

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.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

9. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which the economy continues to benefit from public sector and general reform over the past number of years; if he expects the benefits from such reforms to continue to accrue into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33310/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Service Reform was a key element of the Government's response to the crisis and continues to be an essential part of our strategy for recovery. The reforms we have implemented have enabled us to maintain and improve public services in the face of necessary reductions in staff numbers and budgets, and at a time of increased demand for public services.

Significant progress has been made since the publication of the Government's first Public Service Reform Plan in 2011. Staff numbers have been reduced by around 10% since 2008 and the pay bill has been reduced by over 20%. Other reforms include changes to terms and conditions such as reduced sick leave entitlements and additional working hours. In addition to the reduced cost of the Public Service and improved productivity, reform is also delivering benefits across a range of specific areas such as digital government, shared services, procurement reform and property management.

A second Public Service Reform Plan (2014-2016) was published in January 2014. While maintaining an emphasis on efficiency and reducing costs, this Plan puts a particular focus on improved service delivery and achieving better outcomes. The actions set out in the Reform Plan address areas such as: greater use of shared services and innovative approaches to service delivery; increased use of technology and improved engagement with service users; more efficient and effective public procurement; increased accountability and transparency in public decision making; enhanced leadership and performance management; and a continued focus on building the required capacity to deliver reform. A comprehensive Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 was published in March of this year and can be seen on my Department's website.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Taoiseach and I published a Civil Service Renewal Plan in October last year. The implementation of this ambitious three year plan will lead to major changes right across the Civil Service. A Progress Report, outlining the significant progress achieved in the first 200 days, was published in July and is also available on my Department's website.

Public Service Reform will remain a key element of our ongoing recovery strategy. Overall, I am satisfied that we have made significant progress to date and that the benefits of these reforms will continue to accrue into the future. The scale of reform that we have delivered could not have happened without the efforts and commitment of our public servants and I commend them for their contribution.

Questions Nos. 10 and 11 answered orally.

Budget 2016

12. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the manner in which European Union and national expenditure rules will impact on Budget 2016 and the public finances generally; if he expects any amendment to the way in which these rules will be applied in practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33414/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The budgetary reforms introduced at national level, including the Medium Term Expenditure Framework, operate within the broader context of the reforms at EU level to the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP).

Ireland is currently subject to the corrective arm of the SGP. While in the corrective arm the key budgetary objective is to bring the deficit each year below the limit set under the Excessive Deficit Procedure. This Government has achieved this key target each year and, as outlined in the Spring Economic Statement (SES), Ireland is on track to exit the corrective arm of the SGP at the end of 2015 with a General Government Deficit of 2.3%. This is well below the limit of 2.9% under the Excessive Deficit Procedure.

Budget 2016 will therefore be framed under the rules that apply under the preventive arm of the SGP that will require Ireland to adhere to an adjustment path towards the Medium Term Objective (MTO). Until the MTO is reached, a minimum annual structural improvement of greater 0.5 per cent of GDP is required. Compliance with the preventive arm is also assessed by reference to the Expenditure Benchmark. The Expenditure Benchmark links the year on year growth in expenditure to the potential growth rate of the economy.

As set out on page 34 of the SES, following discussions with the European Commission, there has been clarification on the application of the Expenditure Benchmark that is positive from an Irish perspective, with a marginal benefit in terms of fiscal space for 2016 equivalent to 0.4% of GDP.

The SES outlined that fiscal space of the order of €1.2 billion to €1.5 billion is available for Budget 2016, which affords the scope to increase Government expenditure by €750 million between 2015 and 2016.

Compliance with the fiscal rules under the preventive arm of the SGP, will ensure that Ireland's public finances are kept on a sustainable path, with revenues sufficient to support spending. The challenge will remain to prioritise and design Government interventions within this framework.

National Lottery Funding Disbursement

13. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made on the provision of funding to the natural environment, specifically from the

National Lottery, as set out in 2013; when he expects the first disbursement will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33308/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The National Lottery provides funds for “Good Causes” in accordance with the National Lottery Act 2013. The areas to be funded are set out under section 41 (1) of the National Lottery Act as follows:

- sport and recreation;
- national culture and heritage (including the Irish language);
- the arts (within the meaning of the Arts Act 2003);
- health of the community;
- youth, welfare and amenities; and
- the natural environment (added in the 2013 Act).

The Act also provides that the proceeds may be applied to such (if any) other purposes as the Government may determine from time to time.

A breakdown by Department of all the expenditure areas that are supported by the proceeds of the National Lottery is set out in Appendix 1 of the annual Revised Estimates for Public Services (available at <http://www.per.gov.ie/estpubexp2013/>).

Funding is provided by the Oireachtas, in accordance with the Act, through expenditure subheads which form part of Departmental Programmes. For over a decade, the total allocation for these subheads has exceeded the amount available from the National Lottery. These subheads are described as being part-funded by the National Lottery and the balance of the expenditure allocation for the subheads comes from normal Exchequer sources (e.g. tax revenue or borrowing). All expenditure under these sub-heads, including that funded by the Lottery, counts towards the Government’s expenditure ceiling in the year in question.

The 2013 Act provided for a new area the Natural Environment to be added to the list of categories that may be funded by the Lottery. It is open to relevant Departments (e.g. the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government or the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht) to make a proposal to my Department for Lottery funding for a project or programme relevant to this new area. Should an application be received, it will be considered in the context of the level of funds available for Good Causes in the relevant year as well as the Government’s overall expenditure ceiling.

While, to date, moneys from the National Lottery Fund have not been disbursed to this area, it is important to note that the Government already provides significant funding to the Environment Sector, e.g. the Environment Fund and through the Vote of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

Commemorative Events

14. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an update in relation to the 1916 commemoration projects with which the Office of Public Works is involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33415/15]

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

Harris): As I have previously indicated to the Deputy, the Commissioners of Public Works have a particular role in relation to the Commemorations plans that arises from the responsibility they have for the care and maintenance of National Monuments and certain other Heritage properties in State care. These are, in many cases, iconic locations and important in the context of the forthcoming Commemorations.

The Commissioners also have an operational role in relation to supporting the various planned official Commemorations events with logistical support and organisation which is derived from their long experience at similar events and this will be an important element of work for them throughout 2016. Logistical support for the various official projects is ongoing. OPW has delivered a number of key State events recently, including the O'Donovan Rossa commemoration and the State funeral for Thomas Kent for example, with planning well underway for the remainder.

The following are the details of the various plans and projects with which the OPW is involved through these various roles.

Site	Details
Kilmainham Gaol	Development of new Visitor Centre at the former Kilmainham Courthouse (Complete early 2016) Restoration of the roof of the East Wing at the Gaol (Complete)
St Enda's/Pearse Museum, Rathfarnham	Programme of restoration of the 18th/19th century follies dotted around the Park which were used by Pearse in the staging of dramatic pageants. (Complete) Continuation of the programme of exhibitions and events underway since approx 2010 at the Pearse Museum and Park at Rathfarnham. (Ongoing) Permanent exhibition on the life of Pearse. (Complete 2016)
Arbour Hill	Essential restoration and necessary works to the site (works to start onsite shortly; complete by end 2015)
Garden of Remembrance	Universal Access works (works underway; complete by end 2015); Conservation works at the Children of Lir statue (conservation works to begin immediately).
Pearse Cottage	Provision, by Údaras na Gaeltachta, of a new Visitor Facility and Cultural Centre at Pearse Cottage site (which is Managed by the OPW), including a new Exhibition. Programme of new Universal access works at the Pearse Cottage.

Site	Details
Mac Diarmada Homestead	Major structural / roof renewal / thatching project in 2013. Leitrim Co Council planning the development of a carpark at the Mac Diarmada site; Visitor Facility provided in nearby Kiltyclogher by local volunteer Group with OPW support.
National Concert Hall	Refurbishment of Kevin Barry Room to be completed in March 2016. Related access routes to be completed during 2016.

Fiscal Policy

15. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the discussions he has had with the Department of Finance in relation to the proposed 50:50 ratio of tax cuts to public services investment in advance of the upcoming budget; his views that this constitutes the most effective use of public moneys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33312/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The fiscal adjustment required to bring sustainability to the public finances required both significant expenditure reductions and tax increases.

For Budget 2016 the Spring Economic Statement (SES) outlined that fiscal space of the order of €1.2 to €1.5 billion will be available in Budget 2016, and that the Government has decided to split this evenly between expenditure increases and tax reductions. This will allow the Government to encourage further economic growth, increase investment in public services, and reduce the tax burden for low and middle income earners.

This 2016 budgetary approach reflects the strategy of Government to marry the objectives of encouraging economic growth while increasing the resources available to deliver quality public services. An approach that looks to create the right conditions for growth in employment through progressive taxation, appropriate regulation and targeted investment can ensure that there are sufficient resources available to deliver effective public services for our citizens.

In relation to future years, decisions regarding the division of fiscal space between tax and expenditure measures will be taken in the relevant estimates cycle. Such decisions will take account of the prevailing economic conditions and Government's commitments to investing in public infrastructure and services.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the priorities in his capital expenditure statement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33081/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Yesterday, I announced the publication of "Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021". The Capital Plan sets out the Government's commitment to Exchequer investment of €27 billion over the six-year period 2016-2021 across a number of key priorities.

In recognition of the importance of transport to our recovery and the large scale investment needed, €10 billion is being provided for transport between 2016 and 2022. This will include €6bn for investment in the national, regional and local road network. It also involves €3.6bn for Public Transport, including a new Metro link in Dublin.

Over the period 2016 to 2021, capital funding of almost €3 billion will be provided in support of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, which aims to increase the supply of social housing by up to 35,000 units.

€3.8 billion is being invested in Education which will enable us to continue to meet growing enrolments at primary and post-primary level, and also to invest in third level facilities.

Over €3 billion is being invested in Health to deliver major infrastructural projects such as the new National Children's Hospital.

The Plan also announces the development of a new 3rd Phase of the Government's PPP programme with about €500 million of PPP projects.

In addition, over the period of the Capital Plan, the wider State sector plans to invest €14½ billion in capital projects. This will principally be undertaken by the commercial State-owned companies. These will lead to about €42 billion of State backed investment in capital projects.

The Exchequer funded Plan will support some 45,000 construction related jobs and protect our economic recovery and competitiveness.

It is a National programme that will also provide a commitment to rollout Broadband in rural areas, investment via the Rural Development Programme, and a new Village Renewal Scheme. We will respond to climate change by investing more resources in energy efficiency, Forestry Programmes, increasing flood mitigation works.

We will also make investments in the Justice Sector including investment in necessary ICT infrastructure and in the Garda fleet to support Garda reform and deliver an effective and modern policing service.

The resources are targeted where infrastructural improvements are most required. The plan has been designed to underpin and build on our economic recovery.

Public Service Contracts

17. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the percentage of supplies and services public contracts that have been awarded to micro-enterprises which collaborated on a public sector tender through a joint bidding or consortium formation, year-on-year over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33409/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The national platform for the management of tendering, eTenders, which is managed by the OGP, does not collect data relating to consortia or joint bids as part of the tendering process. Directive 2014/24/EU published by Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) on February 26th 2014 which is yet to be transposed in to Irish Law, instructs that information on whether contracts are awarded to a group of economic operators (joint venture, consortium or other) is to be captured. It is intended that eTenders platform will have the capability to capture this data.

Since late 2013 the OGP has undertaken a significant business intelligence exercise to analyse the national state spend and tendering activities. As the Deputy is aware, a ground-breaking

report was published earlier this year by the OGP which analysed 2013 spend and tendering activity from 64 large public service bodies across thousands of account codes relating to almost 4 million payment transactions. Over 35,000 suppliers were classified by size using data from Dun & Bradstreet, Irish Times, eTenders, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and SoloCheck. ie. However for the majority of businesses full data was not available and for the majority of likely “micro” businesses no data at all was publicly available. Where no classification data was available (accounting for 14% of the spend data collected), these suppliers were excluded from the analysis.

Much effort has been made by the OGP to communicate with Suppliers asking them to update their business profiles in eTenders (the national tendering platform www.eTenders.gov.ie) with accurate business profile data so it can expand and improve the classification methodology. Until more data is available the OGP will not be able to report specifically on micro-enterprises.

The OGP consistently promotes the inclusion of SMEs in public tendering activities and as part of Circular 10/14 issued last year SMEs are encouraged to consider using consortia where they are not of sufficient scale to tender in their own right. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has also issued guidance for companies in this regard. Template tender and contract documents allow for consortia to tender for public procurement opportunities.

The OGP issued a report titled “Public Service Spend and Tendering Analysis for 2013” and the positive news for Irish businesses and for SMEs is that the data indicates

- 93% of public service expenditure is with businesses in the Republic of Ireland;
- 66% of public service expenditure is with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), ranging from high levels of SME success in areas such as Plant Hire (98%), Laboratory and Diagnostic Equipment (87%) and Minor Building and Civils Works (85%) to low levels in areas such as Utilities (24%) and Medical, Surgical and Pharmaceutical Supplies (38%).

Public Procurement Contracts

18. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the consideration he has given to the inclusion of a social clause in capital public procurement projects to the value of €1 million or more. [33411/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Government supports the use of social clauses in a manner which can address issues such as social exclusion, long term unemployment or provide enhanced opportunities through the provision of training.

Whilst the Government is convinced of the merit in using social clauses in particular circumstances, it is important that contracting authorities are not compelled to use them on every contract particularly where their deployment may disproportionately impact on SME’s bidding for public contracts. They are used to best effect in a targeted fashion to tackle the identified causes of inequity or deprivation.

In order to ensure that social clauses do not discriminate, it is best to use general categories of beneficiary (e.g. long-term unemployed, trainees, young people) and then target the social benefits through ‘supply-side’ activities (e.g. training and job-matching services). Targeted social clauses are likely to be most effective in cases where they are actively supported by supply-side actions and by good monitoring and evaluation processes taken by the Department or Agency with the relevant policy remit. The inclusion of social clauses represents additional

costs to the State and suppliers in meeting the requirements and demonstrating and verifying compliance. It is imperative that such provisions

- are enforced and independently verified;
- do not adversely affect value for money;
- do not place additional costs on domestic suppliers relative to other potential suppliers, and;
- are only applied to contracts of a minimum scale so that they do not disadvantage SMEs.

Unemployment in the construction sector increased since the economic crisis first hit mirroring the decline in activity. In response, Government set out a range of actions in Construction 2020 aimed at increasing activity and has introduced a number of stimulus packages to increase activity and employment in the sector. Social clauses are included in the various contracts that are awarded under the PPP element of the €2.25bn package announced in July 2012. These clauses require a minimum percentage of the time required to deliver the contract to be undertaken by those recruited from the ranks of the long term unemployed and apprentices.

The operation of this clause has already been successfully piloted and local Intreo offices have worked closely with the appointed contractors to support the pilot initiative.

The OGP is currently developing guidance for my consideration in including social clauses more broadly in tender and contract documentation.

Open Government Partnership

19. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the implementation of Ireland's first Open Government Partnership national action plan across the three main areas of promoting open data and transparency, building citizen participation and strengthening governance and accountability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33327/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy is aware, Ireland became a full member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in July 2014 following the publication of its first National Action Plan 2014-2016. There are 26 commitments in the Plan which span the following three core areas:

1. Open Data and Transparency
2. Fostering citizen participation/more active citizenship
3. Strengthening governance and accountability

Membership of the OGP requires governments to submit annual Self-Assessment Reports assessing performance in meeting the commitments in the OGP National Action Plans.

I recently published for consultation, prior to finalisation and submission to the OGP Support Unit internationally, Ireland's first self-assessment report.

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the first year review shows that excellent progress has been made in implementing the Plan across each of the main areas with 9 actions already fully completed, 13 substantially completed and only 4 with limited progress. I am particularly pleased that the areas under my own remit on Open Data, legislative reforms and a number of

key actions around citizen engagement are very substantially progressed.

In relation to Open Data completed actions include establishment of a Technical Framework meeting best practice standards and development of an Open Data portal. The establishment of an Open Data Governance Board is well advanced.

In relation to citizen participation, completed actions include development of new public consultation guidelines in line with best practice internationally, early engagement in the legislative process, Public Participation Networks have been established at local government level, the first Strategy on children and young people's participation in decision-making has been developed and other actions are well advanced.

In relation to strengthening governance and accountability, a number of legislative reforms have been introduced including the Freedom of Information Act 2014, the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, and the Lobbying Regulation 2015.

I am confident that the various actions will achieve greater transparency and accountability, help improve public services, and enable valuable contributions to decision-making, all of which are extremely important to the functioning of government institutions and ultimately economic growth and social progress.

EU Directives

20. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the consideration he has given to transposing the new European Union procurement directives into Irish Law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33412/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): On 28 March, 2014, the European Commission published three new Directives as a collective reform of the existing EU regime for public procurement under the existing provisions of Directive 2004/17/EU - co-ordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and Directive 2004/18/EU - on the co-ordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts.

The new Directives referred to by the Deputy are:

2014/23/EU - on the award of concession contracts

2014/24/EU- on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EU

2014/25/EU - on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and repealing Directive 2004/17/EC.

The bulk of the new public procurement suite of Directives are mandatory for all Member States to implement into national law. The Directives will be transposed by Statutory Instrument and I intend to adhere as closely as possible to the wording and intent across the Directives to provide maximum flexibility for procurers.

These Directives do provide a number of policy choices for Member States. In this regard, the Office of Government Procurement, which is under the aegis of my Department, has conducted both an internal consultation and a public consultation process. The public consultation process was initiated at the end of October 2014 and 43 submissions were received by end January 2015, including submissions by representative bodies such as ICTU, IBEC and Enterprise Ireland.

I understand that the Office of Government Procurement has submitted a draft memorandum to the Office of Parliamentary Counsel to allow the commencement of drafting of the Statutory Instrument transposing Directive 2014/24/EU.

It is expected that the transposition of the public procurement, utilities and concessions Directives into Irish law will be completed by April 2016.

The principal approach to transposing the new procurement regime as set out in the new Directives has been to retain the flexibilities provided for in the Directives in order to ensure that Ireland is not disadvantaged in any aspect of public procurement relative to other Member States.

Performance Management and Development System

21. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to reform the performance measurement system in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33078/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): My Department has engaged in an ongoing review and reform of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) on in the civil service. A particular priority has been to address significant weaknesses in the performance management system overall. These include the extremely low proportion of serious underperformance identified and the high proportion of personnel who are awarded high ratings as well as a significant lack of consistency in the distribution of ratings across different civil service Departments and Offices.

In 2011 and 2012, changes introduced to PMDS, included:

- simplification of the system
- award of a low rating to managers who do not manage the performance of their staff
- a grade-based competency framework
- revised ratings with improved descriptions of performance
- a rating of 'Fully Achieved Expectations' required for the award of an increment.

In 2014, the ePMDS electronic system was launched. An eProbation system to manage the performance of new entrants is currently being developed.

Following Government approval for the Civil Service Renewal Plan responsibility for the reform and strengthening of performance management in the civil service resides with the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) composed of Secretaries-General of Government Departments and Heads of Civil Service Offices and subject to the oversight of the Civil Service Accountability Board.

The CSMB is proposing a number of important reforms to PMDS. These include the introduction of a two-point rating system - in which performance will be assessed to be either acceptable or not acceptable - to replace the current complex five-point scale that has not proved successful at differentiating between different performance standards.

Alongside the new ratings system, the adoption of a sharper focus on the developmental objectives of PMDS through the integration of performance management with learning and

development to support ongoing improvements in performance of all civil servants and the provision of greater supports for managers to identify and address serious underperformance in a small number of staff.

I look forward to the early introduction of these proposals following consultation with staff representatives, as appropriate.

Public Sector Staff Data

22. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of full-time equivalent public servants at the end of 2014; the estimated number at the end of 2015 and for 2016, his views on public sector recruitment generally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33418/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): For the number of full-time equivalent public servants at end 2014, I would refer the Deputy to the Databank on my Department's website, at databank.per.gov.ie, which shows an outturn of 289,643 at end year. For 2015, provision was made in the Budget for just over 292,000 public servants, on a full-time equivalent basis. Further information on the departmental breakdown of this provision is set out in the 2015 Revised Estimates, which again is available on my Department's website. With regard to staffing and recruitment levels for 2016, these matters will fall to be considered in the context of Budget 2016.

On the general issues of public service recruitment, there has been a considerable level of recruitment across the public service in 2015, especially in the Health and Education sectors and in An Garda Síochána. So far this year, 200 Garda Trainees have been recruited, with a further 150 planned to commence before year end. Over 2,700 new staff have being recruited into the Health sector during the first half of this year, and in the Education sector there will be 900 more teachers, 830 more Special Needs Assistants and 570 more Resource Teachers by the end of this year compared with 2014.

At the broader policy level, the Deputy will recall that at Budget time last October I also announced an end to the Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion in the Public Service, to be replaced with new delegated management arrangements to be phased in during 2015 and 2016. These arrangements, which now apply to most Government departments, give managers the means to respond to service needs as they arise, including considerable flexibility to make staffing and service level delivery decisions at the front line.

These new arrangements represent a significant shift away from the central control of the Moratorium and allow Departments greater management of its staffing resources.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

23. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which, following the Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements, he and his Department have examined the possibility of approval for prudent and strategic expenditure, with a view to addressing those areas most severely affected by curtailments during the economic downturn; given the need to maximise the opportunities in the future and to consolidate economic gains to date, if investment will be made in infrastructure, such as the M7 Naas-Newbridge-Sallins bypass upgrade, an enhanced local authority housing programme; if education and health services can be facilitated along with a restoration of incomes in some form for the

general public, in recognition of the sacrifices made since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33309/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Earlier this week, I announced the Government's large scale Exchequer investment programme of €27bn over the period 2016 to 2021. This will increase the State's infrastructure, support economic recovery and jobs, support sustainable communities throughout Ireland and provide modern fit for purpose buildings to deliver services to our citizens.

This investment Programme has been carefully designed to meet the needs of a growing economy and builds on the recovery, addresses emerging pressures especially on transport networks- supports the regions, and provides social infrastructure to enhance quality of life and is responsive to environmental challenges.

