert Advisory Group of historians on 27 January last.

My Department is issuing a reply to the person concerned.

Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme Expenditure

233. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount of funding, by county, provided to local authorities in 2015, for the Structures at Risk Programme; the amount allocated to the Heritage Council to provide to local authorities for the preservation of protected structures in 2015; the amount of money provided, under the Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme 2015; if she will provide details of other funding to be provided to local authorities for privately owned protected structures in 2015; broken down by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7577/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 9 February last, I announced an allocation of €624,000 for the Structures at Risk Fund 2015, to enable conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended, and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. This Fund, which will be administered through the local authorities, encourages the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and helps to secure the preservation of protected structures, which might otherwise be lost. The Fund is open to two applications per local authority, of which only one application may be in respect of a publicly-owned building. The amount of funding available per project will be subject to a minimum

level of €15,000 and a maximum level of €60,000. Final details of projects funded will be made available once all applications are received by the local authorities and assessed by my Department. Since 2011, over 100 structures have been safeguarded for the future as a result of the Structures at Risk Fund.

The remainder of my Department's built heritage capital budget for 2015 will be focused on the conservation and presentation of the State's heritage portfolio, which is managed by the Office of Public Works.

In the published Revised Estimates for Public Services 2015, funding of €4.743m was allocated to the Heritage Council to support its functions under the Heritage Act 1995, in its role of supporting heritage infrastructure, promoting pride and best practice in conservation and sustainable heritage management. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports in 2015 and future years, having regard to competing priorities for limited resources.

In 2014 my Department was provided with a special allocation of €5m from Capital Stimulus funding for a new Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme to assist with works to safeguard structures, in private and civic ownership, protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended. A total of €15m was invested in 540 historic structures across the country and information provided by the local authorities indicates that 175 jobs were created as a result of this scheme. The operation of a similar scheme in the future would be contingent on dedicated funding being made available to my Department.

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