In recognition of the importance of transport to our recovery and the large scale investment needed, €10 billion is being provided for transport between 2016 and 2022. This will include €6bn for investment in the national, regional and local road network, which includes the projects referenced by the Deputy. It also involves €3.6bn for Public Transport, including a new metro link in Dublin.

In last year's Budget, we identified Social Housing as a critical area for investment, and over the period 2016 to 2021 capital funding of almost €3 billion will be provided in support of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, which aims to increase the supply of social housing by up to 35,000 units.

€3.8 billion is being invested in Education which will enable us to continue to meet growing enrolments at primary and post-primary level, and also to invest in third level facilities.

Over €3 billion is being invested in Health. This will deliver major infrastructural projects such as the new National Children's Hospital, which will be the largest health infrastructure project ever undertaken in Ireland.

Ireland's economic recovery is underway and fiscal choices are now increasing. There will be moderate but steady increases in resource levels over the coming period. However, there are a wide range of competing demands for those funds. On October 13th, I will present the 2016 spending Estimates to the House as part of the Budget with my colleague the Minister for Finance. In line with this Government's previous budgets, Budget 2016 will strike a balance between what is fair and appropriate whilst being mindful of the need to continue to build on the fiscal improvement that we have achieved.

Public Service Reform Plan Measures

24. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the efficiencies being achieved in the public sector regarding the use of shared services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33079/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Shared Services is a key element of the Public Service Reform Plan and a core priority for my Department. The National Shared Services Office (NSSO) within the Department is leading on shared service strategy and implementation within the overall Reform and Renewal context. It is responsible for delivering Shared Services projects in the Civil Service and for the operation of Civil Service Shared Service Centres. As part of its wider leadership role, the NSSO provides support to other Public Service sectors in progressing their Shared Service commitments but is

not directly responsible for their implementation.

My Department is advancing 3 key Shared Services projects across the Civil Service. These are:

PeoplePoint, the HR and Pensions Administration Shared Service Centre; PeoplePoint operates the Civil and Public Service HR and pensions administration service on behalf of 31 Public Service Bodies, serving approximately 26,500 employees currently. This will rise to more than 33,000 employees across 40 Public Service Bodies.

Payroll Shared Service Centre The Payroll Shared Service Centre (PSSC) provides payroll and travel and subsistence services to 31,000 payees across 34 Public Service Bodies. This will rise to 120,000 payees (including pension payees) across 53 Public Service Bodies.

Financial Management Shared Service Project The Financial Management Shared Service Project is at an earlier stage. A procurement exercise is nearing completion for a single solution to deliver Financial Management Shared Services to approximately 47 Public Service Bodies. Once the business case is fully evaluated, I expect to seek the approval of Government to progress to implementation. Shared Services improves management insights to support more informed decision making at PSBs and across Central Government through standardising data sets and common information requirements and sharing of cost effective standard technology solutions.

- Shared Services allows Public Service Bodies have the right balance of retained knowledge and more strategic expertise to focus on the core business of their Department.

- Shared Services frees up resources to support core Government services and priorities for front-line services, and creates harmonisation opportunities increasing policy compliance across Departments and drives processing excellence, efficiency and scalability.

- Shared Services is not a short-term efficiency measure. Both public and private sector best practice indicates that benefits are generally realised over three to five years following the transitioning of all customers into the new service.

- Over the medium term, Shared Services delivers effective and efficient corporate services through the adoption of standardised processes for repeatable transactions, thereby improving performance and reducing duplication of effort and avoidance of procuring expensive highly customised individual solutions in response to new and emerging requirements.

In September, I announced that the Government had approved the drafting of the National Shared Services Office Bill 2015 to establish the NSSO as a separate Civil Service Office, under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Register of Lobbying

25. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of lobbyists who have registered on lobbying.ie during the first month of the operation of the new legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33080/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): There are currently just over 340 organisations or individuals registered on the Register of Lobbying. The Deputy can get the up to date numbers by logging on to www.lobbying.ie and clicking either the 'Directory of Registrants' button at the top right hand corner or the 'Search the Directory'

button at the bottom right hand corner of the home page. For each organisation or individual registered you can view their contact details and the main activities of the organisation or individual by clicking on the organisation or individual in question.

Registered lobbyists will be required to provide their first set of returns by 21st January 2016 in respect of the period 1st September to 31 December 2015.

I am satisfied with this initial response level and I expect the numbers registering to continue to increase in light of the public information campaign now underway on the Register of Lobbying and also as we get closer to the 21st January 2016 deadline.

Public Procurement Contracts

26. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the consideration he has given to reducing the size of public procurement tenders to make them accessible to micro-business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33413/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The reform of the procurement system across the public service is a key element of the reform programme for the public service. Reform of Public Procurement is being carried out in a manner that recognises the importance of SMEs including micro business.

In its report “Public Service Spend and Tendering Analysis for 2013”, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), which comes under the remit of my Department, found, as part of its Key Findings, that 74% of tender notices were of small value (i.e. below EU threshold), with the median contract values by spend categories ranging from €500,000 (Utilities) to €50,000 (Veterinary, Marketing, Print, Stationery, Defence). Of the €2.742 billion spend data analysed, just over 66% of the value (€1.82 billion) was spent with suppliers whose business was classified as SMEs.

The Government acknowledges the significant role that SMEs play in the Irish economy and is committed to ensuring that SMEs are fully engaged with public sector procurement and the opportunities presenting. As the Deputy is aware, in April 2014 my Department issued Circular 10/14 aimed at opening up opportunities for small businesses, including micro business, that want to tender for public contracts by, for example, encouraging more on-line open tendering, reducing bidders’ turnover requirements, promoting the use of proportional and reasonable insurance requirements, and breaking larger contracts into lots.

The OGP is also continuing to work with industry representative bodies to promote the engagement of Irish business in public procurement (including ISME, IBEC, SFA, Chambers Ireland, and CIF) as well as the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, InterTrade Ireland, and Enterprise Ireland. For example, in 2015, the OGP supported the “Meet the Buyer” event which took place on 17 June in Belfast and drew over 600 delegates and the OGP is supporting another “Meet the Buyer” event on 21 October in Dublin.

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

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

27. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the

outcome of the Lansdowne Road Agreement financially for those persons earning less than €65,000; the outcome at the conclusion of the Haddington Road Agreement financially in respect of those earning over €65,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33410/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As part of the measures required to repair the Government finances and meet our international commitments to reach the GDP Deficit target of 3% by end 2015, it was necessary in 2013 for the Government to secure agreement (the Haddington Road Agreement) with Unions and Associations representing public servants for the introduction of significant productivity measures and also additional pay cuts for public servants earning over €65,000. There was a commitment given in that Agreement, for the restoration of the 2013 pay cuts in two equal phases in April 2017 and 1 January 2018. For those on annualised remuneration in excess of €110,000, the Government has decided that restoration will be in three equal phases with the first phase due to take place in April 2017 and the two remaining phases in April 2018 and 2019.

The provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, which are significantly weighted in favour of the lower paid, also make provision for increases in gross pay in 2016 for those on pay up to €31,000 and in 2017 for lower and middle income public servants, namely those on pay up to €65,000. For any public servant whose annualised salary is below €24,001 there will be an increase in gross pay of 2.5% from 1 January 2016. For those on annualised salaries between €24,001 and €31,000 there will be an increase in gross pay of 1% from 1 January 2016. For all those on annualised salaries up to €65,000 there will be an increase in gross pay of €1,000 from 1 September 2017.

Additionally, all public servants will benefit from the Pension Related Deduction (PRD) measures contained in the Lansdowne Road Agreement. On 1 January 2016 the exemption threshold for payment of Pension Related Deduction (PRD) will increase from €15,000 per annum to €24,750 per annum and on 1 September the exemption threshold for payment of Pension Related Deduction (PRD) will increase further from €24,750 per annum to €28,750 per annum. The value of the PRD measures to individual public servants is €733 per annum in 2016 increasing to €1,000 in 2017 with lower paid public servants benefiting to a greater extent through the tax code.

Following acceptance of the Lansdowne Road Agreement by the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, my intention is to bring forward the necessary legislation to give effect to the provisions of the Agreement shortly.

Personal Micro Credit Scheme

28. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when micro-loans will be made available for families currently under financial strain; the office that will administer the loans; the location and time when applications for such loans can be submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33681/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A proposal for a Personal Micro Credit scheme in Ireland is currently being developed under the auspices of Citizens Information Board and the Social Finance Foundation.

A preliminary outline of the scheme envisages a microloan facility, operated by Credit Unions, providing small loan amounts (circa €500), over an average term of 12 months, at an interest rate of approximately 12%, with an estimated annual value of €20 million.

There has been extensive engagement in recent months with a number of stakeholders

including my Department, Department of Finance, Central Bank of Ireland, Irish League of Credit Unions, Credit Unions Development Association, Credit Union Managers Association, An Post, Money Advice and Budgeting Service and charity organisations, to progress the development of a Personal Micro Credit Scheme.

An Implementation Group, comprising key stakeholders has been established (chaired by Department of Social Protection) to oversee the implementation of the Personal Micro Credit Scheme in a number of pilot sites initially, and, if successful, to national rollout.

To date, 33 Credit Unions throughout the country have indicated agreement to participate in the pilot scheme which is intended to be in place towards the end of this year. The outcomes and learning from the pilot will inform the development of any final model prior to full roll-out.

Disability Allowance Data

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to increase disability allowance, given the major additional living costs of citizens with disabilities, and given that this proposal was a long-term objective of her own political party while in opposition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33650/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In line with its commitments when it took office, the Government has protected core weekly social welfare rates. Any increases in social welfare rates can only be considered by the Government in the context of its overall deliberations on Budget 2016.

Disability Allowance Applications

30. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a decision on an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33655/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm the Department received an application for disability allowance (DA) on 14 August 2015. In order to determine the circumstances of the person concerned, her file was forwarded to her local Social Welfare Inspector (SWI). The SWI will arrange to meet with the person in question as soon as possible.

A decision on her entitlement to DA will be made on receipt of the Social Welfare Inspector's report. The person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

31. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a decision on an application for renewal of a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33656/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is in receipt of Carer's Allowance (CA). The continued eligibility of the person in question for CA is currently under review.

To this end, the person concerned was asked to submit up to date evidence in relation to the care recipient and, specifically, in relation to the ongoing requirement for full-time care and attention. In order to assist the Department to carry out the review, it is important that the person concerned provides full and complete information for consideration by the deciding officer. Payment of CA will continue while the review is ongoing.

Once the review is completed the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Dietary Allowance Administration

32. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to increase the funding for persons in receipt of a diet allowance because of specific medical conditions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33693/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Diet supplement, administered under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, is payable to qualifying persons, in receipt of the supplement prior to February 2014, who have been prescribed a special diet as a result of a specified medical condition.

During 2013, the Department commissioned the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (INDI) to update its previous research published in 2006 and updated in 2007 on the costs of healthy eating and specialised diets. Pricing for a selection of foods based on branded and own label foods was surveyed in a sample of retail outlets for each diet. These outlets included large stores, large low cost stores, medium sized stores and convenience stores.

The research showed that the average costs across all of the retail outlets of the diets supplemented under the scheme can be met from within one third of the minimum personal rate of social welfare payment, i.e. the SWA rate of €186 per week. The scheme was discontinued on the basis of this evidence.

Payment of the supplement will continue to be made to the existing 4,300 recipients for as long as they continue to be entitled to the payment. In cases of particular hardship that may present, officials have the legislative power to award a payment under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme in cases of exceptional need.

Changes to social welfare schemes can only be considered in a budgetary context.

Fuel Allowance Data

33. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to increase the income limit for applicants under the national fuel allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33709/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The fuel allowance is a payment of €20 per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to low income households. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

The scheme is means tested and an applicant and members of his/her household may have a combined assessable income of up to €100.00 a week above the appropriate rate of State Pension Contributory (€230.30) and qualify for a payment. The weekly income limits are as

follows:

(i) €330.30 for a single person under 80 years (€100 + €230.30);

(ii) €483.80 for a couple where the qualified spouse/civil partner/cohabitant is under 66 years (€100 + €230.30 + €153.30 - value of the increase for a qualified adult aged under 66);

(iii) €536.30 for a couple where the qualified spouse-civil partner-cohabitant is over 66 years (€100 + €230.30 + €206.30 - value of the increase for a qualified adult aged over 66).

In the case of applicants over 80 years of age an extra allowance of €10.00 is applied to the appropriate rate above.

The fuel allowance payment is targeted at those who are more vulnerable to energy poverty, including those reliant on social protection payments for longer periods and who are unlikely to have additional resources of their own.

The Guidelines for the Fuel Allowance Scheme are kept under review. However, any change in the qualifying criteria would have cost implications, and would have to be considered in the context of the Budgetary process. The Government will finalise its consideration of the Budget in the coming weeks and the outcome of this process will be announced on Budget Day.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

34. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will examine the diversity in the means assessment for the adult dependent payment of disability allowance claims, whereby currently, self-employed adult dependents have all of their income means assessed without any disregards; if she will allow for the same disregards as adult dependents who are in employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33755/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department operates a range of statutory means tested schemes where, in order to qualify for the social assistance payment, the claimant must satisfy a means test. The means test takes account of the income a person or couple has in terms of cash, property (other than the home) and capital.

Where a spouse is in insurable employment, the means test takes the gross weekly earnings less PRSI, superannuation, and trade union contributions. A disregard of €60 per day for each day worked up to a maximum of €60 per week is applied, and 60% of the balance is assessed as means.

Where a spouse is self-employed, account is taken of the income which the spouse may reasonably expect to receive in the next year. All expenses necessarily incurred in carrying out the business are disregarded.

This is the method used in assessing spousal earnings, not only for Disability Allowance, but also for Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist. Any change to the means testing of these schemes would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

Community Employment Schemes Data

35. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will clarify the estimated cost of increasing the number of community employment scheme

places from 23,943 to 26,000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33785/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The figure mentioned of 23,943 was the total number of participants and Supervisors employed on Community Employment at year-end 2013.

The estimated cost of 2,057 additional places (inclusive of Supervisory costs) is in the order of €28.8 million.

The current number of participants and supervisors as at the end of August 2015 is 24,239 places.

Social Welfare Fraud Investigations

36. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will investigate a matter (details supplied) regarding social welfare fraud; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33786/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The vast majority of people on social welfare are claiming the correct entitlement due to them. However, a small minority is not and a range of measures are employed by the Department to ensure that social welfare fraud and abuse is minimised and that its control activity is appropriately focused.

The Department has set out its strategic approach to tackling fraud and error in the Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy. It includes systematic measures to prevent and detect fraud and to ensure effective debt recovery and deterrence measures are in place. As part of these measures, the Department is continuing to improve and utilise more innovative approaches to prevent and detect fraud.

A key measure of control activity is the value of control savings achieved by the Department on an annual basis. Control savings are an estimate of the value of various control activities across schemes in payment. They represent the value of prevented expenditure over a future period that would have been incurred if investigative and control work had not been carried out. In this context the Department undertakes a substantial number of control reviews each year. In 2014 over 1m control reviews were carried out yielding control savings of €505m, 99% of the overall target set for 2014. A similar level of savings is expected in 2015. In addition work is ongoing utilising predictive analytics techniques to identify non-compliance amongst existing customers of the three main working age schemes. These predictive models will enable the Department to detect more non-compliant cases and to do so more efficiently.

Furthermore the presence on the ground has been increased through the secondment of 20 Gardaí to the Department's Special Investigation Unit. These officers are augmenting the resources and expertise available to the Department to detect and investigate fraud.

Effective deterrence is also necessary to address fraud. It is important to ensure appropriate sanctions can be applied where fraud is discovered. Where an individual committing social welfare fraud thinks that the potential penalty or sanction is minimal, relative to the potential gain, then fraudulent activity will be encouraged and will most likely continue.

The Department is proactively targeting persons with overpayments to ensure all persons who have a social welfare overpayment are making a contribution towards the repayment of the debt outstanding. Enhanced debt recovery is being achieved through a new debt management system which went live in 2014. €83m in overpayments were recovered in 2014, €8m

more than the target set for the year and an increase of over 17% on the amount recovered in 2013 (€71m approx.). In addition over 315 cases were submitted for prosecution, which was in excess of the target set for last year.

The overall aim of the Department's approach to tackling fraud and incorrect payments is to ensure that the available resources are targeted at, and are available for, the people, who need them most.

Disability Allowance Applications

37. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a disability payment will be approved for a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [33792/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance (DA) from the above named person on 31 August 2015. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

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

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

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

38. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on a claim by a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [33793/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance at her full entitlement – the maximum personal rate per week.

Social Welfare Benefits

39. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application or appeal for disability allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if an application for an increase in rent allowance will also be approved. [33795/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 28 January 2015. The first payment was made by his selected payment method on 12 August 2015.

As a consequence, the rate of rent supplement entitlement was re-assessed and increased on 24 August 2015. The person in question is in receipt of their full entitlement to rent supplement based on their monthly rent, weekly income and family composition.

Question No. 40 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Payments

41. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection as to when arrears of payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33805/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 17 June 2015. The first payment issued by his chosen payment method on 9 September 2015.

It is expected that any arrears due from June to September will issue shortly, once adjustment is calculated and made in respect of payments made in respect of overlapping schemes in the period.

Social Welfare Benefits

42. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost in 2016 of a 1%, 2% and €5 per week increase in the weekly rate of all pension age payments, including proportionate increases for qualified adults where applicable; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33807/15]

43. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost in 2016 of a €5 increase in the monthly rate of child benefit from €135 to €140; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33808/15]

44. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost in 2016 of an increase in the respite care grant to €1,700; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33809/15]

55. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual cost in 2016 of a €5 increase in the monthly rate of child benefit. [33903/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 to 44, inclusive, and 55 together.

The cost in 2016 of a 1%, 2% and €5 per week increase in the weekly rate of all pension-age payments (including proportionate increases for qualified adults, where applicable) is €71 million, €141.1 million and €154.6 million respectively.

The cost in 2016 of a €5 increase in the monthly rate of Child Benefit (from €135 to €140) is €72.6 million.

The cost in 2016 of an increase in the Respite Care Grant by €325, from €1,375 to €1,700 is €30.15 million.

These costings assume the relevant rates of payment increase from the beginning of January 2016. It should be noted that the costings are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2016.

One-Parent Family Payment Payments

45. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the

cost in 2016 of increasing the maximum child age of the one-parent family payment from its current threshold of seven years to 12 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33810/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The full-year cost, in 2016, of increasing the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme maximum child age threshold from seven years to twelve years would be approximately €23.5 million.

It should be noted that this figure includes a reduction in expenditure on the back to work family dividend (BTWFD) scheme. This arises as lone parents who currently are in receipt of this payment would no longer be entitled to the dividend were they to requalify for the OFP payment.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

46. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection with regard to contributory State pensions, the cost in 2016 of allowing persons to disregard up to 200 pre-1994 A1 pay related social insurance payments for the purpose of calculating their date of entry to the workforce; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33811/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): State pension (contributory) is based on the PRSI contributions paid or credited by the person over their working life, and the level of entitlement depends on their yearly average number of contributions.

The homemaker's scheme was introduced in 1994 to make qualification for State pension contributory (SPC) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or incapacitated people, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being calculated for pension purposes. The effect of this is to reduce the number of years by which the person's contributions are divided, thereby increasing their yearly average, making it easier for them to qualify for a maximum rate SPC. However, it is important to note that the homemaker's scheme will not, of itself, qualify a person for a SPC. The standard qualifying conditions for the SPC must also be satisfied. These require a person to enter insurable employment at least ten years before pension age, pay a minimum of 520 contributions at the correct rate (credited contributions do not satisfy this condition) and achieve a yearly average of at least 10 contributions paid or credited on their record.

The information requested by the Deputy is not compiled by my Department, and is not therefore available.

There are no plans to introduce a disregard in respect of parts of a person's insurance record to enable them to qualify for SPC.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

47. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost of increasing the rent supplement limit in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford by 5%, 10% and 15%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33846/15]

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost of increasing all rent supplement limits by 5%, 10% and 15%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33847/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 48 together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 65,000 people at a cost of €298 million in 2015. Over 13,700 rent supplement tenancies have been awarded this year showing that significant numbers are being accommodated under the scheme.

A review of the rent limits undertaken earlier this year found that the impact of increasing limits at a time of constrained supply will increase costs disproportionately for the Exchequer with little or no new housing available to recipients.

Analysis shows that increasing the current rent limits nationwide by 5% would result in a full year cost in excess of €15 million, a 10% increase would carry a cost of almost €37 million, with a 15% increase costing approximately €51 million. A breakdown of this cost on a county basis is not available, however the costs to apply such an increase in the Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford regions, which accounts for over 58% of the customer base, would account for a significant proportion of this additional cost. Though the costing model accurately reflects the increased cost for the scheme, the likelihood is that there will be little additional supply achieved for persons seeking rent supplement support due to the constrained market. There is also the additional risk in a market with such tight supply that rent supplement limits would generate homelessness for low income/single earner families who could no longer compete with the higher rents.

Rather than increasing limits at this time rent supplement policy will continue to allow for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of current limits. Flexibility is provided under the National Framework for Tenancy Sustainment for both existing customers of the scheme and new applicants. Under this measure tenant's circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis, and rents are being increased above prescribed limits as appropriate. This flexible approach has already assisted approximately 4,000 households throughout the country to retain their rented accommodation. In addition, the Department, in conjunction with Threshold, operates a special Protocol in the Dublin and Cork areas where supply issues are particularly acute, with plans to extend this arrangement to Galway City.

I can assure the Deputy that where Departmental staff are notified of a threat of tenancy loss these measures are implemented as appropriate. Persons in receipt of rent supplement at risk of losing their tenancy are advised to contact the Department's Community Welfare Service or Threshold's Tenancy Protection Service without delay.

I am keeping this matter under close review.

Question No. 49 withdrawn.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

50. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review an application for a back to education allowance for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33871/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In order to qualify for the Back to Education Allowance scheme (BTEA) while pursuing a third level course cer-

tain conditions must be fulfilled, including being in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment for 9 months (234 paid or credited days of unemployment).

The person concerned submitted a BTEA application on 11 September 2015, at which point he was advised by email that as he had a total of 186 days and would not be eligible.

Jobseeker's Allowance

51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which jobseeker's allowance and basic payment continues to be made available to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33880/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance payment from 21 May, 2012 to date. The person concerned will continue to receive the payment once he continues to meet the criteria for jobseeker's allowance.

Social Welfare Eligibility

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which a widow (details supplied) in County Kildare is in receipt of the full social welfare entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33885/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is in receipt of a widow's contributory pension at the maximum rate payable to a person under age 66 years of age. She is also in receipt of a qualified child increase at the weekly rate of €29.80 and qualifies for a fuel allowance payment of €20.00 per week. Fuel allowance payments are issued from October to the following April to eligible claimants.

Additionally, the person concerned is in receipt of child benefit in respect of her qualified child. This year the person concerned has applied for, and received, a back to school clothing and footwear allowance.

No other primary social welfare payment is payable at the same time as widow's contributory pension.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection whether a carer's allowance and respite facilities can be provided to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33887/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a social assistance payment made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a relevant person/persons and whose income falls below certain limits.

The department informs me that, to date, no application by the person concerned for CA has been received.

Accordingly, I have arranged for an application form (CR1) to issue, which the person con-

cerned should complete and return as soon as possible, in order that the Department may determine their entitlement to CA. If the person in question has already submitted an application in the past few days, there is no need to re-submit a new application and the Department will be in touch in relation to the application in due course.

The respite care grant (RCG) is paid automatically in June of each year (usually on the first Thursday of the month), to eligible carers.

The person concerned should contact the Health Service Executive (HSE) regarding respite care facilities.

Jobseeker's Benefit

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in determining suitable employment through Intreo, or other means, for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; the extent to which Intreo assessment has concluded, or is ongoing, and keeping in mind the lack of public transport available to the person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33891/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has advised her case officer that she has access to her own transport.

The person concerned met with her case officer firstly on 21 July 2015 where all possible options including, job seeking and training courses were discussed and considered. The person concerned has chosen to participate on a part-time course in the Baldoyle Training Centre though she was offered other suitable course options in the Maynooth area.

Upon completion of the training programme the person concerned will revert to her case officer when they will work together in sourcing suitable employment.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 42.

Climate Change Policy

56. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance if Ireland will make a contribution to the Green Climate Fund and, if so, the extent of the contribution, and when it will be paid. [33692/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the outset, it has to be noted that the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government is, of course, the Minister with lead responsibility, inter alia, for climate change matters. However, as Minister for Finance I have over-riding responsibility to take into account the financial implications of climate change, including Ireland's potential involvement in international climate finance, insofar as these matters may impact domestically on the National Budget. In this respect therefore, I must have regard to economic and budgetary constraints, together with Ireland's obligations under the Stability and Growth Pact, in considering possible public financial contributions in the area of international climate finance.

Against this background, an inter-Departmental technical working group has been established to actively consider and present feasible options for scaling-up/mobilisation of international climate finance in the period to 2020, including via the Green Climate Fund (GCF). This work includes consideration of both public and private finance options as well as policy

instruments. A decision to contribute to the GCF and the size of any such contribution would, of course, require Government approval in the first instance and would fall to be implemented by the Minister for Finance if required.

As with Ireland's involvement with other International Institutions such as the World Bank and funds established by such Institutions, my officials will work closely with officials from other relevant Departments and Agencies to ensure a whole-of-Government approach is taken to meet our policy objectives and optimise outcomes for Ireland. In this manner, it is envisaged that my officials would work closely with those from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and other Departments/Agencies should any contribution be made by Ireland to the GCF.

Tax Exemptions

57. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to expand the current commuter Tax-saver programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33748/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am satisfied that the Travel Pass/ Tax-saver works well for the vast majority of employees who wish to avail of it. Nonetheless any such schemes are periodically reviewed. However the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss in advance any measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill process.

Departmental Offices

58. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will extend the opening hours of the Revenue Commissioners information office in Dublin 1 from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33665/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The deployment of resources to its compliance and customer service programmes is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. I am advised by Revenue that they offer a range of service channels that are adapted and refined to meet the changing demands of taxpayers. The demand for 'walk in' counter services by taxpayers has declined in recent years as high quality self service electronic and telephone service channels have been introduced and expanded.

I am advised by Revenue that the current opening hours of the Central Revenue Information Office (CRIO) in Dublin 1, reflect taxpayers demand trends that saw the majority of customers calling to the office in the early morning. While there are no plans to change or extend the opening hours of the CRIO, I am assured by Revenue that they continue to monitor and evaluate demand for services in the CRIO. Taxpayers will continue to be provided with a flexible and responsive service commensurate with demand.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Applications

59. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance the number of successful applicants from the Dublin Fingal area to the home renovation incentive scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33691/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commis-

sioners that 2,608 properties within the boundaries of Fingal County Council have registered works under the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) Scheme to date. This figure includes works which have commenced but have not yet been completed, and works which are due to commence. Of these properties within Fingal County Council, works have been completed and paid for in respect of 2,127, and the relevant tax relief can be claimed under the scheme.

The Deputy may be interested to know that other data regarding the HRI scheme are available from Revenue's statistical webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/>. Specifically, the HRI statistics can be accessed at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/hri-stats.pdf>.

Budget 2016

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to provide a detailed breakdown of the carry-over effect relating to taxation measures for budget 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33752/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The table below provides a breakdown of the minus c. €340 million in respect of the carryover effect of measures previously introduced or due to expire in 2016, which was taken account off in the calculation of the estimated fiscal space for 2016 of €1.2 - €1.5 billion in the Spring Economic Statement last April.

Tax head	2016 Carryover €m
Income Tax	-192
Corporation Tax	-15
VAT	-2
CAT	+1
Pension Levy	-135

Tax Data

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expected yield from the introduction of a 5% and a 10% tax on sugar sweetened drinks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33756/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A tax on sugar sweetened drinks may be imposed as either an ad valorem tax, which would be imposed as a percentage of the final retail price (i.e 10%), or a specific duty, which would be imposed as a specific amount per volume of liquid (i.e €7.76 per hectolitre). The Deputy seems to be suggesting an *ad valorem* tax.

There is no official data on the total sales revenue of sugar-sweetened drinks in Ireland. However, using data from industry sources gives the following yield for rates of 5% and 10% on the final sales price of carbonated drinks (diet and non-diet), concentrates, and sports and energy drinks, assuming no behavioural change:

Rate	5%	10%
Yield	€49m	€99m

I would note that an ad valorem tax may be difficult to administer, given it would be imposed on the final retail price of the product, and thus liable to collection at the point of retail.

I would also note that excise duties are traditionally imposed as specific duties, rather than as ad valorem taxes.

Tax Relief Eligibility

62. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Finance if retirees who participate in a pension scheme are permitted to claim tax relief for the full year in which they retire, or only up to the date of retirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33804/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am assuming that the Deputy's question relates to retirees who were formerly, as employees, members of their employer's sponsored occupational pension scheme.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the legislation governing tax relief for contributions to occupational pension schemes is set out in section 774 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997). Relief for contributions is granted to an employee against the remuneration from the employment in respect of which the pension scheme is effected. The relief is given by way of deduction of the pension contributions as an expense in determining the employee's income tax liability for the year in question. In any tax year, the amount of contributions on which relief can be granted is limited to an age-related percentage (ranging from 15% to 40%) of the employee's remuneration (subject to an overall annual earnings' cap, which currently stands at €115,000).

Employee contributions can take the form of ordinary annual contributions, additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) or special contributions[1]. AVCs allow employees to improve the retirement benefits provided by their occupational pension scheme at their own expense (i.e. without a corresponding employer contribution) provided the benefits stay within Revenue maximum limits. A common circumstance in which special contributions arise is in the context of payments to AVC schemes at or near the point of retirement (known as "last minute" AVCs) to enhance benefits (normally the lump sum). Irrespective of the type of contribution (ordinary, AVC or special) overall relief on contributions in any year cannot exceed the relevant age-related percentage limit of earnings.

In the case of ordinary annual contributions (and regular additional voluntary contributions) relief is normally provided by an employer under what is known as the net pay arrangement whereby employee pension contributions are deducted from gross pay before tax is calculated. In the case of special contributions, relief is normally granted by way of a claim made by the taxpayer to Revenue at the end of the relevant tax year. Any unrelieved special contributions made in a year can be carried forward and treated as a contribution made in future years for the purposes of tax relief (subject to the relevant limits applying for those years). This spreading forward continues until the full amount had been granted relief or until it is no longer possible to carry the relief forward.

The inability to carry relief forward would occur, for example, where the employee has retired in which case, as the relief for pension contributions is only available against the remuneration in respect of which the pension scheme is effected, the retirement results in a cessation of the roll forward of relief.

In that regard, however, section 774 (8) of the TCA 1997 provides for a limited spread-back provision for special contributions whereby a contribution made before the return filing date for a year (generally 31 October) can, where the taxpayer so elects, be treated as having been made in the previous year with tax relief granted in that earlier year (subject to the relevant age-

related and earnings limits applying in that earlier year).

This is particularly useful where an individual is close to retirement, as he or she may have insufficient taxable income in the year in which the contributions are paid (i.e. the year of retirement) to absorb the full amount of the special contribution. In addition, the carry forward of unrelieved contributions to later years is not an option for such individuals, as pension income is not taken into account in computing income for pension contribution tax relief purposes. This facility, therefore, effectively allows the retiree to use the tax relief available to him or her in the year of retirement and, where necessary, to take advantage of any unused tax relief in the previous year.

In recognition of the fact that retiring employees who are not chargeable persons (within the meaning of Part 41A TCA 1997) may overlook the 31 October deadline for making an election, Revenue, in such cases, treats an election as being timely where it is received on or before the 31 December of the year of retirement, once the special contribution has been made by the earlier of the return filing date (i.e. 31 October) and the date of retirement.

[1] The legislation only refers to ordinary annual contributions and contributions that are not ordinary annual contributions but the latter encompass AVCs and special contributions. AVCs can be made on a regular basis (like ordinary annual contributions) or on a once off or occasional basis in which case they are generally referred to as special contributions.

Tax Data

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of equalising the treatment of pay as you earn, PAYE, and non-PAYE workers earning over €100,000 per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33825/15]

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of reducing the 11% rate of universal social charge for non-pay as you earn workers earning over €100,000 per year to 10% and to 9%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33826/15]

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of introducing an earned income tax credit for self-employed people of €250; €500; €825; €1,650, per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33827/15]

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of increasing the personal income tax credit by €100 and by €200 per year; the number of taxpayers who would benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33828/15]

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of reducing the 7% rate of universal social charge to 5.5% and to 5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33829/15]

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who paid the 3% universal social charge surcharge on earnings over €100,000 in each year since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33830/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 to 68, inclusive together.

Regarding the question as to the cost of equalising the treatment of Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and non-PAYE income earners over €100,000, it is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the

current 3% Universal Social Charge (USC) surcharge applicable to self-assessed income over €100,000. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated first and full year costs of abolishing this surcharge are in the order of €59 million and €144 million respectively. Alternatively, the estimated first and full year yields to the Exchequer of applying a comparable 3% USC surcharge to Pay As You Earn (PAYE) income over €100,000 are in the order of €84 million and €108 million respectively. The Deputy will be aware that other differences also exist in the treatment of employed and self-employed taxpayers, such as differences in expenses deduction regimes and the timing of tax payments. In this regard, the PAYE and self-assessment systems are not directly comparable.

Regarding the question as to the cost of reducing the 11% rate of Universal Social Charge for non-Pay As You Earn income earners over €100,000 to 10%; and to 9%, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated first and full year costs to the Exchequer of reducing the rate from 11% to 10% are in the order of €20 million and €48 million respectively. The estimated first and full year costs of reducing the rate from 11% to 9% are €40 million and €96 million respectively.

In relation to the question as to the number of persons who paid the 3% Universal Social Charge surcharge on earnings over €100,000 in each year since 2011, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners this information is available for 2012 and 2013 on the Revenue Statistics webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/usc-rates.pdf>.

In response to the question as to the cost of introducing an earned income tax credit for self-employed people of €250; €500; €825; €1,650, per annum the Revenue Commissioners estimate, on the basis of 2013 returns, the latest year for which data are available, introducing this credit would cost in the region of €21 million, €41 million, €68 million and €137 million respectively. For the purposes of this estimate, it is assumed that the credit would only be extended to cases identified to be in receipt of Trading or Professional (Case I or Case II) income, and not currently in receipt of the PAYE credit. The estimate does not take into account the ability of the credit to be fully absorbed.

Regarding the question of the cost of increasing the personal income tax credit by €100; and by €200, per annum; and the number of tax payers who would benefit, I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated full year cost to the Exchequer would be of the order of €219 million and €436 million respectively. The number of income earners to benefit from the Deputy's proposal would be 1.4 million. The increase in the personal tax credits mentioned in the Deputy's Question is assumed to apply in similar measure to widowed persons tax credit and to include the normal consequential increases in the tax credit for lone parents and the married tax credit. It should also be noted that a married couple or civil partners who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

In relation to the question as to the cost of reducing the 7% rate of Universal Social Charge to 5.5%; and to 5%, I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a Ready Reckoner is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>. This Pre-Budget 2016 Ready Reckoner shows a wide range of information including a number of indicative changes to USC rates and thresholds. While the Ready Reckoner does not show all of the specific costings requested by the Deputy, other changes can be estimated broadly on a pro-rata (or straight-line) basis with those displayed in the Reckoner.

All figures provided above are estimates for 2016 incomes from the Revenue tax forecasting model using latest actual data for the year 2013, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are provisional and may be revised.

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the existing employment and investment incentive scheme, the cost of increasing the €150,000 annual investment limit for individuals to €200,000, €250,000 and €500,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33831/15]

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the existing employment and investment incentive scheme, the cost of permanently removing the scheme from the high earners' restriction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33832/15]

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the existing employment and investment incentive scheme, the cost of providing full income tax, universal social charge and pay related social insurance relief in the year of investment, rather than over two stages, as currently provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33833/15]

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the existing employment and investment incentive scheme, the cost of the tax expenditure relating to the scheme in each year since it was established; the number of jobs it supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33834/15]

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the existing employment and investment incentive scheme, the cost of increasing the investment period to five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33835/15]

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the existing employment and investment incentive scheme, the cost of increasing the €10 million company investment life-time limit to €15 million, €20 million and €25 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33836/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 to 74, inclusive, together.

The cost of increasing the €150,000 annual investment limit for individuals to €200,000, €250,000 and €500,000 would depend on future investment levels in excess of the existing annual investment level but there is no information available from returns filed with Revenue to predict these levels. It should be noted that in 2014, the most recent year available, it is estimated that over 70 individuals claimed relief under the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) for investments at or near the limit of €150,000. This does not take into account individuals who invest via a fund.

The Deputy should note that it is not possible to state the cost of permanently removing the EII from the High Earners restriction as the effect of including the scheme in the restriction is to delay the relief rather than disallow it. This means the effect of removing it from the restriction would only lead to a temporary cash flow gain which could be in the region of €1 million each year from 2018. There would be no cash flow for earlier years as the scheme is not included in the restriction for investments before 1 January 2017.

The estimated cash flow cost of providing full Income Tax relief in the year of investment, rather than over two stages, as currently provided, would be in the region of €7 million to €10 million in the first year of introduction. The incentive does not provide relief from Universal Social Charge and Pay Related Social Insurance, so this has not been costed.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a wide range of statistical information is

available on the Commissioners' Statistics web page: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html>. In particular, the tax expenditure section of the web page includes the cost of the scheme: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/costs-tax-expenditures.pdf>.

Data in relation to the number of jobs supported will become available at a later stage. Under the terms of the scheme, relief in respect of 30% of the amount invested in a qualifying company is granted to the investor in the year of investment, while the balance is only due where it has been proven that employment levels have increased at the company at the end of the 3 year holding period or where evidence is provided that the company used the capital raised for expenditure on research and development. Claims for the balance of the relief will be due from 2015.

In relation to increasing the investment period to five years, it is not possible to accurately estimate the impact of the tax cost but presumably there would be a disincentive effect on investment in the scheme which would likely lower the tax cost.

The cost of increasing the €10 million company investment lifetime limit to €15 million, €20 million and €25 million would depend on the ability of companies to secure investment in excess of the existing scheme. No company has utilised the full limit of €10 million so far.

Tax Code

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance in respect of capital gains tax entrepreneurs' relief, to indicate the cost of simplifying the relief to provide a 10% capital gains tax rate on entrepreneurial gains up to €10 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33837/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There are gaps in the data available to the Revenue Commissioners which prevent a definitive costing being provided for this proposal. Tax returns data available to the Commissioners do not in all cases clearly distinguish between disposals of business assets and non-business assets. Furthermore, it is not clear from the question what would be considered "entrepreneurial" gains and the Revenue Commissioners have no reliable data to make distinctions between gains on that basis. Subject to these caveats it is very tentatively estimated that the cost of introducing a €10 m cap and 10% CGT rate for individuals could cost in excess of €130 million in a full year. This assumes that the reduced rate would apply in respect of all quoted and unquoted shares, commercial property disposals by proprietary directors and self-employed individuals and also agricultural land disposals by farmers. This estimate assumes no behavioural impact.

Universal Social Charge Application

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to set out the position on income earners aged over 70 years or with full medical cards with income under €60,000 per year and who pay a maximum universal social charge rate of 3.5%; whether this is due to expire under current legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33841/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, individuals aged over 70 whose income does not exceed €60,000 are liable to a maximum rate of USC of 3.5%. The legislation underpinning this feature of the tax system has no expiry date.

Individuals who hold full medical cards and whose income does not exceed €60,000, are

also only liable to a maximum rate of USC of 3.5%. When the USC was introduced by the previous Government, the preferential rate for medical card holders aged under 70 with unlimited income was due to expire at the end of 2014. I introduced an income cap of €60,000 in Budget 2013 to ensure that this measure was focused on low and middle income earners. In Budget 2015, I extended the preferential rate for these individuals, so that it would be available up to the end 2017. A further review of this measure will be completed in advance of Budget 2018.

NAMA Staff Data

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to confirm how many employees of the National Asset Management Agency have expressed an interest in availing of its voluntary redundancy programme to date; whether the agency expects to achieve its target of reducing its workforce from 342 to 291 by the end of 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33843/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by NAMA that the Agency received 80 applications for the programme. Of these, I am advised that 3 members of staff re-considered, leaving 77 expressions of interest. I am further advised that NAMA accepted 51 of these applications, in keeping with reducing staff numbers to 291 by the end of 2015.

Property Tax Administration

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to set out the approximate cost of providing assistance to persons over the age of 70 who wish to trade down to a smaller house by exempting them from stamp duty on the purchase of a new home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33852/15]

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to outline the approximate cost of providing assistance to persons over the age of 70 who wish to trade down to a smaller house of exempting them from the local property tax on their new home for a period of five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33853/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 79 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the information returned to them provides no basis for estimating the potential uptake of the scheme proposed by the Deputy. However, for illustrative purposes, Revenue have examined Stamp Duty returns and LPT data for 2014 to identify individuals older than 70 years of age who sold a residential property in 2014 and bought one with a lesser consideration in the same year. The numbers affected are small, and exempting these cases from Stamp Duty and LPT would have cost the Exchequer approximately €0.25 million and €0.1 million respectively based on 2014 returns.

These estimates do not take account of any potential change in behaviour which could occur if such exemptions were to be introduced. Nor have the Revenue Commissioners considered the administrative issues that may need to be addressed to implement such a proposal.

Mortgage Interest Relief Eligibility

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to outline the cost of provid-

ing 100% mortgage interest relief for landlords who agree to sign up to long-term family tenure leases of at least four years duration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33855/15]

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to outline the cost of providing 100% mortgage interest relief for landlords who agree not to increase rent for a period of three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33857/15]

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to outline the cost of providing 100% mortgage interest relief for landlords who agree to provide accommodation to tenants under the rental accommodation scheme and the housing assistance payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33858/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 to 82, inclusive, together.

It is not possible to cost the reliefs proposed in the Deputy's questions. The Revenue Commissioners do not require rental income data to be returned in a manner which would enable commercial and private rental accommodation income to be separately identified. Similarly, income from the categories of tenant in the Deputy's proposals and the current level of mortgage interest deduction specific to such lettings is not separately identified.

In this context, it should be noted that an increase in interest deductibility would only be of benefit to those landlords that have borrowings outstanding in respect of the purchase or improvement of the relevant property. This limits the potential of any measure to incentivise landlords to commit to rent certainty. In addition, rent certainty would not of itself solve the supply-side issues that are driving rent increases. I note that the ESRI in their Quarterly Economic Commentary, published yesterday, urged that in light of difficult past experience, extreme caution should be taken when any use of the tax system as a means of stimulating activity in the residential property market is being considered.

Significant administrative issues would also need to be addressed in the implementation of such a measure. It should also be noted that any increase in the deduction allowed for interest could not be confined to areas experiencing specific accommodation shortfalls, such as the major urban centres, and this would significantly increase the deadweight cost of the measure. Furthermore it is likely that the increased deductibility would have to be applied in respect of taxable rental income sourced throughout the EU/EEA, where similar conditions are met.

With regard to the calculation of rental profits under current legislation, I would point out that there are also a number of other allowances and deductions available to reduce the tax on rental income paid. These include, for example, the cost to the landlord of any goods provided or services rendered to a tenant and the cost of maintenance, repairs, insurance and management of the property.

In addition, wear and tear allowances are available in respect of expenditure incurred on fixtures and fittings provided by a landlord for the purposes of furnishing rented residential accommodation. These allowances are granted at the rate of 12.5% per annum of the actual cost of the fixtures and fittings over a period of 8 years.

The Deputy may wish to note that the 2013 Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General contained, in Chapter 16, a detailed review of the taxation of rental income and expenses deductible therefrom. This report is available on the website of the Comptroller and Auditor General: <http://audgen.gov.ie/documents/annualreports/2013/report/en/Chap16.pdf>.

Office of Public Works Projects

83. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the repair work completed during the recent filming on Sceilig Mhicil in County Kerry. [33824/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) maintains access for visitors to Skellig Michael for about 4.5 months of the year, from mid May to the end of September. During this time, it would be expected that approx 11,500 / 12,500 visitors would land on the Island when weather permits.

From time to time, in the normal course of events, steps leading to the Monastery at Skellig Michael may become slightly loosened through the actions of nesting birds or by the passage of human feet. These incidents are a regular occurrence throughout the summer and, because of their particular implications for safety, are closely monitored by the OPW guides and maintenance staff who remain onsite during the season. As occurrences are observed therefore, they are dealt with as soon as the area is clear of visitors. This does not involve introduction of new material but rather concerns the tightening up of steps which may have loosened by re-using the dislodged fabric. Work of this nature was carried out in the week ending Friday 19th September.

A second repair was also necessary recently at an entry point through a wall near to the Monastery. An incident had occurred at this location in approx mid June when stones in the drystone entrance jamb at the entrance point were accidentally dislodged by visitors. At the time, a repair was effected by the onsite OPW staff and the damage was rectified. The same material was again inadvertently dislodged by a visitor passing through the entrance on 17 September. The entrance was immediately protected and access curtailed while a repair was carried out by OPW stonemason staff onsite. The work took a short time to complete and normal access through the entrance was restored immediately thereafter.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

84. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the up-to-date status of the flood relief plans for the River Deel in Crossmolina in County Mayo; the progress of the statutory public exhibition; when he expects the Office of Public Works to seek formal sanction to proceed with a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33770/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) and its consultants are currently refining a preferred option for the Crossmolina Flood Relief Scheme, along with the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement which will assess the effect of the scheme on aspects of life in Crossmolina, from the natural environment to its possible impact on the quality of life for the residents of the town.

These documents, along with maps/drawings and photomontages will be used in the formal Scheme Exhibition, which it is hoped to hold early in 2016. The Exhibition will run for 4 weeks and the above documents will be on public display at a venue in Crossmolina (yet to be decided), along with a duplicate set being made available in the Council offices in Castlebar. In addition, on a number of days and evenings during the exhibition, OPW staff and consultants will be in attendance to answer queries and take comments on the scheme.

Following the exhibition period, a further minimum period of 4 weeks will be allowed for the receipt of comments and observations from interested parties, which will be given due consideration by the OPW, with the scheme being amended if appropriate. Following this, the detailed design of the Scheme will be undertaken which will allow the relevant documentation to be prepared to apply for formal Confirmation of the scheme under the Arterial Drainage Acts by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, hopefully during the second quarter of 2016.

As part of the Confirmation process, the Minister will be required, as a result of EU environmental regulations, to have an independent assessment of the Environmental Impact Statement carried out. Every effort will be made to bring the Scheme to construction stage before end 2016 but it may be 2017 before construction commences.

The OPW remains fully committed to the Scheme and has provided for its costs in its multi annual budget profiles for 2016-2018.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

85. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform where the 2015 graduate recruitment posts in the Civil Service will be located; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33771/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The 2015 civil service graduate recruitment competitions have just been launched by the Public Appointments Service. It is currently expected that over 200 roles will be filled in the civil service, in roles such as Third Secretaries, Administrative Officers, graduate economists and trainee auditors.

The specific location of these positions will be determined once the panel is established on the basis of requests made by Departments/Offices for assignments from that panel. Given such factors as, for example, the training requirements that arise for newly appointed personnel, it would be expected that the positions will largely be filled in the Dublin region. Although after a period of time, successful candidates may be posted to roles elsewhere in the State in line with service needs or to positions abroad in the diplomatic service.

Budget 2016

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenditure carry-forward effects of previously announced measures from 2015 for Budget 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33842/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Spring Economic Statement (SES) and the corresponding Stability Programme Update (SPU) outlined that fiscal space of the order of €1.2 to €1.5 billion is expected to be available for Budget 2016 split evenly between expenditure increases and tax reductions.

This would allow Government to target an increase in government expenditure of between €600m and €750m in 2016 relative to the 2015 spend and provides the scope to manage any additional impact of previous Budgets, deal with underlying demographic and spending pressures, and target enhancements in key public services.

In addition, as outlined in the SES, the range of €1.2 to €1.5 billion does not take into account re-allocation within expenditure funded by savings from efficiencies and policy measures. For example, Live Register savings over and above those related to the cycle due to

lower unemployment as a result of existing activation measures will be available to fund new measures.

The increases in the expenditure ceilings between 2015 and 2016, set out in Comprehensive Expenditure Report 2015-2017, already reflect certain expenditure needs including demographics in Health, Education and Social Protection. For instance, Budget 2015 provided for a number of additional Mainstream and Resource Teachers as well as extra Special Needs Assistants posts to be created and provision for the 2016 cost of these posts is reflected within these ceilings.

Specifically in relation to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, the available fiscal space will be partly utilised to deal with the costs related to that agreement which, as previously stated, begins the process of unwinding the financial emergency measures in a prudent and sustainable fashion, thereby reducing the risk to sustainability of the public finances.

Fiscal Policy

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which public expenditure remains on target and in line with the criteria laid down in the memorandum of understanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33892/15]

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied with the extent of the economic progress made in the area of public expenditure and reform and the degree to which he expects the general public to benefit from the sacrifices of the past seven years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33893/15]

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consider the specific measures which might alleviate the pressing needs in the areas of housing and health, while at the same time remaining within the terms of the memorandum of understanding which he inherited from his predecessors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33895/15]

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied that the prudent relaxation of some areas of expenditure might be beneficial to economic progress and continued recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33897/15]

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which prudent public expenditure and reform will continue to be a part of economic progress and continued recovery in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33898/15]

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he continues to remain satisfied with his ability to maintain prudent spending policies in the context of the 2016 Budget, while at the same time meeting the most urgently required expenditure requests likely to come from his and other Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33900/15]

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which, in the context of Budget 2016, he will be in a position to acknowledge or reward the sacrifices made by the particular sectors which have contributed heavily to economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33901/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87, 88, 90, 92, 93, 95 and 96 together.

Ireland met or exceeded its key fiscal targets in each year of the EU/IMF programme of financial support. This resulted in a successful exit from the programme in December 2013.

As a result of the fiscal policies of this Government and the efforts of the Irish people, Budget 2015 marked a turning point where expenditure reductions were no longer required to meet our fiscal targets and the Government could look to making targeted increases in expenditure for key sectors.

As outlined in the Spring Economic Statement (SES), Ireland is on track to exit the corrective arm of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) at the end of 2015 with a General Government Deficit of 2.3%. With Ireland moving to the preventive arm of the SGP, the SES outlined that fiscal space of the order of €1.2 to €1.5 billion would be available for Budget 2016 split evenly between expenditure increases and tax reductions. This will allow the Government to target prudent increases in expenditure of up to €750 million in 2016 relative to the 2015 spend. The specific measures will be announced on Budget day.

Public service reform remains at the heart of this Government's agenda and focuses on ensuring efficiency and improving outcomes for service users - that is, every citizen in the country. Investment in public services will continue to be targeted at priority areas and will be linked closely with reform. Importantly, the cost savings delivered through the reform programme are available for priority front-line services. Furthermore, the wide-ranging reforms to the budgetary architecture introduced by this Government support the efficient use of public funds to deliver effective services for citizens. The implementation of a medium term budgetary framework and the introduction of wide-scale reviews of public expenditure with the Comprehensive Reviews of Expenditure allow for greater consideration and debate about key challenges facing public expenditure. In this regard, the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) is an integrated cross-Government service which enhances the role of economics and value for money analysis in public policy making. IGEES staff operate in designated economic evaluation units and are engaged with almost all Government Departments.

Specific measures for Housing and Health are contained in the recently published Capital Investment Framework. Social Housing was identified as a critical area for investment, and over the period 2016 to 2021 capital funding of almost €3 billion will be provided in support of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, which aims to increase the supply of social housing by up to 35,000 units. Furthermore, over €3 billion is being invested in Health. This will deliver major infrastructural projects such as the new National Children's Hospital, which will be the largest health infrastructure project ever undertaken in Ireland.

Building on this Government's track record, Budget 2016 will set out a responsible, affordable and sustainable way forward for expenditure.

Housing Provision

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform whether he sees a requirement for specific options that might be pursued to facilitate the alleviation of the housing crisis which has built up over the past 15 years while keeping within the off balance sheet requirements; whether the Government will consider a development bond to address the growing problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33894/15]

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

faced by the Government in responding to the housing crisis is not related to the availability of funding, but rather to the fiscal space available to the Government under the fiscal rules of the Stability and Growth pact which restrict Government's ability to increase expenditure, including on capital projects. Any funding that would be raised through the issuing by Government of a development bond, as suggested in the question, would be on-balance sheet in General Government terms; this means that it would not add to the fiscal space available and any spending or investment of the funding by the Government would use up existing fiscal space but not provide capacity for additional expenditure.

The Deputy will be aware, however, that the Government is already pursuing a number of off-balance sheet options to help address the housing crisis. Under PPP, €300 million will be invested in social housing which is expected to deliver 1,500 social housing units. Potential sites have been identified and details of the first PPP bundle for procurement of some 500 units will be announced soon. In addition, work is also proceeding on options for the use of the €400 million from the proceeds from the sale of Bord Gáis Energy, which the Government has agreed to make available for this purpose, on an off-balance sheet basis. A Clearing House Sub-Group of the Social Housing Strategy's Finance Workstream, established by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, has engaged in an extensive process of consultation with potential providers and financiers of social housing and work is continuing on exploring a number of potential opportunities, identified as a result of the work undertaken to date, to use this €400 million, either alone or in conjunction with additional private funding, to facilitate the delivery of additional social and/or affordable housing through the private and/or voluntary housing sectors. If a private Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to fund social and affordable housing can be developed in that context, it could possibly involve the SPV issuing its own bonds to fund housing.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 87.

Public Expenditure Policy

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to indicate whether he remains satisfied as to the extent to which public expenditure and reform will continue to remain a fundamental part of the economic framework in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33896/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The management of public expenditure and the formulation of overall public expenditure policy in recent years have played a crucial role in the economic recovery now underway. Public expenditure policy has helped stabilise the public finances on a sustainable basis, protect and support key public services, support employment, invest in vital infrastructure (as evidenced by the recent Capital Plan) and provide a stable framework for future economic progress. The role of expenditure policy has in turn been complemented by my Department's role in pushing the reform agenda throughout Government and the public service. This is intended to secure greater value for money in public services and public procurement, improve the quality of services to the citizen, engender greater public confidence in the institutions of the State and support the overall national recovery.

Noteworthy outputs under the reform heading include the liberalisation of the FOI framework, greater transparency in public institutions, the renewal of and greater accountability in the Civil Service, the regulation of lobbying and greater visibility of public data. I am confident that the continued management of public expenditure on a sustainable basis and the continued drive for reform throughout Government and the public service will be key foundations of the

framework for future economic development.

Questions Nos. 92 and 93 answered with Question No. 87.

Public Service Reform Plan Update

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he and his Department have identified areas requiring further reform in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33899/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Government's first Public Service Reform Plan was published in 2011. This plan provided the basis for the most significant programme of reform since the foundation of the State and was a key component of Ireland's recovery. Building on progress made in the first plan, the second Public Service Reform Plan was published in January 2014, covering the period 2014 to 2016.

The 2014 Plan places a particular emphasis on improving outcomes for service users, as well as maintaining the necessary focus on increased efficiency. A comprehensive Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 was published in March of this year and can be seen on my Department's website. Publication of a second progress report is planned for early next year.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Taoiseach and I published a Civil Service Renewal Plan in October 2014 which runs for three years and will lead to major changes right across the Civil Service. A Progress report on achievements in the first 200 days was published in July and is also available on my Department's website.

Public Service Reform is by its nature a fluid process. Projects mature and new opportunities for reform initiatives are explored on an ongoing basis. The current plan, while setting out specific initiatives for the three year period 2014 to 2016, also sets out the broad direction of Public Service Reform to 2020.

Questions Nos. 95 and 96 answered with Question No. 87.

Trade Missions

97. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to host a trade mission to the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33666/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am due to travel to the East Coast of the U.S. later this month. This visit will focus primarily on maintaining and encouraging foreign direct investment into Ireland. Since taking office in 2011, I have completed 28 major trade and investment missions. At the heart of our jobs plan has been growing employment in the exporting parts of the economy. Key to this has been growing the performance of companies supported by my Department through Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. In order to achieve this, we have put in place a range of new measures including doubling the number of Ministerial led trade missions, extra staff for Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland in overseas markets along with tax incentives to make it easier for exporting Irish companies to grow their sales overseas.

IDA Portfolio

98. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry will be promoted to potential investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33767/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The property mentioned is not under the ownership of IDA Ireland. IDA Ireland is aware, however, of the availability of this property and has included it on its property database of available office and manufacturing properties in Co. Kerry. This database is used to identify possible properties which might be suited to potential client needs. In County Kerry as a whole there are 12 IDA Ireland client companies employing 1,874 people in full and part time employment.

We are determined that every region will benefit from the recovery. Growing both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous enterprise is key to Ireland's economic recovery. In February, the Government announced details of the *Action Plan for Jobs: Regional* initiative which seeks to capitalise on the strengths and assets of each region to maximise enterprise growth and job creation. The initiative will build on the success of the National Action Plan for Jobs, and encourage regional stakeholders - including enterprise agencies, Local Authorities, higher education institutions, other public bodies and the private sector - to come forward with innovative ideas to boost job creation in their own region.

In addition to a €150 million property investment programme for the IDA, up to €100 million will be available to Enterprise Ireland to support entrepreneurs and enterprise growth in the regions. Three new competitive calls will be announced this year by Enterprise Ireland at regional level. The first will focus on community-driven enterprise initiatives, the second will focus on new ideas emerging from the LEOs and a third, broader, competitive regional call will support significant projects or initiatives to improve or leverage identified enterprise capability in the region.

Kerry has traditionally established itself as a centre for foreign manufacturing companies but has seen a number of downsizings/closures in recent years. It has however attracted a number of services companies (e.g. JRI America, Enercon, etc.) and has a strong cluster of well-established indigenous companies.

Earlier this year IDA Ireland launched its 5 year strategy for the period 2015 to 2019 which aims to create 80,000 new jobs in the economy over the period and increase investment into each region by between 30% and 40%.

As the Deputy is aware, officials of my Department and its agencies are actively engaged with regional stakeholders in the development of individual Action Plans for each of the regions, including the South West Region, which was launched on 3 July 2015. Counties Kerry and Cork make up the South West Region.

Microenterprise Loan Fund Applications Data

99. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the funding allocated to Irish business from Microfinance Ireland; the number of firms that have secured loans from this source; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33800/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): As of 28th September 2015 Microfinance Ireland (MFI) has approved 683 applications to the value of

€10.5m supporting 1,554 jobs. All the figures that the Deputy has requested are available in the quarterly and yearly progress reports which are published on my Department's website www.djei.ie. The progress report detailing the analysis and performance up to the quarterly period ending 30 June 2015 is available on the Department's website. I will shortly receive the quarterly report for the period up until 30 September 2015 and I will publish on my Department's website shortly afterwards.

Agricultural Colleges Courses

100. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to deal with the large number of individuals who have expressed interest in attending green certificate distance-learning courses, but who have no available courses to attend and require green certificates to operate certain parts of their business; if it is envisaged that additional distance-learning courses will be introduced in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33870/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Teagasc is the main provider of further education in agriculture, food, horticulture, forestry and equine studies. The Teagasc Green Cert course has been developed to meet the training requirements for full-time or part-time farmers. The course covers subjects such as the environment, farm safety and animal welfare as well as modules dealing with production agriculture, farm business management and succession. It is offered at Teagasc Regional Education Centres and Agricultural Colleges as a distance learning option. It is Teagasc policy to accommodate all farmers that require places on the Green Cert course. Interest is currently exceptionally high due to the education requirements of the Young Farmers Scheme and the National Reserve. My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, approved the appointment of 20 temporary teachers in 2014 to meet the Green Cert demand. It enabled Teagasc to substantially increase intake from a normal level of 500 annually to 1,500 enrollees, a threefold increase. Teagasc was recently granted approval to hire a further 20 temporary teachers bringing the overall allocation to date to 40. It will enable Teagasc to provide an additional 1,000 Green cert places this autumn.

My Department continues to work closely with Teagasc to explore all available options to maximise participation in the Green Cert.

Harbours and Piers

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the recent lettings in Howth Harbour in 2014 and in 2015 to date; if he will indicate how upcoming vacancies and tenders were advertised and how the competition for rental of these premises was conducted by his Department and by the Office of Public Works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33652/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned and managed by my Department under Statute. Responsibility for the management of the Fishery Harbour Centres' property portfolio is solely under my Department's remit and the Office of Public Works has no role in this regard. The property portfolio in Howth encompasses a range of diverse properties reflecting its remit as a working fishery harbour and its unique features which facilitate a broad range of other diverse activities which are important from both an eco-

conomic and social perspective.

The selection of properties for leasing is based on factors such as availability, potential income, interest level, the potential benefit to the harbour itself and prevailing economic conditions.

Properties are, when appropriate, offered for tenancy under lease agreement by means of open competitive tendering process in accordance with normal public procurement guidelines. Maintaining a fair and transparent process where all interested parties are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in such competitions is a priority.

On Monday 15 June 2015 my Department offered two properties for tenancy under lease agreement at Howth Fishery Harbour Centre by competitive public tender. The competitions were advertised on my Department's website, in a national and local newspaper and within the harbour and were open to all interested parties. Both competitions followed the same format which was developed in conjunction with my Department's legal advisors. The format was included in the published Tender Documents which are still available on my Department's website. The successful and unsuccessful Tenderers for these competitions have been notified and the finalisation of the lease agreements is well advanced.

There was no competitive tendering process undertaken in 2014 for Fishery Harbour Centre property, including Howth.

Harbours and Piers

102. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all tenancy agreements in Howth Harbour have been brought up to date; if he will provide a list of the tenancies in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33653/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The six Fishery Harbour Centres, including Howth, contain a diverse property portfolio reflecting their role as working fishery harbours and as the location for a broad range of other marine activities. The majority of Fishery Harbour Centre properties are leased by my Department to a variety of public and private sector tenants which support this range of activities, which is vital economically and socially, to the coastal communities the Fishery Harbour Centres serve. There are a total of 70 properties/sites in the Howth Fishery Harbour Centre property portfolio, 10 of which are occupied by commercial entities without current documented lease agreements in place, of these 10 only 4 are in arrears of rent. Progress is being made to regularise all these property arrangements. I am not in a position to provide details of the individuals concerned for confidentiality reasons.

Since taking over responsibility for the management and operation of the Fishery Harbour Centres my Department has established a dedicated Property Unit to manage the property portfolio. In addition my Department worked closely with the Chief State Solicitor's Office to increase the legal capacity resource for progressing the often complex and protracted legal aspects relating to outstanding property cases. An additional solicitor was employed by the Chief State Solicitor's Office at my Department's request to deal exclusively with Fishery Harbour Centre property portfolio, the cost of which is being met from the Department's Fishery Harbour Centre Fund.

Harbours and Piers

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total of rent arrears in all tenancies of State property in Howth Harbour on 1 September 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33654/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are 70 properties in Howth Fishery Harbour Centre of which 13 are in rental arrears to the total amount of €603,395. The issues associated with the property portfolio are by and large legacy problems. On taking over responsibility for the management and operation of the Fishery Harbour Centres my Department established a dedicated Property Unit to manage the property portfolio. My Department worked closely with the Chief State Solicitor's Office to increase the legal capacity resource for progressing the often complex and protracted legal aspects relating to outstanding property cases. An additional solicitor was employed by the Chief State Solicitor's Office at my Department's request to deal exclusively with Fishery Harbour Centre property portfolio, the cost of which is being met from the Department's Fishery Harbour Centre Fund.

In addition, a dedicated Debt Recovery Unit was established in October 2009 to address the debt that had developed in the harbours predating my Department. In 2013, my Departments Management Advisory Committee set up a Debtor Review Group comprising of representatives from Accounts, Finance and Legal Services Divisions to assist and give direction to debtor divisions in the area of debt management. A Central Debt Management Group has been formed to monitor compliance and debt levels.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

104. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding payment of a single farm payment for 2014 and 2015 to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33677/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on farm inspections be completed to confirm eligibility under the schemes. The 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Area's Scheme application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection resulted in findings of an over-declaration in area of greater than 50%. Based on the terms and conditions of the scheme this resulted in no payment in respect of the 2014 Single Payment Scheme and the application of an administrative fine to be offset against any future EU payments. The person named was notified of this decision on 11 December 2014.

The person named sought a review of this decision and the outcome was to uphold the original inspection decision. The person named was notified of this outcome on 25 June 2015. The person named submitted an appeal to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office on 25 September 2015. The Agriculture Appeals Office will notify the applicant of the outcome on completion of the appeals process.

The 2015 Basic Payment Scheme/Areas of Natural Constraint application of person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. *This inspection has been completed and the results are currently being processed.* In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

105. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payment under the areas of natural constraints scheme; and if he will clarify why the Department did not make contact with the herd owner to indicate that there was an error on the file prior to payments commencing, given that the delay is causing undue hardship. [33704/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment /Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on 29 May 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue. Advance payments under the Basic Payment Scheme will commence issuing to eligible applicants from 16 October 2015.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

106. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payment under the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33714/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently examining approximately 400 cases that submitted invoices from one particular company to verify and support claims under the non-productive capital investment action of AEOS. It is known that in some cases the invoices submitted were for greater amounts than actually paid by the participants. Funding provided under the scheme comes partly from the EU and partly from the National Exchequer. There is a requirement and obligation to ensure that the expenditure claimed by scheme participants reflects the reality of what took place. For that reason my Department wrote to participants requesting alternative proof that the amounts claimed were in fact the amounts paid.

The person named was written to on 15 June 2015 regarding the non-productive capital investment claim that he had submitted. This letter requested the submission of alternative verifiable proof to support one of the invoices that was included in the claim. A reply to this letter was received on 7 July. My Department officials are now examining this case and a decision will issue to the person-named shortly.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

107. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments in relation to the areas of natural constraint scheme and to the basic payment scheme will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33715/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment /Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on 19 March 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satel-

lite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue. Advance payments under the Basic Payment Scheme will commence issuing to eligible applicants from 16 October 2015.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payment due under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

TAMS Applications

108. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry who received full planning permission for a four-bay slatted unit, but who now wishes to erect a three-bay unit and who intends to apply for a retention order to sanction the three-bay unit, can apply under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33728/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There will be no issue here for the applicant concerned. He can apply on-line for the three bay unit and the existing planning in place for the four bay unit can also be submitted. The terms and conditions of the scheme allow for such circumstances. The applicant should also note that no grant-aid is payable for any works commenced in advance of approval from my Department.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

109. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the areas of natural constraint scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33729/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment /Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on 16 May 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue. Advance payments under the Basic Payment Scheme will commence issuing to eligible applicants from 16 October 2015.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Grant Payments

110. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal under an area aid application for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33731/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for both the Basic Payment and the Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes on 29 April 2015. The person named applied on a Commonage with fourteen other herd owners. This commonage is currently over-claimed. The matter is being investigated by

my Department with a view to resolution and issuing payments to all valid claimants as soon as possible.

GLAS Data

111. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers who have qualified for the full payment of €5,000 under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33749/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under European Commission regulations all applications must be administratively checked before any application can be approved into the scheme. Almost 27,000 GLAS applications were submitted and final checks will be carried out in October and farmers will then be notified in writing of the outcome of their application. Until this process is complete it is not possible to determine precisely the number of eligible applications or the average payment. Details of the exact individual payments to be made will only be known following completion of pre-payment checks, which will commence after approvals have issued in October and contracts have been accepted.

Fish Landings

112. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry will be assigned as a revised designation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33764/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The SFPA has recently outlined its advice in relation to the request to designate Renard Pier for landings of Hake and Monkfish. I will give my full consideration to all relevant issues including this advice. When I have come to a determination I will inform the Deputy.

Animal Breeding Regulations

113. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views regarding the issues raised by Canine Breeders Ireland at a meeting that he attended; if his Department can provide the number of registered breeding establishments and dog breeders' premises inspected each year; if he can confirm the number of pups exported to the United Kingdom each week; his plans to request a derogation from the European Union directive that prevents the export of pups to the United Kingdom until the age of 15 weeks; and if he or his Department have been lobbied in this regard; if he will further confirm the number of court cases taken against dog breeders; if his Department retains a record of these cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33789/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Legislation on dog breeding establishments comes under the aegis of the Minister for the Environment and enforcement action, including prosecution, is normally undertaken by that Department. My Department has no pending court cases against dog breeders. There are 68 dog registered breeding establishments in Ireland, 58 of which were inspected jointly by my Department and local authorities during 2015. On average 200 dogs have been exported to the United Kingdom per week since the beginning of 2015.

With regard to pets, in accordance with EU law, all pets entering and leaving Ireland must

have a valid rabies vaccination evidenced by a pet passport or a veterinary health certificate. The special derogation from a rabies vaccination that was in place in respect of movement of pets between Ireland and the United Kingdom expired on 1 January 2012 and the rabies rules on pet movement within the EU are applied uniformly across the EU.

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

Grant Payments

114. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2015 areas of natural constraint scheme and the 2015 basic payment scheme will issue to a farmer (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33813/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payments/Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received from the person named on 29 May 2015. In relation to the Basic Payment Scheme and Greening Payment, I am pleased to confirm that advance payments will commence to issue in Ireland on 16 October 2015, which is the earliest that payments can commence under the governing EU Regulations. In addition, following my direct approach to the EU Agriculture Commissioner, I can confirm that the level of the advance payment is set at 70% for 2015 rather than the normal 50%. The increase in the advance payment for 2015 is, in particular, due to the difficulties encountered in the dairying and pigmeat sectors. Payments under the Basic Payment and Greening Scheme will be made to all applicants, whose applications are fully processed and who have no outstanding errors from 16 October 2015. Processing of the application under the ANC Scheme is currently in progress. On completion of this process, the application will be further reviewed with a view to payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Control of Dogs

115. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is aware that a petition of over 2,500 persons is calling for an end to the welfare implications for the re-homing of dog breeds listed on the Control of Dogs Regulations 1998, where some pounds currently do not allow their re-homing based on breed, but rather directly euthanise them. [33862/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The administration of Local Authority Dog Pounds is a matter for the relevant Local Authority and the Minister for Environment and Local Government. However, I am informed that, in dealing with stray dogs, Local Authority officials need to balance a variety of issues, including the fact that certain dogs which come into their care may be unsafe for re-homing. Dogs which end up in the dog pound system may be more likely to have been poorly cared for and poorly socialised and so are more likely to be dangerous and present a risk, particularly to children.

Pension Provisions

116. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Defence why there has been an extremely lengthy delay of approximately 15 months thus far in processing an application for a disability pension under the Army Pensions Acts by a person (details supplied), in County Dublin; his views that this delay is acceptable. [33669/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I note the concerns raised by the Deputy regarding the length of time taken to process the application for a disability pension in the case in question. However, the nature of disability pension applications means that the procedure for investigating them takes some time to complete. Once an application is received in my Department the details provided must be checked and verified. This is done by liaising with Army Administration in the Defence Forces. Once all the details have been verified, the applicant is referred to the Army Pensions Board for examination. The Army Pensions Board is a statutory independent Board appointed to investigate disability applications under the Army Pensions Acts and to report to the Minister thereon. The convening of the Board is subject to the availability of the members and the Board deals with all disability pension applications in chronological order. As outlined previously in relation to this case, my Department expects to be in a position to write to the applicant in the near future and advise of the decision regarding his application.

Freedom of Information Requests

117. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Defence for an update regarding a representation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33716/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am advised by the Military Authorities that a Freedom of Information application has been received in relation to this matter. A reply will issue as soon as the matter has been fully investigated.

Garda Station Refurbishment

118. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans are to refurbish the Garda Síochána station in Howth, County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33660/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda authorities for the information requested and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as I have this information to hand.

Garda Station Refurbishment

119. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans are to refurbish the Garda Síochána station in Coolock, Dublin 5; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33661/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda authorities for the information requested and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as I have this information to hand.

Data Protection

120. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if it is the policy of the Data Protection Commissioner to inform complainants, when issuing draft reports of determinations to them, that the determination is indeed a draft and that the complainant may make further submissions in regard to their complaint prior to a final determination being issued. [33679/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Dara Murphy): Under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003, the Data Protection Commissioner is independent in the performance of her duties, including the conduct of investigations in response to complaints received by her Office. Such investigations, and any related enforcement actions, are subject to relevant statutory provisions and due process requirements.

UN Conventions Ratification

121. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Government's plans in respect of the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33757/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): I refer the Deputy to previous answers on this issue on 7 July, 19 May, 23 April and 16 April 2015. The Government has given a firm commitment to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and intends to proceed to ratification as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. As the Deputy is aware, Ireland has a dualist legal system and therefore does not become party to treaties until it is first in a position to comply with the obligations imposed by them, including the amendment of domestic law as necessary. We are determined to take the steps necessary to meet all the Convention's requirements in a constructive, proactive and appropriate manner. I should stress that for Ireland, ratification is the end of the preparation and implementation phase, not the beginning.

A team within my Department has been charged with examining all outstanding obstacles to ratification, and has nearly completed the first phase of its work, which includes identifying all areas which will need attention to make ratification possible. My Department chairs the Interdepartmental Committee, which comprises representatives of the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Children and Youth Affairs; Finance; Education and Skills; Health; Defence; Environment, Community and Local Government; Public Expenditure and Reform; Communications, Energy and Natural Resources; Transport, Tourism and Sport; Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; Social Protection; and the Office of Public Works.

Significant progress towards ratification continues to be made and much has been accomplished. The requirement to enact suitable capacity legislation has long been one of the core obstacles to ratification of the Convention and the progress made in this area is a testament to the Government's commitment to meeting the obligations of the CRPD in a comprehensive and meaningful way. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill 2013 passed Dáil Committee Stage on 17 June 2015 and enactment is expected by the end of the year.

Progress is also being made on necessary reforms to legislation on sexual offences, and by my colleagues, the Minister for Health and the Minister of State for Primary and Social Care, on reforms to mental health legislation. Another key task which is underway involves examining how the important issue of Reasonable Accommodation can be achieved within our Constitu-

tional framework as interpreted by the Supreme Court. Further measures required to enable ratification include amending unsuitable and outmoded language and in some cases, archaic legal provisions, in existing legislation.

The Interdepartmental Committee has agreed on the main areas across Departments where legislative amendment or new legislation will be necessary to meet the requirements of the Convention. These proposals will be contained in a Roadmap to Ratification, which will be submitted to Government shortly. Once approved by Government, we will publish the Roadmap outlining the measures to be taken to overcome all outstanding barriers to ratification of UN CRPD, along with the estimated timescales involved.

Sentencing Policy

122. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria under which persons are granted enhanced remission; the number of persons who have applied for enhanced remission in 2015; the number granted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33686/15]

123. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have applied for enhanced remission in each of the years 2007 to 2014; the number granted in these years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33687/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 and 123 together.

As the Deputy is aware the principles governing the awarding of enhanced remission are contained under Rule 59 of the Prison Rules 2007 to 2014 (S.I. No. 252 of 2007 and S.I. No. 385 of 2014). In summary, prisoners sentenced to a term of imprisonment qualify for one quarter remission on the basis of good behaviour. In addition, prisoners who have engaged in authorised structured activity may apply to receive enhanced remission of greater than one quarter but not exceeding one third of their sentence. In order for a prisoner to be granted enhanced remission, I as Minister must be satisfied that the prisoner, having regard to the matters listed below, is less likely to re-offend and is better able to re-integrate into the community. For all applications, the following factors are considered:

- the manner and extent to which the prisoner has engaged constructively in authorised structured activity
- the manner and extent to which the prisoner has taken steps to address his or offending behaviour
- the nature and gravity of the offence to which the sentence of imprisonment being served by the prisoner relates
- the sentence of imprisonment concerned and any recommendations of the court that imposed that sentence in relation thereto
- the period of the sentence served by the prisoner
- the potential threat to the safety and security of members of the public (including the victim of the offence to which the sentence of imprisonment being served by the prisoner relates) should the prisoner be released from prison
- any offence of which the prisoner was convicted before being convicted of the offence

to which the sentence of imprisonment being served by him or relates

- the conduct of the prisoner while in custody or during a period of temporary release
- any report of, or recommendation made by the Governor of the prison, an Garda Síochána, any probation officer or any other person whom I consider would be of assistance in enabling me to make a decision on an application.

The statistics for those who applied for and were granted enhanced remission are not readily available and I will respond to the Deputy as soon as possible with the information requested.

UN Conventions Ratification

124. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce legislation to enable the ratification of the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33694/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It is my intention is to seek Government approval for Ireland to sign the Istanbul Convention in the coming weeks.

The Deputy will be aware that the Convention has a very broad scope across a number of policy areas with potential policy and legislative implications. The provisions of the Convention and the legislative and administrative arrangements that would enable Ireland to ratify the Convention have been identified following consultations with Government Departments and agencies. I intend to include those actions in the new National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. I expect to publish the Strategy, which will cover a multi-year period from 2015, in the coming months.

Current Irish legislation already implements many articles contained in the Convention. The EU Victims Directive which sets out minimum standards across the European Union on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime will also implement articles contained in the Convention. Legislation to give effect to the EU Directive is currently being drafted.

A general scheme of a Domestic Violence Bill was published by my Department on 24th July, 2015. This legislation will enhance the legislative measures available within the civil law system to support and protect victims. The Bill, when enacted, will also introduce reforms required to enable Ireland to ratify the Istanbul Convention.

In addition, other legislative reform will implement elements of the Istanbul Convention. These include the recently published Sexual Offences Bill, the Court of Appeal Act, 2015 and the Children and Family Relationships Act, 2015.

Visa Applications

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality what assistance can be given to a person (details supplied) who is currently living in Syria with his family, who has tried to apply for a visa to Ireland, and who is being persecuted for his Christian beliefs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33701/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) in my Department that no record of a visa ap-

plication can be found based on the details supplied by the Deputy. If the Deputy is willing to provide further details, INIS will advise him of the position.

It is, more generally, open to the applicant concerned to apply at any time for a visa to travel to Ireland for any purpose, the onus resting with the applicant to satisfy the visa officer as to why the visa should be granted. All information that the applicant wishes to have taken into consideration should be included with his application. Any such application will be considered taking all the circumstances of the applicant into account. However, the Deputy will be aware that our visa system is not intended to be a protection system.

Guidelines on the visa application process including details of the required supporting documentation can be found at www.inis.gov.ie

If the applicant is resident in Syria, he needs to submit his application to the Syrian Honorary Consul in Damascus and it will be referred to the Irish Visa Office in Abu Dhabi. If he is unable to submit it there, he can submit it to one of the other Irish Embassies or Consulates in the surrounding area or directly to the Irish Visa Office in Abu Dhabi. Further information can be found on the website of the Irish Embassy in Abu Dhabi at www.embassyofireland.ae.

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

Residency Permits

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will facilitate upgrade of a Stamp 2 to a Stamp 4 for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33702/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has been granted permission to remain in the State, on immigration Stamp 3 conditions, for the period to 1st October, 2015.

The decision to grant such status was arrived at following the detailed consideration of the case of the person concerned, as well as the cases of all family members involved, under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This decision would have had regard for all information and documentation on file at the time the decision was made.

It will be open to the person concerned to apply for the renewal of that permission in advance of its expiry date. However, I am advised that the INIS would be prepared to review the case of the person concerned in circumstances where they presented documentary evidence to show that they had a concrete offer of paid employment available to them. The Deputy will appreciate that any such offer of paid employment must be on the prospective employer's headed paper; it must describe the specific position being offered; it must set out the proposed salary or salary scale; it must provide an indication that any such position is available immediately, is whole-time and is not subject to seasonal factors. Upon receipt of documentary evidence of the nature described, the INIS will undertake a review of the case of the person concerned.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the

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

Irish Prison Service

127. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the practice of recording calls between prisoners and their solicitors, which the Irish Prison Service first informed the Minister of in April 2014, has ceased, or if it continues to happen. [33721/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that it was never the practice of the Irish Prison Service to deliberately record calls between prisoners and their solicitors.

The inadvertent recording of a small number of phone calls between prisoners and their solicitors which came to light in April 2014 was the result of solicitors contacts being placed on phone lines outside of the designated solicitor line which enjoys confidential privileges.

All necessary steps have been taken to avoid a repeat of this situation reoccurring. This includes facilitating prisoners in listing more than one solicitor on the phone system. In addition where the relationship to the prisoner is stated as solicitor that contact number cannot be entered onto a phone line where recordings take place.

In the event of a prisoner placing a contact for their legal representative on a non designated solicitor line a voice message will prompt both the persons making and receiving the call that it is being recorded. This is applicable for all of the prisoner contacts listed outside the designated solicitor lines. The onus is on the prisoner when submitting their phone panel to clearly state the relationship status the contact has to them.

Irish Prison Service

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality how much the Irish Prison Service has paid to date in 2015 for maintenance and support, and software assurance for, the NICE recording system, given that a 24-month contract for such maintenance and support was put out to tender by the service in March 2014. [33722/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that there has been a spend of €58,906 including VAT to date, for maintenance, support and software assurance of the system. The tender commenced in November 2014. The tender cost includes an upgrade to the Phone system.

Liquor Licensing Laws

129. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views regarding the excise licence required to retail alcohol remotely into the country; the controls in place to ensure the accountability of remote retailers for their products; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33735/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position is that the Licensing Acts 1833 to 2011 do not address alcohol sales into the State from another jurisdiction. My Department has been informed by the Revenue Commissioners that alcohol products on which tax has been paid in another jurisdiction are subject to excise duty in Ireland when sold to a private individual here. The supplier of the product is liable for payment of the excise duty and is required to appoint a person to act as his or her representative in the State for that purpose. The supply of alcohol products on which the excise duty has not been paid is illegal under excise law. Such products are liable to seizure and any person concerned may be prosecuted for the offence of evading or attempting to evade payment of excise duty.

Departmental Funding

130. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will support and facilitate the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in conducting a second sexual abuse and violence in Ireland study. [33759/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has received a formal proposal from the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre for a second Sexual Assault and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) research project. I subsequently met with the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) to discuss these proposals. The proposal recognises that, given the significant budget of approximately €1m required, funding would be divided between four Departments, namely the Department of Justice and Equality and the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, Education and Skills and Health.

I wrote to the relevant Ministers on this matter. Upon receipt of all responses, options will be considered.

131. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry will be considered for State accommodation provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33766/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Reception and Integration Agency recently concluded a call for expressions of interest from persons interested in providing accommodation and ancillary services for persons seeking asylum in the State.

The responses are being assessed at the moment taking into account a number of matters including the ongoing demands for these services, the specific location of the facilities on offer, the type of accommodation and the range of services available locally. It would not be appropriate to make any comment on any particular offer at this time.

Garda Training

132. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to provide the maximum number of trainee gardaí that the Garda Síochána Training College in Templemore can accommodate in a calendar year. [33772/15]

133. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the maximum number of trainee gardaí the Garda Síochána Training College in Templemore can accommo-

date in 2016. [33773/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

I have sought the information requested from the Garda Commissioner and I will write directly to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Student Visas Reform

134. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will examine the reform of the international education sector and student immigration system government policy statement of May 2015 which states that the interim list of eligible programmes will be implemented fully by 1 October 2015, and will remain in place until the international education mark is fully operational, at which point a more permanent system for programme eligibility will be established; if she will confirm that the deadline of 1 October 2015 will be met; if not, when the intended date for implementation is; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33777/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As with any new process, the arrangements for the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) is taking some time to bed down and there have been some gaps in the information provided in the majority of applications. This is being addressed with the education providers on an ongoing basis. The overall process is generally taking somewhat longer than anticipated. As a result the next phase of the reforms intended for 1 October 2015, and in particular the publication of an updated ILEP, will be delayed for a number of weeks. Providers have been informed. A new date will be notified shortly.

Until the ILEP is published, the current Internationalisation Register will continue to apply in respect of English Language Programmes. As a result, the planned reduction (from 12 to 8 months) in the standard immigration permission available for the purposes of pursuing an English language programme, to be implemented in conjunction with the ILEP, will be also be deferred until its publication.

Garda Equipment

135. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will examine the number of dedicated Garda Síochána public order vans allocated to each Garda Síochána district in 2015 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33780/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda authorities for the information requested and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as I have this information to hand.

Garda Station Closures

136. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will examine the current updated position regarding the use of the former Garda Síochána station in Whitehall in Dublin 9; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33781/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda authorities for the information requested and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as I have this information to hand.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

137. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will examine the Garda Síochána districts and divisional headquarters that do not have closed-circuit television cameras installed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33782/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda authorities for the information requested and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as I have this information to hand.

Garda Equipment

138. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to provide funding for the purchase of unmarked vehicles for the Garda Síochána dog unit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33783/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Decisions in relation to the provision and allocation 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 I am informed by the Commissioner that there are currently twelve vehicles allocated to the Unit, including three new vehicles allocated in 2014. As it is the policy of An Garda Síochána to only use marked vans for the Garda Dog Unit there are no plans to purchase unmarked vans for this Unit. I am further advised by the Garda Authorities that the current fleet of vans allocated to the Dog Unit meets all of their operational requirements.

Garda Deployment

139. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí currently stationed in Garda Síochána stations in Clondalkin, Lucan, and Ronanstown in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33816/15]

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 continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that, as of the 31 July 2015 the latest date for which figures are readily available, 681 members of An Garda Síochána are assigned to the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) West, of which 86, 70 and 89 are stationed in Clondalkin, Lucan, and Ronanstown Garda Síochána stations, respectively. The work of these Gardaí is supported by 29 Garda Reserve members and 21 civilian staff. The work of local Gardaí in the DMR West is augmented when necessary by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBCI), the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) and the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB). Organised criminal activity is currently be-

ing targeted by An Garda Síochána across a number of fronts, including the use of focused intelligence-led operations by specialist units such as the Drugs and Organised Crime Unit and the Criminal Assets Bureau.

This Government is committed to the ongoing recruitment of trainee Gardaí, and to this end the first intake since 2009 of new recruits commenced training at the Garda College, Templemore, in September of last year. To date there has been four intakes of Garda Trainees into the Garda College, giving a total intake of 400. A further 150 recruits will enter college by year end, bringing total recruitment of Garda Trainees to 550. So far 290 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. On attestation, new Probationer Gardaí are assigned to Garda stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí.

Criminal Prosecutions Data

140. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who were charged with being a member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army or assisting that organisation for the years 2012 to 2014 and to date in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33817/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It is an offence to be a member of an unlawful organisation as provided for by section 21 of the Offences Against the State Act 1939. It is also an offence to knowingly render assistance to an unlawful organisation as provided for by section 49 of the Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) Act 2005.

There are in place two Suppression Orders for unlawful organisations made by the Government, one of which was made in 1939 and is in respect of the organisation styling itself the Irish Republican Army (also the IRA and Óglaigh na hÉireann). Charges in respect of these offences are stated in the terms of the organisation as identified in the Suppression Order rather than in the terms of any labels such as 'Provisional' and, accordingly, charges do not distinguish between various manifestations of the IRA.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the number of persons charged before the Special Criminal Court with IRA membership during the period referred to by the Deputy is as follows.

Year	Number
2015 (as of 30 September)	10
2014	13
2013	25
2012	12

Deportation Orders

141. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a possible revocation of a deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33872/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the above named person along with two of her family members are the subject of Deportation Orders signed on 09/07/2015.

Representations were received from the above named person and two of her family members' legal representative to request the Minister to use her discretion, pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Orders. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Orders. In the mean-time, the Deportation Orders remain valid and in place.

In relation to the remainder of the family, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the persons concerned have submitted written representations. These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement, in advance of final decisions being made.

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

Refugee Status Applications

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which any progress can be reported regarding a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33873/15]

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

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

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

Residency Permits

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determining eligibility for residency and possible naturalisation in the case of a per-

son (details supplied) in Dublin 6, given that all documentation requested has been provided, including that related to the person's Zambrano qualification, with the exception of the person's child's Irish passport which is not yet available; whether it is likely that matters can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion in the near future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33874/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a right of residency in the State, accompanied by the right to work, based on parentage of an Irish citizen child in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy.

The Deputy may be interested to know that INIS has recently developed a new application form for these type of applications. In an effort to be of assistance, INIS wrote to the person concerned on 30 September, 2015 to provide him with a copy of the application form. INIS also advised the person that further information on the application process, including guidelines for completing the form, can be found on the INIS website www.inis.gov.ie.

Deportation Orders

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a person (details supplied) in County Cork who, along with the person's family, has been in this jurisdiction for the past seven years; whether any progress has been made regarding the revocation of the deportation order; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33875/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy is the subject of a Deportation Order and is therefore not entitled to residency. A request to revoke the Deportation Order has been received but in circumstances where proceedings seeking to quash that Order are ongoing before the High Court and the matter is accordingly sub-judice, I do not propose to further comment.

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

Residency Permits

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which progress has been made in regularising residency for a person (details supplied) in County Galway, who has been in this jurisdiction for several years, who has worked both with and without a work permit and who is anxious to be fully compliant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33876/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that correspondence is due to issue to the person mentioned in the coming days.

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

Residency Permits

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date regarding an application for regularisation of residency by a person (details supplied) in County Galway, who is anxious to obtain stamp 4 status, who has worked in this jurisdiction for several years, who is the father of an Irish born child, given that his mother is an Irish citizen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33877/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that documentation requested was received by INIS and acknowledged in August 2015. I understand that application will be processed shortly.

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

Residency Permits

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress, if any, in determining residency status for a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary who is the sibling of an Irish citizen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33878/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) in my Department that no record of an application for a right of residency in the State can be found based on the details supplied by the Deputy.

It is open to this individual to lodge an application for a right of residency in the State, as the dependant of an Irish national.

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

Residency Permits

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status regarding the residency of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who committed an offence resulting in imprisonment, but who has subsequently completed a third level education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33881/15]

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

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. Various headings set out in Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) include; family and domestic circumstances, the length of time the person concerned has been in the State, their employment record and employment prospects, the character and conduct of the person (including any criminal convictions) as well as any humanitarian considerations advanced by the person concerned. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made.

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

Naturalisation Applications

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality whether the current residency status of a person (details supplied) qualifies that person for naturalisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33882/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 5 October 2016.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Garda Vetting Applications

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality whether Garda Síochána vetting of an application for employment (details supplied) has been completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33883/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that records at the Garda Central Vetting Unit indicate that no Garda Vetting application has been received from the registered organisation concerned in respect of the individual referred to by the Deputy.

In the circumstances, I suggest that the individual contact the authorised signatory of the organisation directly.

Residency Permits

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider upgrading residency status to stamp 4 for work and education purposes for a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33884/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the first named person concerned has permission to remain in the State until 4th November, 2015 on immigration Stamp 4 conditions. The second named person concerned has been granted permission to remain in the State, on immigration Stamp 3 conditions, for the period to 4th November 2015. These decisions were conveyed in writing to the persons concerned by letters dated 4th November, 2013.

The decision to grant such status was arrived at following the detailed consideration of the cases of the persons concerned under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). These decisions would have had regard for all information and documentation on file at the time the decision was made.

It will be open to the persons concerned to apply for the renewal of their permission in advance of its expiry date. However, I am advised that the INIS would be prepared to review the case of the second named person concerned in circumstances where they presented documentary evidence to show that they had a concrete offer of paid employment available to them. The Deputy will appreciate that any such offer of paid employment must be on the prospective employer's headed paper; it must describe the specific position being offered; it must set out the proposed salary or salary scale; it must provide an indication that any such position is available immediately, is whole-time and is not subject to seasonal factors. Upon receipt of documentary evidence of the nature described, the INIS will undertake a review of the case of the person concerned.

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

Residency Permits

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in updating the regularisation of residency status-qualification under the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006 to 2008 for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33886/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application, by the person concerned, for residence under the Free Movement provisions is currently under examination. Further documentation was requested in support of the application on 26 August, 2015 but has not been submitted to date. A decision will issue very shortly on the case and will be made on the basis of the documentation on file.

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

Deportation Orders Re-examination

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the decision to deport a person (details supplied) in County Laois will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33888/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 15 July 2011.

Representations were received from the person's legal representative, to request the Minister to use her discretion, 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 of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Early Childhood Care Education

154. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will reconsider the decision to deduct the payment of a client (details supplied) under the early childhood care and education scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33657/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood

Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children, in the age range 3 years and 2 months to 4 years and 7 months, before commencing primary school. A standard capitation fee of €62.50 per week per eligible child is paid to participating childcare services. A higher capitation fee of €73 per week is paid per eligible child to services with more highly qualified staff. This capitation rate is paid on the basis of a child attending for 3 hours per day, 5 days per week for 38 weeks. Where a child attends for less hours, payment is made on a pro-rata basis.

Payment is made based on the details provided by the childcare service when registering children. The ECCE programme rules are clear that any change in level of service must be notified/administered on the system. It is unfortunate that this service has lost out; however it is the responsibility of the service to manage its childcare arrangements with the parent and therefore to approach the parent in relation to the change in level of service in a timely manner.

Departmental Funding

155. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will support and facilitate the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in conducting a second sexual abuse and violence in Ireland study. [33762/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The second Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI 2) research proposal which was submitted to my Department in June this year, requested that funding of approximately €1m which is required should be divided between four Departments, namely the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills and my own Department.

From my Department's perspective, the SAVI 2 proposal can only be considered in the wider context of the constraints, demands and developments relevant to the area of responsibility of my Department. Unfortunately, in the context of the pressure on available resources there is no funding available to my Department from which to consider an allocation for this proposal at this time.

Alcohol Sales Legislation

156. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health his views on the below-invoice cost selling of alcohol; if he will consider banning the practice to achieve the policy goals set out in the public health (alcohol) Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33734/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The General Scheme of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill was approved by Government on the 3 February 2015. The Scheme includes provisions for minimum unit pricing, health labelling on products that contain alcohol, restrictions on the advertising and marketing of alcohol and the regulation of sports sponsorship. As part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, the measures were debated in detail by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children. The JOCH report was published in June 2015. The Department of Health is continuing to work on the preparation of the legislation. The Bill is due to be published in the autumn.

The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill will make it illegal to sell or advertise for sale alcohol at a price below a set minimum price. Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) sets a minimum price per gram of alcohol. The minimum price of an alcohol product would be based on the number of

grams of alcohol in the product. MUP is a targeted measure, aimed at those who drink in a harmful and hazardous manner, and designed to prevent the sale of alcohol at very cheap prices. MUP is able to target cheaper alcohol relative to its strength because the minimum price is determined by and is directly proportional to the amount of pure alcohol in the drink.

The University of Sheffield study reported that the alcohol products most affected by this policy are those that are currently being sold very cheaply, often below cost prices, in the off-trade, i.e. supermarkets and off-licences. On the other hand, the study found that a ban on below-cost selling (implemented as a ban on selling alcohol for below the cost of duty and Value Added Tax) would have a negligible impact on alcohol consumption or related harms.

Services for People with Disabilities

157. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he is liaising with the Health Service Executive, the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to address the urgently needed provision of 500,000 additional personal assistant hours for citizens with disabilities in budget 2016, given that the projected €45 million cost over three years would be greatly offset by freeing up bed space in hospitals and care institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33649/15]

182. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to support the funding of personal assistant services for people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33778/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 182 together.

Work is currently underway in the Department of Health in relation to the preparation of budget estimates for 2016. As part of this process, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has submitted an estimate of its proposed expenditure for 2016, including health and personal social services for people with a disability. As discussions on budgetary issues are ongoing within the Department of Health, with the HSE and with the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, I am not in a position to comment on the outcome of the process at this stage.

Ambulance Service Provision

158. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to clarify the number of front-line emergency ambulances aged 12 years and over which are still in service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33663/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy may wish to note that the National Ambulance Service (NAS) operates its fleet in line with the requirements of CEN 1789, the European Union standard for ambulances. The NAS has a fleet of over 520 vehicles which travel over twenty million km each year. Fleet management policies in place, minimise, as far as possible, the potential for vehicle failure. Daily vehicle inspections are carried out by ambulance crews, and a defect logging system is in place. Replacement of stock within the fleet runs at up to 15% a year and, in 2015, 62 new ambulances will be added to the fleet, at a cost of €7.5 million. The NAS adheres to vehicle manufacturer's specifications for service schedules and intervals. In line with current manufacturer and warranty requirements, each manufacturer's main dealer network carries out the majority of heavy maintenance work.

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

Medical Card Applications Data

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health to clarify, further to his response to Parliamentary Question No. 226 of 9 July 2015, the number of applications for medical cards and general practitioner visit cards where eligibility was granted, in each of the past 12 months to date; how many of the applications resulted in full medical card eligibility; in general practitioner visit card eligibility only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33673/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I understand that the Health Service Executive corresponded with the Deputy on 22 September last detailing the number of medical card/GP visit card applications received and the number of medical card/GP visit card applications where eligibility was granted for the period August 2014 to July 2015. The HSE has been asked to further examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

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

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

Hospital Services

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a date for an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [33678/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

161. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 642 of 9 June 2015, if he will provide the exact waiting times for mastectomy prosthesis; surgical bras; swimsuits; etc for each Health Service Executive area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33680/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

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

Medicinal Products Prices

162. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health whether he has reviewed the policy proposals recently launched by the Healthcare Enterprise Alliance, which propose to save €130 million on the annual medicines budget, through a series of reform measures; if he and his Department support these proposals and will move to implement them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33682/15]

163. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the Healthcare Enterprise Alliance, with 15% of the Irish medicine market, will be included in the negotiations on medicines pricing, which are due to commence with the pharmaceutical sector next month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33683/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 163 together.

Officials in the Department of Health are working with their colleagues in the HSE, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Office of Government Procurement to ensure that the State achieves the best possible deal in terms of value for money regarding the pricing and supply of medicines.

In this context, I welcome the recent proposals made by the Healthcare Enterprise Alliance. However, it would not be appropriate or in the public interest to comment on the State's position in advance of any negotiations or discussions it may undertake with supplier representative organisations.

Preliminary discussions have taken place with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) regarding a possible successor agreement to the existing drugs pricing and supply Agreement between IPHA, the Department of Health, and the HSE. It is not envisaged that the HEA will be a party to this process.

Primary Care Centres Expenditure

164. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the projected costs associated with the development of the primary care centres in Balbriggan and Swords in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33690/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has responsibility for the provision, maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres. Therefore, this matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

165. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he and the Health Service Authority will facilitate a person (details supplied) in having a wheelchair adapted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33695/15]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

166. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application from the Brothers of Charity Services in Ennis, County Clare, on behalf of their clients (details supplied) under the residential support budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33696/15]

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.

Medical Card Applications

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will restore a full medical card, which was due for renewal in June 2015, to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [33699/15]

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.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

168. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health with regard to a request from the Health Service Executive, HSE, in which national approval is being sought for the establishment of a panel of nursing staff to be employed on a permanent basis by the HSE to provide home care nursing services to children with complex medical conditions, if he will provide details of the recruitment process which will be employed; if he will state if it is intended that following the panel's establishment only staff who will reside on the panel may be deemed eli-

gible for recruitment to future permanent posts involving care provision for such children; if he will provide an expected timeframe as to when such a panel will be formally established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33705/15]

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.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

169. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health regarding current inadequacies in home care nursing for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal, due to the failure of the responsible private home care agency to source adequate nursing staff; if he will provide details of the plans to recruit permanent staff to a nursing panel, which it is proposed will be responsible for providing home care to this person; if personnel currently charged with providing home care nursing to this person may be eligible to apply for positions on this panel, considering the advantage which this would have for continuity of care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33706/15]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

170. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason all the appointments of a person (details supplied) was cancelled in Galway University Hospital in 2015, with the person now being unable to access Lidocaine infusion for pain management; when is it expected that this service will become available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33707/15]

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.

Registration of Nurses

171. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of the crisis in the registration of nurses who have been identified as candidates to fill nursing posts given that as of 4 September 2015, 2,313 applications were outstanding, according to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, and given that in a statement issued on 16 September 2015, the Department stated that 70% of outstanding applications had submitted incomplete documentation and that 30% of applications that were complete, which equates to 694 applications, are still outstanding. [33711/15]

172. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of the requirement for nurse candidates seeking registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland to submit €350 with their application, to signal their serious intent to fulfil nursing posts in the Irish health service; his views that it is extremely disappointing that applications are subject to

huge delays, and candidates are met with silence when they seek information as to the status of their application. [33712/15]

173. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken by his Department to ensure the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland addresses the crisis in processing applications for nurse registrations; and when he expects measures to take effect so that prospective candidates receive an appropriate level of service. [33713/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 to 173, inclusive, together.

I wish to thank the Deputy for the matter raised.

Given that this is an operational matter, it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the NMBI. I have referred the Deputy's question to the NMBI for attention and direct reply.

If you have not received a reply from the NMBI within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Provision

174. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if financial assistance will be provided to a family in County Kerry (details supplied) for additional physiotherapy sessions for their child.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33724/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. 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.

Legislative Measures

175. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health when the public health (alcohol) Bill 2015 will be published; the measures under consideration to address the pricing of alcohol in the event that minimum unit pricing is found to be illegal by the European Court of Justice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33732/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The General Scheme of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill was approved by Government on the 3 February 2015. The Scheme includes provisions for minimum unit pricing, health labelling on products that contain alcohol, restrictions on the advertising and marketing of alcohol and the regulation of sports sponsorship. The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill will also provide for the making of regulations to restrict promotions including price based promotions. As part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, the measures were debated in detail by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children. The JOCH report was published in June 2015. The Department of Health is continuing to work on the preparation of the legislation. The Bill is due to be published in the autumn.

The opinion of the Advocate General of the European Court of Justice on minimum unit pricing (MUP) for alcohol products was published on the 3 September 2015. The opinion indicates that minimum unit pricing may be compatible with European Law if it can be shown to be more effective than other alternative measures. The Department of Health will study the

opinion and its implications before the final judgement of the Court. This is expected towards the end of the year.

Hospital Waiting Lists

176. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the progress made in reducing waiting times for patients awaiting inpatient and day care treatment; for outpatient appointments at Mayo General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33741/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Improving waiting times for scheduled care for patients is a key priority for the Government. In January, taking into account current pressures on acute hospital services, the Minister for Health put in place maximum permissible waiting times for inpatient and day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 June and 15 months by year end. The HSE was provided with additional funding of €51m to ensure that these maximum waiting times would be achieved.

In June, the HSE reported a performance against the 18 month maxima of 99.6% for inpatient/day cases (IP/DC) and 92% for out-patients (OPD). In order to maintain progress and to make further improvements to achieve a 15 month maxima by end December, the HSE has directed that hospitals which breach the 18 month maximum waiting time in August are to be fined. The fines will be calculated on the basis of the Activity Based Funding cost of each procedure and are being imposed from 1 September.

The HSE, in conjunction with Hospital Groups is focused on delivering these targets through maximising use of internal capacity within and across Hospital Groups in the first instance. Hospitals have been requested to produce clearance plans in this regard.

Hospital Waiting Lists

177. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the progress made in reducing waiting times for patients awaiting inpatient and day care treatment; outpatient appointments at Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33742/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Improving waiting times for scheduled care for patients is a key priority for the Government. In January, taking into account current pressures on acute hospital services, the Minister for Health put in place maximum permissible waiting times for inpatient and day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 June and 15 months by year end. The HSE was provided with additional funding of €51m to ensure that these maximum waiting times would be achieved.

In June, the HSE reported a performance against the 18 month maxima of 99.6% for inpatient/day cases (IP/DC) and 92% for out-patients (OPD). In order to maintain progress and to make further improvements to achieve a 15 month maxima by end December, the HSE has directed that hospitals which breach the 18 month maximum waiting time in August are to be fined. The fines will be calculated on the basis of the Activity Based Funding cost of each procedure and are being imposed from 1 September.

The HSE, in conjunction with Hospital Groups is focused on delivering these targets through maximising use of internal capacity within and across Hospital Groups in the first instance. Hospitals have been requested to produce clearance plans in this regard.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

178. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting time in County Mayo for patients awaiting approval under the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33743/15]

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.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

179. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the assessment that has been made by the West North West Hospital Trust of the business case presented to it for an extension to the accident and emergency department, and for the provision of additional medical beds at Mayo General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33744/15]

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.

Orthodontic Services Provision

180. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health when emergency orthodontic treatment will be provided for a person (details supplied) in Lucan in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33745/15]

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.

Departmental Funding

181. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will support and facilitate the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in conducting a second sexual abuse and violence in Ireland study. [33761/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am supportive, in principle, of follow up research into this important issue. However, I am not in a position to contribute to the funding of this study. My Department's policy role in relation to sexual abuse and violence has been much reduced since the original study was undertaken. The setting up of the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (COSC), under the auspices of the Department of Justice and Equality saw Government delegate explicit whole-of-government co-ordination to this Office. More recently, responsibility for child protection, rape crisis services and refugees transferred to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

In the circumstances, I consider that decision making, funding and oversight for the proposed study should be determined by the Department of Justice and Equality/COSC. In so

far as wider input is justified, this might have regard to the responsibility of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for important matters formerly falling within this Department's remit.

Question No. 182 answered with Question No. 157.

Services for People with Disabilities

183. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to support a matter (details supplied) regarding a child on the autism spectrum disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33779/15]

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.

Respite Care Services Availability

184. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the status of a proposal to provide a respite house for Tír na nÓg Carlow; the number of meetings attended by the Health Service Executive with regard to funding for this project; the obstacles, if any, in progressing this project and the solutions as envisaged by his Department or the Executive; if he will confirm the funding required by the project; if he will provide funding in 2015 or in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33794/15]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

185. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the financial supports available to diabetics with a medical card, and on a limited social protection income, to cover the cost of dietary needs and medication; and his plans to introduce such supports [33798/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): All medical-card holders are provided free of charge with approved prescribed drugs and medicines, subject to the prescription fee of €2.50 per item or €25 per month.

Patients suffering from diabetes insipidus or diabetes mellitus are also eligible to apply to the Long Term Illness Scheme, which provides free drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances for the treatment of those conditions.

Departmental Correspondence

186. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if correspondence dated 24 June 2015 sent to his Department concerning an organisation (details supplied) in County Waterford has been processed; if a reply will issue as soon as possible; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33801/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The issues raised are of significant concern to both me and the Minister for Health. As the Deputy will be aware, there is an ongoing Garda investigation into related matters. However, in relation to two previous inquiries commissioned by the HSE, I can confirm that a Review by Conor Dignam S.C. has now commenced and an Interim Report is due to be presented to me within four weeks. Terms of Reference for the Review have been carefully prepared on the basis of legal advice to the Department of Health, and taking account of the Garda investigation.

I can confirm for the Deputy that a reply to the correspondence referred to has issued from my office and I have undertaken to keep the correspondent informed in relation to any developments arising from Mr. Dignam's Review.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

187. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be fitted with special shoes. [33802/15]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

188. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an urgent appointment will be arranged for a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [33803/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, 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.

Health Services Provision

189. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the assistance that can be offered to a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[33806/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The provision of services to prevent and treat addiction to alcohol is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive and as such, I have referred this question to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply. 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.

Drugs Payment Scheme Threshold

190. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health if the drugs refund scheme will be adjusted to lower the limit for single persons in relation to correspondence (details supplied). [33812/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Drugs Payment Scheme, no individual or family has to pay more than €144 per month for approved prescribed drugs, medicines and certain appliances for use by that person or his or her family in that month. The definition of a family for this Scheme is an adult, their spouse, and any children under 18 years. Dependants over 18 years and under 23 years who are in full-time education may also be included.

There are no plans at present to change the operation of the Scheme.

HSE Agency Staff

191. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason workers in an agency (details supplied) in County Galway have yet to be issued with their twilight premium time payments; when this matter will be resolved; when these payments will issue to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33814/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The issue of twilight payments for social care workers in these agencies has been the subject of discussions within the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) for the past number of months. The Department has been engaging with the HSE on this matter and I understand that industrial action taken by workers in these agencies has now been suspended.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with the HSE.

Hospital Waiting Lists

192. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an operation in Cappagh Hospital for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33818/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Mental Health Services Provision

193. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health what services will be provided for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22 who has been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum and who is currently attending the final year in school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33820/15]

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 Cherry Orchard Hospital, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10, telephone 01-6206072.

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

Ambulance Service Provision

194. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the additional number of vehicles which the national ambulance service has taken on in 2015, indicating the different types of vehicle, such as patient-carrying ambulances, rapid response vehicles, etc.; the expenditure on each type of vehicle and the number of each; and the number of such vehicles that the service has decommissioned in 2015 to date. [33823/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy may wish to note that the National Ambulance Service (NAS) operates its fleet in line with the requirements of CEN 1789, the European Union standard for ambulances. The NAS has a fleet of over 520 vehicles which travel over twenty million km each year. Fleet management policies in place, minimise, as far as possible, the potential for vehicle failure. Daily vehicle inspections are carried out by ambulance crews, and a defect logging system is in place. Replacement of stock within the fleet runs at up to 15% a year and, in 2015, 62 new ambulances will be added to the fleet, at a cost of €7.5m. The NAS adheres to vehicle manufacturer's specifications for service schedules and intervals. In line with current manufacturer and warranty requirements, each manufacturer's main dealer network carries out the majority of heavy maintenance work.

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

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health whether a psychological assessment has been sought by or made available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33889/15]

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 reply within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33890/15]

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.

Official Engagements

197. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has plans to meet the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Mr. John Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33658/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Today is the final day of my five-day visit to the United States, with my programme including US-specific contacts as well as engagements related to the United Nations General Assembly.

Contacts with US authorities throughout the visit have been extensive. As part of my UN programme, I participated at a number of engagements and discussions hosted by President Obama and had an opportunity to speak with the President. Yesterday I visited Washington where I met a cross-section of leading Democratic and Republican colleagues on Capitol Hill and briefed the friends of Ireland on the talks process in Northern Ireland. My focus in these meetings has been on Northern Ireland and on immigration reform. Later today I will meet with

Assistant Secretary of State, Ms. Victoria Nuland.

I, my Department and our Embassy in Washington have ongoing and regular contacts with the US Department of State on a variety of issues. In particular, following my meeting with Secretary of State Kerry last year, he appointed former US Senator Gary Hart as his personal representative to Northern Ireland.

Secretary Kerry and Senator Hart have been hugely valuable partners to all participants at Northern Ireland talks, both last year in the lead-up to the Stormont House Agreement and this year during the current talks process.

Diplomatic Representation

198. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will clarify the number of Irish embassies currently without an ambassador; the length of time each post has been vacant; when he will fill these vital posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33659/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): From this month there will be no vacancies at Ambassadorial level. Ambassadors appointed to Cairo, Ljubljana and Lusaka are currently in the process of assuming duty.

The Head of Mission post in Cairo, Egypt has been vacant since the end of April. The Ambassador designate to Egypt, Mr. Damien Cole, has already made a number of visits to Cairo and an initial round of calls. He will formally take up duty within the fortnight. The former Ambassador, Isolde Moylan, retired from her post in early May and in the interim the Deputy Head of Mission, Cormac Gallagher, has been Chargé d’Affaires. The Head of Mission post in Ljubljana, Slovenia has been vacant since early September and our Ambassador-designate, Mr. Seán O’Regan, will take up duty there next week. The Head of Mission post in Lusaka, Zambia has been vacant since the end of August and our Ambassador-designate, Mr. Seamus O’Grady, will take up duty in mid-October.

In the interim, all three Missions are currently being headed by the respective Deputy Heads of Mission acting as Chargés d’Affaires, in line with the usual practice.

Northern Ireland

199. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has consulted with his counterparts in Northern Ireland regarding the ongoing and very serious issues in Maghaberry Prison, including the frequent use of the discipline alarm, in spite of a prison ombudsman recommendation that the alarm not be used except in extreme circumstances; allegations that cell bells have been silenced from a central control location, resulting in prisoners not being able to alert staff if they are in distress while in their cells; allegations that closed circuit television footage has been destroyed by senior staff; and the refusal of prison governors to accept complaints in typewritten format. [33675/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Prison issues in Northern Ireland, in particular those affecting prisoners in separated accommodation, regularly feature in my discussions with Northern Ireland Minister of Justice, David Ford, MLA, and, on non-devolved matters, with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers, MP.

In those contacts and those of my officials with officials from the Northern Ireland Depart-

ment of Justice, our strong emphasis is on the importance of building trust between separated prisoners and prison management in Maghaberry Prison. This includes progress on the issues highlighted by the Deputy, which my officials have raised with the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

I welcome the appointment of a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross as the agreed independent chair of the Maghaberry prison forum. He has been working with both the prisoners and the staff side to agree an agenda. The development of the prison forum has the potential to address many of the issues which have caused friction between staff and prisoners.

Officials have been in touch with the chair since he commenced his work and will continue to do so.

I will be meeting Minister Ford as the Stormont talks continue and will reiterate my concerns regarding Maghaberry.

Foreign Policy

200. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his position on Catalan independence from the Spanish state. [33864/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position of the Irish Government is that arrangements for the governance of any EU Member State are a matter for determination by the Member State concerned. Hence, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on such matters in any particular Member State of the European Union.

Middle East Issues

201. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the decision of the Israeli Government to relax rules on its police and army using live ammunition against stone throwers in occupied east Jerusalem and the West Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33865/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have expressed for some time my concern about the growing recourse to the use of live ammunition by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, and the steady toll of Palestinian fatalities resulting from this.

I have raised this point at EU level, and we have also made it directly to the Israeli authorities and will continue to do so.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

202. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the United Nations new sustainable development goals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33866/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The 17 Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) are at the heart of the new development framework adopted by global leaders at last weekend's UN Summit in New York. The Summit saw the largest number

of heads of state and government in the history of the UN gather to adopt the new framework, the 2030 Agenda, which will guide the actions of all countries in their efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger and achieve sustainable development over the next fifteen years.

The Taoiseach led the Irish delegation on the opening day of the Summit and President Higgins and my colleague Minister of State Sherlock also participated.

Ireland led by Ambassador David Donoghue and Kenya co-facilitated the final phase of negotiations to agree this new development framework and succeeded in brokering consensus among all 193 Member States of the UN on this wide ranging global agenda. Last week was a proud moment for Ireland and our achievement in helping deliver this historic agreement was widely acknowledged.

The 2030 Agenda is the second of three major agreements that will be concluded this year and which, taken together, have the potential to deliver a truly transformative agenda that can end poverty and promote sustainable development. The first of these is the Addis Ababa Accord on the means of implementing the new SDGs which was agreed in July, and the third, the climate agreement, should be concluded in Paris in December.

The new SDGs are challenging and ambitious but we have been heartened by the level of commitment to their implementation expressed by global political leaders at last weekend's Summit. The Taoiseach emphasised the importance Ireland attaches to these new goals and to their implementation.

I am determined that Ireland's aid programme which is central to our foreign policy will continue to focus on ending poverty in the poorest countries in the world. The SDGs are universally applicable and all countries will have to take action. Like our EU partners, we will now focus on developing the most appropriate institutional framework to deliver the 2030 Agenda at home and abroad.

Overseas Development Aid

203. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals he has to reach 0.7% gross national product as overseas development aid funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33916/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, which is at the heart of our foreign policy. "One World, One Future" our policy for international development, sets out our vision for a sustainable and just world, and reaffirms our commitment to the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) on Official Development Assistance (ODA). We have stated clearly that we intend to make further progress on this commitment as our economic recovery consolidates. The Taoiseach repeated the commitment when he addressed the United Nations in New York last week at the Summit to adopt the new framework for global development, the 2030 Agenda. Ireland played an important role in ensuring that the EU recommitted to achieving the 0.7% target within the timeframe of the 2030 Agenda.

Over the lifetime of this Government, despite the severe economic difficulty we have faced, we have successfully managed to stabilise allocations to the aid programme. Since coming to office we have allocated in excess of €3 billion for Ireland's Official Development Assistance programme.

We are currently at an advanced stage of the 2016 Estimates process. While final alloca-

tions for Budget 2016 are ultimately a matter for Government, I can assure the Deputy that I am making the strongest possible case for an increase in the allocation to Official Development Assistance.

School Transport Eligibility

204. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will contact Bus Éireann in order to grant approval for travelling facilities, including wheelchair access, for a person (details supplied) in County Galway. [33708/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs children are eligible for 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.

In this case, the child in question is not attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet his special educational needs and is therefore not eligible for school transport.

Generally, children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only subject to a number of terms and conditions which are detailed in the Scheme. However, Bus Éireann has advised that there is no suitable service that the child in question can avail of on a concessionary basis.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

205. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the names of the schools in Dublin 5, 13 and 17 that were successful in having construction works carried out under the summer works scheme 2015; the schools in the same areas that applied for works but were unsuccessful; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33651/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the names of all schools that were successful under the 2014 Summer Works Scheme (SWS), including the areas to which he refers, may be viewed on my Department's website www.education.ie. My Department approved grant under the 2014 SWS in three moieties, in March 2014, May 2014 and April 2015. Details of the schools in the areas in question that were unsuccessful will be compiled and furnished to the Deputy shortly.

School Staff

206. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the staffing figures for the retention and appointment for schools with three to four teachers, to ensure that both figures are the same; if she will confirm the number of schools that would have benefitted in 2014 and 2015 if the appointment threshold had been reduced by three to the retention threshold; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33667/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The

1 October 2015

staffing arrangements for primary schools for the 2015/16 school year are set out in Department Circular 0005/2015 which is available on my Department's website. The Deputy will be aware that I announced some improvements in the staffing schedule for small primary schools in February 2015. These changes were introduced to better support the sustainability of small schools and particularly those in isolated areas and were the only changes that I made to the staffing arrangements for schools for the 2015/16 school year.

These improvements are improved retention thresholds for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th classroom teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for isolated one-teacher schools.

These improvements particularly recognise the challenges faced by very small schools that are more than 8km from the next nearest school of the same type.

This package of measures will provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools, recognising the essential social function which small schools can play, especially in isolated communities.

The Deputy has sought information on what the impact of these improvements would be for the 2014/15 school year if they were applicable to the last school year. The improvements came into effect from 1 September 2015. There is no scope within my Department to do the detailed analysis requested by the Deputy in relation to the 2014/15 school year given that the focus is now on the staffing and redeployment arrangements for the coming school year.

School Staff

207. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated number of posts to be created by doubling the release time for teaching principals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33668/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Principal duties in medium to large sized schools are carried out by administrative principals. Principal duties in small to medium sized schools are carried out by teaching principals.

Circular 25/02 which is available on the Department website outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. Under the current arrangements the number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year ranges between 14 and 22 days depending on the size of the school.

The level of substitution required to facilitate doubling release time for teaching principals is estimated to be of the equivalent of about 170 posts.

I am aware of the workload issue and the pressures on Principals teachers. My Department has done work at helping to ease the administrative burden on school principals. The development and introduction of the primary online database is a significant step forward in this regard. A further step forward was the publication recently of Department Circular 0033/2015 which updates and simplifies the manner in which primary schools can maintain pupil enrolment and attendance records following the introduction of the primary online database.

Economic constraints and the moratorium on recruitment albeit alleviated to some extent

for schools, have presented challenges within the education sector. They also provide an opportunity to review the role of the principal so that our principals are leaders of learning, and to reconfigure the middle management structure to support principals in their role, ensuring ownership of responsibility rather than tasks, thereby building expertise and supporting a career path within the profession.

The Department, in consultation with the representative management bodies has commenced an exploration of the opportunities to support and thereby advance our understanding of the needs of school leaders and how they might be addressed.

Special Educational Needs Staff

208. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if any study has been undertaken by the Teaching Council into the supply and qualifications of resource teachers in recognised special schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33670/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Teaching Council is the professional standards body for teaching in Ireland. It promotes and regulates the profession.

All registered teachers working in publicly-funded schools must be registered with the Teaching Council. In order to be registered, they must meet minimum standards for qualifications which have been established by the Council. Once registered, the recruitment and deployment of teachers is a matter for school management guided by relevant circulars issued by my Department.

The Council have been asked to prepare advice on teacher supply and is working closely with my Department on the matter. No specific study on the qualifications or supply of resource teachers has been undertaken by the Council.

Special Educational Needs Staff

209. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will request the Teaching Council to undertake a study, in accordance with section 7(2)(h) of the Teaching Council Act 2001, into the impact of the proposed revised registration requirements for the supply of resource teachers for recognised special schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33671/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Primary teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council are eligible to be appointed resource teachers in recognised special schools. I do not intend requesting the Council to undertake a study, in accordance with Section 7(2)(h) of the Teaching Council Act 2001, into the impact of any possible changes registration requirements for the supply of resource teachers for recognised special schools.

Schools Administration

210. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans for the old school building on Eblana Terrace in Dún Laoghaire which is vacant, given that other schools are interested in purchasing and-or leasing school premises; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33672/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This building is in the ownership of Dublin Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The future use of the building is a matter for Dublin Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board, subject to the approval of my Department, and my Department is awaiting a proposal from Dublin Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board in this regard. Enquiries regarding the use of the building should be directed to Dublin Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board in the first instance.

Education Policy

211. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will commit to provide support to primary education in Budget 2016 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33676/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Government’s approach to restoring the economy has helped Ireland to return to a position where we are seeing economic growth. It is a continuing improvement in our economic growth over a sustained period that will enable us to move to a point where we can look again at providing for additional teacher resources in schools which could bring about further improvement in PTR, class size and support for classroom teachers. I am determined that education should be prioritised for investment as our economy recovers and I will be seeking to agree a set of priorities for such increased investment into the future. In the last Budget, I was able to secure the first increase in education spending in recent years. I am determined to continue pressing the case for increased investment in education in the forthcoming budget.

The challenge for all schools is to ensure that they utilise their allocated resources to best effect to maximise teaching and learning outcomes.

Student Accommodation

212. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be measures in Budget 2016 to address the student accommodation issue in Counties Dublin, Cork and Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33684/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Government fully appreciates the concerns regarding the availability of accommodation for students and the report, Student Accommodation: Demand & Supply, which I published recently sets out clearly that the demand for student accommodation outstrips supply in certain areas and will continue to do so in the coming years.

There are 13 useful recommendations in this report some of which include capital financing, tax considerations and planning issues, as well as support for the rent-a-room scheme. I have introduced two immediate actions to begin this work. Firstly, the immediate establishment of an inter-departmental steering group to oversee this work. This group will provide a coordinating mechanism to ensure that the higher education institutions have access to information on new potential funding and delivery models.

And secondly, the awarding of a grant of €30,000, which will be provided by the HEA to the Union of Students’ (USI) in Ireland to progress short-term solutions for students in need of accommodation. This funding will allow USI to develop their homes.usi.ie website, to communicate more effectively to student and homeowners, and to carry out research into this important issue.

Finally, the Government is committed to addressing the housing shortage through the Construction 2020 strategy. This will not resolve all of our problems immediately, but I am confident that the implementation of Construction 2020 will provide us with a sustainable housing stock in the medium to longer term.

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Report-on-Student-Accommodation-Demand-and-Supply.pdf>.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

213. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to amend the income thresholds for families with students in receipt of a grant at third level in Budget 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33685/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The eligibility criteria for student grants including the income thresholds is reviewed annually in my Department and approved by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

As the Deputy will be aware, all proposals made in relation to education expenditure, including changes to income thresholds, will be considered in the context of the Budget 2016.

Schools Building Projects Status

214. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for the second phase of the building project for Lusk Community College; if she will provide information on the provision of adequate sports facilities, including changing rooms, and a library for the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33688/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Major Building Project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning. The school’s Design Team are currently working on completing Stage 2b - Detailed Design, which involves planning permission, fire certificate and disability access certificate and the completion of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The second phase of Lusk Community College provides for a new build to cater for an additional 650 pupils, a Special Needs Unit, a PE Hall with fitness suite and changing facilities and ancillary accommodation including a school library.

Once the Stage 2b Tender documentation is submitted, the Department will carry out its review and subject to no issues arising the project will then progress to tender and construction stages.

Institutes of Technology Expenditure

215. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is aware of remarks made by the chief executive of the Higher Education Authority in relation to financial challenges facing Dundalk Institute of Technology; the problems involved; and her plans to address these; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33697/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department allocates

recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions, including institutes such as Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT). The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution.

I understand that the position with regard to DKIT is that it declared significant operating deficits in both 2013 and 2014. As a result, the HEA requested a three year financial plan demonstrating how the institute would return to achieving a balanced budget over that period. The plan was independently reviewed by Mazars and they confirmed that the institute would achieve a breakeven position over the next three years based on the assumptions and proposals set out within the plan. DKIT has also confirmed to the HEA that it is now expecting a balanced outturn for 2015.

My Department, through the HEA, will continue to work with DKIT to monitor the implementation of the financial plan and to ensure that any issues with regard to financial sustainability continue to be addressed.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

216. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to have a special needs assistant assigned to a person (details supplied) who cannot attend school due to requiring a personal special needs assistant whom the school has been unable to provide; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33710/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs.

The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support, which is set out in my Department’s Circular 0030/2014.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2015/16 school year by 18th March 2015. The NCSE also continued to accept applications after this date in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed.

The NCSE has now published details of SNA allocations for schools for September 2015 on its website at www.ncse.ie.

Once allocated, the deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

Details of the manner in which a school or parent may appeal the level of SNA or resource teaching allocation which has been made to support a child in school, to the NCSE, is set out on the NCSE website.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO, while Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child’s special educational needs, using the contact details available the NCSE website.

As this question relates to an allocation for an individual child, I will arrange to have the matter referred to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects Status

217. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for funding for a school extension (details supplied) in County Mayo; when a decision is expected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33719/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that my Department has approved a devolved grant to the school in question for the provision of 5 new permanent general classrooms to replace existing prefabs. This additional accommodation will greatly enhance the accommodation available to the school and the school authority has been advised accordingly.

Schools Building Projects Status

218. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to expedite a long-awaited schools building project for a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; if she is aware of the current need to upgrade and replace much of the school’s ageing facilities and equipment, particularly given that enrolment numbers for the 2015-2016 academic year have seen a marked increase by comparison with previous years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33747/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that architectural planning has commenced for a building project at the school to which he refers. The project is at an early stage of the architectural planning process, Stage 2(a) - Developed Design Stage. The next stage involves my Department meeting with the Board of Management and their Design Team for the Stage 2a Stakeholder meeting and this will take place shortly. Following this meeting and subject to no issues arising, the project will be authorised to progress to Stage 2b – Detailed Design Stage which includes the applications for Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents. Planning permission has already been secured.

In view of the need to prioritise the provision of mainstream teaching accommodation in areas of significant demographic growth, it was not possible to include this project in the current 5 Year Construction Programme. However, the project is being progressed to the final planning stages so that it will be well placed for consideration in the context of future construction programmes.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

219. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason an application for a laptop for a child (details supplied) in County Cork, which was recommended by the Health Service Executive, has been refused; if she will request that the matter be reconsidered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33750/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools

for special educational needs supports. SENOs also make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support, which is set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013.

In order to qualify for equipment under the assistive technology scheme, a child must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in a professional assessment that the equipment is essential in order to allow the child to access the curriculum. It must also be clear that the existing I.T. equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs.

I can advise the Deputy that an application for assistive technology support for the child referred to in his question has been received in my Department. A response will issue to the school shortly following consideration of the application.

National Educational Psychological Service Administration

220. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current average waiting time for a child to be assessed by the National Educational Psychological Service; and if she will provide, in tabular form, the average waiting times for each individual year from 2010 to 2014. [33751/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

NEPS does not keep waiting lists for assessments of children but in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention. This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention. This process has been embedded by NEPS psychologists in the Primary sector with the production by the Department of Special Educational Needs – A Continuum of Support guidance and resource materials which has been distributed to all schools since 2007/8. In late 2010 similar support documentation was produced in relation to Emotional and Behavioural difficulties in the Primary sector and in relation to a formal Post-Primary Continuum process.

The continua described above all involve a graduated problem solving model of assessment and intervention in schools processes which moves from basic classroom based interventions to

more specialised and individual interventions and comprise three distinct school based phases characterised as follows:

Classroom Support – is an intervention which is co-ordinated by the Class Teacher and is carried out in the regular classroom,

School Support - is an assessment and intervention process which is usually co-ordinated by the learning support/resource teacher working alongside the class teacher. Interventions at this stage will be additional to those provided through classroom support.

School Support Plus – is generally characterised by the school requesting the involvement by the relevant external service (predominantly NEPS) in more detailed assessment and development of intervention programmes. This level of intervention is for children with complex and/or enduring needs and whose progress is considered inadequate, despite carefully planned interventions at previous levels.

The staged model recognises that pupils present with a wide range of issues and difficulties and allows for their amelioration and intervention at the level most appropriate to the particular need. The continuum approach ensures that pupils presenting within this range are dealt with quickly and at the appropriate level without the establishment of a waiting list for formal assessment.

Schools Building Projects Status

221. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the development of a new building for a school (details supplied) in County Galway; if Galway County Council has completed the takeover of a road leading to the proposed development site; the outstanding issues, if any, before construction can commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33754/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy will appreciate, due diligence must apply in relation to any site acquisition.

With regard to the proposed site for the school referred to by the Deputy, issues outside the control of my Department arose during the conveyancing process. These issues have now been addressed which will enable the conveyancing process to be progressed.

In the interim period the Department had been progressing plans for the delivery of the school building. Planning permission has been obtained and assuming no further issues arise, the Department expects to be in a position to advance the project to construction once the conveyancing process has been satisfactorily concluded.

Teaching Council of Ireland

222. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the average waiting time for the registration of teachers with the Teaching Council of Ireland, given the necessity for a person who has trained as a primary school teacher abroad to be certified as competent to teach Irish, through Marino College in Dublin 3, where registration is required by November 2015. [33758/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Council is obliged under the terms of EU Directive 2005/36/EC to grant registration to teachers who have completed ‘regulated education and training’ and are deemed fully qualified as a teacher under the terms

of the Directive in another EU/EEA Member State. The Council published requirements in this area in a notice of compliance with the Directive in May 2010.

The processing time for an application for registration varies on the type of application and whether an assessment of qualifications is required (to determine if the qualification(s) meet the Council's registration criteria). Applicants, including newly qualified teachers (NQTs) who have provided full documentation and have completed the Garda vetting process at the time of application, are typically registered within one/two weeks of the date of application. However in cases where requested documentation remains outstanding, where qualification(s) assessment is required, where the outcome of the Garda vetting process is not returned in a timely manner, or where the Evidence of Character Panel is required to consider the outcome of the Garda vetting process, the registration process may be considerably longer.

The Council processes applications from teachers who have completed their initial teacher qualifications in EU Member States under the terms of Council Directive 2005/36/EC. The processing timeframes for such applications are set out under Article 51 of the Directive and the Council endeavours to remain compliant with the stated timeframes.

The Council is independent in the exercise of its regulatory functions, including the processing of applications for registration, and accordingly my Department does not have the details sought by the Deputy.

Departmental Funding

223. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will support and facilitate the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in conducting a second Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland study. [33760/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department has been requested to provide support for the completion of a second SAVI (Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland) Study. The request is currently under consideration by officials within my Department.

School Accommodation Provision

224. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional classroom accommodation will be provided at a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33763/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy recently made an application to my Department for capital funding for the provision of additional accommodation. The application is currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school as soon as the assessment process has concluded.

Education Schemes

225. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the first-year and full-year cost of extending the school books grant scheme to all students in primary and post-primary schools. [33774/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): There is a School Books Grant Scheme already in place that provides assistance for books for students in all recognised primary and post-primary schools within the Free Education Scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provides funding of €15 million annually to all these schools. The issue of extending this scheme does not therefore arise.

The arrangements in relation to this scheme are set out in Circular 0046/2013 which is published on my Department’s website.

In addition, Budget 2014 provided funding of €5 million per annum for three years to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools that did not operate such schemes. Under this additional funding, DEIS schools receive €150 per child and non-DEIS schools receive €100 per child in seed capital to establish book rental schemes. The schools which qualified for funding under this scheme received 70% of their funding in 2014 and received the remaining 30% in May 2015.

Primary schools that were operating book rental schemes prior to 2014 will also benefit from this funding. These schools will receive €18 per pupil in mainstream schools and €20 per pupil in DEIS schools over two year period or €7 or €8 per pupil in 2015 and €11 or €12 in 2016. These arrangements are set out in Circular 0030/2015.

Every primary school has now been given the opportunity to benefit from the funding secured for the School Book Rental Scheme.

Capitation Grants

226. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost to the Exchequer of increasing the capitation grant to primary and post-primary schools by 2%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33784/15]

234. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of 5% and 10% increases in capitation funding for primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33906/15]

235. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of 5% and 10% increases in capitation funding for secondary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33907/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 226, 234 and 235 together.

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. I am aware of the impact budgetary decisions taken in our economic crisis have had on capitation and related grants to our primary and second level schools.

The detailed information sought by the Deputy can be gauged from the fact that each 1% increase in capitation and related grants would cost approx. €3.6m. (€1.9m at Primary Level, €1.7m at Second Level).

I am determined that education will be prioritised for investment in the coming years, and

I believe that increasing the staffing and funding of our schools should be priorities for such investment.

School Staff

227. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is aware of the situation in a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; if she will sanction approval for the school to retain current teacher numbers as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33788/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. There is no change to the staffing of the school referred to by the Deputy for the 2015/16 school year. Based on an enrolment of 56 pupils on 30th September 2014, the school retains a mainstream staffing of Principal and 2 mainstream classroom teachers. In addition, the school retains the resource post and GAM/EAL post which it had in the 2014/15 school year.

The staffing arrangements for the 2016/17 school year will be published early in 2016.

Schools Building Projects Status

228. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for an extension for a school (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if the project will be expedited as the school caters for 74 children with a range of special needs and autism. [33791/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy recently made an application to my Department for capital funding for the provision of additional accommodation. The application is currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school as soon as the assessment process has been concluded.

Teacher Redeployment

229. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process in place for considering applications from teachers who wish to transfer within the Vocational Education Committee sector from county to county; her views on whether the process is fair and efficient; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33799/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department has no direct involvement in the deployment of teachers within individual Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Teacher allocations to all ETBs are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment and, in accordance with these rules, each ETB is required to organise its subject options within the limit of its approved teacher allocation.

Each ETB operates its own internal redeployment system annually in accordance with the need of the schools within the ETB. The deployment of teaching staff, the range of subjects offered and ultimately the quality of teaching and learning are a matter for the individual ETBs.

The current redeployment arrangements at post-primary level apply to schools and ETBs that have a surplus of permanent and/or CID holding teachers.

In addition as part of the 2015 post primary redeployment process, all permanent teachers in the Munster region were given an opportunity to volunteer for a transfer to other areas if such a transfer would free up a vacancy that would facilitate the redeployment of a surplus permanent teacher in that area.

This arrangement operated on a pilot basis for 2015. My Department has no plans to introduce a separate voluntary redeployment scheme.

Schools Building Projects Status

230. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills for an update on the provision of an extension to Lucan Community College in County Dublin; when this project will advance to planning stage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33815/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The building project referred to by the Deputy is included in the Five Year Construction Programme to proceed to Tender and Construction.

The original design team appointed to the project had reached completion of Stage 1 of Architectural Planning. As part of that work and following an assessment of the current accommodation, it was agreed by the Department that extensive additional refurbishment works to the existing school will also be required.

The Department approved a significant increase in the scope of works for the project to incorporate those refurbishment works. Arising from this expansion in the scope of works it was necessary to commence a tender exercise for the appointment of a new design team to take the project forward from this point. This process, which was conducted by the ETB, was completed and the new Design Team have been authorised to proceed to Stage 2(a) of Architectural Planning, which is the developed Design Stage.

Earlier this year, the Department met with officials from the ETB regarding progression of the project. Following this meeting, further information was requested from the ETB and its Design Team, which is currently under review by my Department. Upon successful completion of Stage 2(a) the project will progress to complete Stage 2(b), Detailed Design, which includes the application for Statutory approvals and the preparation of Tender Documents for Contractors. Following completion of stage 2(b) the project will then be progressed to tender and construction.

School Equipment

231. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of providing a free laptop computer to every child in the State over five years of age, as recently suggested by the Minister for Finance; if such a proposal has been considered by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33856/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I have not considered any proposal for the provision of a free laptop to every child over five years of age in the State.

The Digital Strategy for Schools will be published shortly and sets out an ambitious five

year plan to further embed ICT in teaching, learning and assessment. Under this Strategy my Department will identify a set of funding priorities annually over the lifetime of the Digital Strategy and the provision of IT equipment to schools will be considered in this context.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

232. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of reducing the pupil-teacher ratio at primary level from 28:1 to 27:1; and to 26:1, with effect from 2016; and from 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33904/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The staffing schedule at primary level operates on the basis of 1 classroom teacher for an average of every 28 pupils, with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools.

Each one point adjustment to the current 28:1 schedule at primary level is estimated to cost of the order of 250 posts (€15m).

The Government’s approach to restoring the economy has helped Ireland to return to a position where we are seeing economic growth. It is a continuing improvement in our economic growth over a sustained period that will enable us to move to a point where we can look again at providing for additional teacher resources in schools which could bring about further improvement in PTR, class size and support for classroom teachers.

I am determined that education should be prioritised for investment as our economy recovers and I will be seeking to agree a set of priorities for such increased investment into the future. In the last Budget, I was able to secure the first increase in education spending in recent years. I am determined to continue pressing the case for increased investment in education in the forthcoming budget.

The challenge for all schools is to ensure that they utilise their allocated resources to best effect to maximise teaching and learning outcomes.

School Staff

233. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of reversing the cuts to the school staffing ratio in smaller schools which was introduced in Budget 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33905/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of the Budget 2012 decisions, the number of pupils required to gain and retain a classroom teaching post in small primary schools was gradually increased between September 2012 and September 2014. An appeals process was made available to schools that are affected by this measure.

The cumulative savings achieved to date from the 2012 small schools budget measure are of the order of €23m. This gives an indication of the overall costs involved in relation to restoring teacher numbers in small schools.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced some improvements in the staffing schedule for small primary schools in February 2015. These changes were introduced to better support the sustainability of small schools and particularly those in isolated areas and were the only

changes that I made to the staffing arrangements for schools for the 2015/16 school year.

These improvements are improved retention thresholds for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th classroom teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for isolated one-teacher schools.

These improvements particularly recognise the challenges faced by very small schools that are more than 8 km from the next nearest school of the same type.

This package of measures will provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools, recognising the essential social function which small schools can play, especially in isolated communities.

Questions Nos. 234 and 235 answered with Question No. 226.

Education Expenditure

236. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of a 50% reversal and a full reversal in the cut to resource teaching hours introduced in budget 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33908/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that on 21st May, 2015, I announced that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will increase its allocation of Resource Teacher Posts to schools by over 9% for the start of the 2015/16 school year.

The NCSE has allocated 6,454 resource teacher posts to schools for September 2015, an increase of 554 posts - or 9.4% - since September 2014.

Even in the constrained economic circumstances we have faced in recent years, we have been able to continue to meet the needs of children with special educational needs attending our schools.

This year we have again increased the number of Resource Teachers which will be allocated to schools, keeping pace with both demographic growth and increased demand.

The NCSE has now published details of the allocations which will be made to each individual school on the NCSE website ncse.ie.

The NCSE is also currently concluding the second round allocation process to respond to late enrolments, or from diagnosed disabilities emerging after the closing date for the first allocation round, to the start of the new school year.

On publishing details of the allocations for September 2015, the NCSE noted that the number of resource teaching posts which are being allocated to schools has increased by 22% since September 2013, from 5285 posts at that point to 6,454 posts for September 2015.

It is therefore clear that not only has there not been a reduction in the overall number of resource teaching posts and hours being allocated to schools, but that there has been a very significant increase in the overall allocation to schools in recent years.

The cost of adding an additional 15% to the existing allocation, which in itself represents an increase of 22% in the allocation recent years, would be approximately an additional €71m per year.

The cost of adding an additional 7.5% to the existing allocation would be an additional €35.5m per year, approximately.

Education Expenditure

237. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of providing one administration day per week for teaching principals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33909/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Circular 25/02 which is available on the Department website outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. Under the current arrangements the number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year ranges between 14 and 22 days depending on the size of the school.

Improving these arrangements so as to enable teaching principals to have one release day per week would cost of the order of €10 million per annum.

I am aware of the workload issue and the pressures on Principals teachers. My Department has done work at helping to ease the administrative burden on school principals. The development and introduction of the primary online database is a significant step forward in this regard. A further step forward was the publication of Department Circular 0033/2015 which updates and simplifies the manner in which primary schools can maintain pupil enrolment and attendance records following the introduction of the primary online database.

Economic constraints and the moratorium on recruitment albeit alleviated to some extent for schools, have presented challenges within the education sector. They also provide an opportunity to review the role of the principal so that our principals are leaders of learning, and to reconfigure the middle management structure to support principals in their role, ensuring ownership of responsibility rather than tasks, thereby building expertise and supporting a career path within the profession.

The Department, in consultation with the representative management bodies has commenced an exploration of the opportunities to support and thereby advance our understanding of the needs of school leaders and how they might be addressed.

Education Expenditure

238. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of restoring the ex-quota guidance counselling to all schools in 2016; the cost of a 50% restoration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33910/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Since September 2012 at post primary level guidance provision is organised by school management from within the staffing schedule allocation. Guidance is a whole school activity and schools have autonomy on how best to prioritise their available resources to meet the requirements in relation to guidance and the provision of an appropriate range of subjects to students.

The budget measure that required schools to manage the provision of guidance from within their standard staffing allocation was introduced as an alternative to an adjustment to the stan-

standard staffing schedule. Such an adjustment would be the equivalent of an 0.6 change in the staffing schedule. My Department helped shelter the impact for DEIS post-primary schools by improving their standard staffing allocations so that it is based on a ratio of 18.25:1 compared to the standard 19:1 – an improvement of 0.75 on the standard staffing schedule for these schools.

The net reduction in guidance provision as a consequence of this budget measure was of the order of 500 posts. The annual budget saving from this measure is over €30 million. This gives an indication of the cost involved if this budget measure was not in place. The Department helped shelter the impact for DEIS post-primary schools by improving their standard staffing allocations.

The representative organisations for School Principals and school management developed a framework that assists schools on how best to manage the provision of guidance from within their staffing allocation. This approach puts a greater emphasis on group-work and class-based activity at senior cycle and maximises the amount of time available for those pupils that need one to one support.

I have no plans to return to a situation where there would be a separate allocation for guidance in schools. If economic recovery continues I hope the Government will be in a position to improve the standard staffing allocation to schools. However, I believe that it is desirable to give schools discretion on how to use those increased resources.

Student Assistance Fund

239. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding provided to the student assistance fund for students attending third level who are experiencing hardship; to students with a disability who require additional resources to fully participate in university or college, in each year from 2010 to 2015; the number of students who benefitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33911/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The objective of the Student Assistance Fund is to assist students in a sensitive and compassionate manner who might otherwise, because of financial reasons, suffer severe hardship or be unable to continue their third-level studies.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities provides grants towards the provision of services, purchase of equipment and provision of academic supports for students with disabilities attending full time courses in Third Level Institutions and Post Leaving Certificate centres.

Both funds form part of the Third Level Access Fund which is managed by the National Access Office in the HEA.

Details of the funding provided and the beneficiaries from 2009/10 to 2015/16 are attached for the Deputy’s convenience.

Student Assistance Fund

Year	Number of Beneficiaries	Total Funding Allocated
2015/16	Not yet available	€6.34m
2014/15	Not yet available	€6.6m
2013/14	15,166	€8.35m
2012/13	16,721	€11m

Year	Number of Beneficiaries	Total Funding Allocated
2011/12	13,347	€9m
2010/11	8,301	€5.012m
2009/10	7,681	€5m

Fund for Students with Disabilities

Year	Number of Beneficiaries	Total Funding Allocated
2015/16	Not yet available	€10.3m
2014/15	10,011	€10.3m
2013/14	8,809	€10.2m
2012/13	7,897	€10.3m
2011/12	6,849	€10.8m
2010/11	6,097	€13.7m
2009/10	4,964	€12.1m

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

240. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of restoring postgraduate maintenance grants in 2016 at the level which previously applied prior to their abolition; the cost of a 50% restoration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33912/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Due to economic circumstances, a number of difficult expenditure reduction measures were taken in recent budgets. A decision in Budget 2012 has meant that new students entering postgraduate courses from the 2012/13 academic year onwards are not entitled to maintenance payments under the Student Grant Scheme, but may qualify in some circumstances for limited fee support.

Those who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible to have their post-graduate tuition fees paid up to the maximum fee limit of €6,270. Alternatively, a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of their fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2015/16 academic year, increasing relative to the number of family dependants.

If the Budget 2012 decision was reversed and the income thresholds increased to bring them into line with those for undergraduate students, then the potential cost is estimated to be in the region of €47m. Based on this figure, the cost of a 50% restoration of the grant would be approximately €24m. This costing assumes that the number of post-graduate grant holders will increase to the level prior to the introduction of this Budget measure.

Capitation Grants

241. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the capitation fees paid in respect of second level Education and Training Board schools; the rates that apply to comprehensive and voluntary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33913/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The funding arrangements

made by my Department for post primary schools reflect the sectoral division of our second-level system. At the core of all arrangements is reliance upon capitation as the principal determinant of funding.

My Department provides funding to Community and Comprehensive schools on a budget basis that is based mainly on pupil numbers, but also take into account additional factors which vary from school to school such as condition of buildings, size of school etc.

With regard to the ETB sector financial allocations are made to ETBs as part of a block grant. ETBs are given a high level of autonomy in the management and appropriation of this grant and each is allowed to distribute its allocations in line with its priorities and perceptions of need.

My Department provides funding to voluntary secondary schools by way of per capita grants and these are set out on the attached schedule.

Fee charging schools do not receive any capitation or related grants from my Department.

Voluntary Secondary Schools in the Free Education Scheme

Per Capita Grant Rates for general running costs and funding provided for caretaking and secretarial services with effect from 1 January 2015

Standard Capitation Grant €296 per pupil, less the contribution to teachers' salaries of €562.5 per Serving Permanent/CID based on the figures contained in each schools schedule of Department supported posts. The grant is paid in three instalments in September, January and April.

School Services Support Fund (SSSF) €201 per pupil payable in three instalments in September, January and April. Each eligible school receives the SSSF grant, which is calculated at a minimum enrolment rate of 200 pupils and thereafter according to enrolment.

Grants for Secretaries

Basic Secretarial Grant - €36 per pupil
SSSF Secretary Grant - €24 per pupil

Schools employing secretaries under 'the 1978 scheme' do not receive any secretary grants.

Grants for Caretakers

Basic Caretaker Grant - €30 per pupil
SSSF Caretaker Grant - €18 per pupil

To qualify for the basic secretary and caretaker grants, a school must have an enrolment figure of at least 200 pupils. The grant is calculated by multiplying the enrolment figure by the rate up to a maximum of 350 pupils. These grants are calculated according to the previous school year's enrolment figures.

All schools, regardless of enrolment, receive the SSSF caretaker and secretary grants, which are calculated at a minimum enrolment rate of 200 pupils and thereafter according to enrolment up to a maximum of 350 pupils.

Capitation Grants

242. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of increasing the capitation fees paid in respect of voluntary second level schools by 10%; and by 20%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33914/15]

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. I am aware of the impact budgetary decisions taken in our economic crisis have had on capitation and related grants on voluntary second level schools. Each 10% increase in capitation and related grants for voluntary secondary schools would cost approx. €9m. I am determined that education will be prioritised for investment in the coming years, and I believe that increasing the staffing and funding of our schools should be priorities for such investment.

Fire Service Staff

243. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to have a recruitment drive for Dublin Fire Brigade before the end of 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33662/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department works closely with Dublin City Council in relation to the staffing needs of Dublin Fire Brigade. My Department recently approved requests from Dublin City Council, to hold both an open and a confined competition to fill firefighter vacancies that arise in Dublin Fire Brigade. It is my understanding that details of the open competition, which will be organised through the Public Appointments Service, will be announced shortly.

Leader Programmes Applications

244. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government details of all Leader funding and projects pursuant to the Rural Development Programme 2008 to 2013, submitted by Mayo north east leader partnership, and sanctioned by the Minister, for projects in excess of €150,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33674/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The Local Action Groups contracted to deliver the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) throughout the country are the principal decision-makers in relation to the allocation of project funding. Mayo North East Leader Partnership (MNELP) is the Local Action Group contracted by my Department to deliver the RDP in the North Mayo area and the details of projects in excess of €150,000 submitted by MNELP and sanctioned by my Department under the Programme are set out in the table below.

Project	RDP Funding Sanctioned
G&N Loftus and Sons Local Waste Recycling Facility	€193,345.00
Refurbishment of Crossmolina Town Hall	€232,802.83
Kilmovee All Weather Pitch	€206,260.50

Project	RDP Funding Sanctioned
Bonniconlon Community Centre	€215,022.22
Behy Community Hall	€339,684.75
MG Precision & Automation	€194,974.94
Courtyard Restoration	€200,000.00
Waste Water Treatment Systems Equipment	€154,848.75
Killala Greenway	€346,472.22
Lavelle Boat Charters	€200,000.00
Second Phase of Bonniconlon Community Centre	€167,635.29
Renovation of Community Hall - Halla Naomh Bhreandain	€301,499.25
Fr. Patrick Peyton Memorial Centre	€207,558.00
Attymass Community Centre	€177,349.53
Swinford Community Centre Renewal	€150,333.75
Admiral Brown Riverside Promenade	€178,656.00
Total	€3,466,443.03

Local Authority Finances

245. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government given that the Local Government Act now places responsibility for economic development with the relevant local authorities, the way in which Sligo County Council can be expected to promote County Sligo's €100 million tourism product, if it does not have the financial resources to appoint persons to any tourism development positions, which is ultimately leaving the county at a major disadvantage in comparison to other counties, ultimately worsening the financial situation of the council; if he will consider allocating specific funding to the council for the appointment of staff to these positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33698/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): It is a matter for each local authority, including Sligo County Council, to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources. The elected members of a local authority have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, which include adopting the annual budget and authorising borrowing, and are democratically accountable for all expenditure by the local authority. Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. Therefore, the issue raised in relation to tourism development positions at Sligo County Council is a matter for the Chief Executive.

Local Authority Housing

246. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for an update on the ongoing construction project at Drumilliard in Castleblayney in County Monaghan, and in particular the provision of an on-site communal facility for Castleblayney Care Housing Association. [33726/15]

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

ly): My Department is providing €2.3 million through the Capital Assistance Scheme for the construction by Castleblayney Care Housing Association of 18 units of accommodation at Drumilliard, Castleblayney, County Monaghan, to cater for persons with disabilities. I understand that this project is substantially complete with 10 of the units having tenants allocated to them. A second application has been submitted for the provision of additional units of accommodation and a communal facility on the site. A decision on this second proposal will be made following the completion of the first project, the completion of a post- project review and confirmation from Monaghan County Council that all units provided under the first project are fully tenanted.

Dumping at Sea

247. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding an application by Dublin Port to the Environmental Protection Agency to dump dredged materials off the south-east coast of Howth in County Dublin; the way in which his Department and its agencies will protect the newly designated United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, UNESCO, biosphere status for Dublin over the next 5 to 10 years. [33736/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I understand that the Dublin Port Company submitted a Dumping at Sea permit application to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on 13 July 2015 relating to capital dredging at Dublin Port as part of the Alexandra Basin Redevelopment project. As the designated competent authority, the EPA will assess the application in accordance with the Dumping at Sea Act and will make a decision accordingly. Management of the Dublin biosphere rests with the appropriate local authorities and, in relation to its special areas of conservation, with my colleague the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Housing Issues

248. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to allow an organisation in County Cork (details supplied) to tender for a housing project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33746/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has approved revised proposals in respect of this housing development.

This approval, along with budget recommendations, was notified to the local authority last week. The further implementation of the project is now a matter for the local authority and the approved housing body concerned.

Rural Development Programme Projects

249. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason for the delay in issuing a letter of offer to an organisation (details supplied) by Mayo north-east leader partnership following a decision of its board on 30 July 2014 to approve grant-aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33768/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The Local Action Groups contracted to deliver the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) throughout the country are the principal

decision-makers in relation to the allocation of project funding under the Programme. Mayo North East Leader Partnership is the Local Action Group contracted by my Department to deliver the Rural Development Programme in the North Mayo area and any issues arising regarding the issuing of contracts in relation to the project concerned is a matter between the promoter and Mayo North East Leader Partnership.

Development Contributions

250. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has reviewed development levy policies by local authorities in light of the transition of water services to Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33775/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Further to the establishment of Irish Water with effect from 1 January 2014, planning authorities were requested in Circular PS 21/2013 issued by my Department on 30 December 2013 to operate revised procedures in relation to the application of development contribution levies. In respect of planning permissions granted prior to 1 January 2014, planning authorities were advised that the full development contribution charge (where such was attached as a condition of the planning permission), including, where relevant, the portion in respect of water services infrastructure, must be paid to the planning authority in accordance with the terms of the permission.

In respect of planning permissions granted after 1 January 2014, planning authorities were advised that when granting planning permission, they should no longer include a portion in respect of water services infrastructure in any development contribution applied and that such charges would instead be levied by Irish Water. Planning authorities were further advised that new development schemes made after that date should not contain charges in respect of water services infrastructure.

I am not aware of any non-compliance by planning authorities with the terms of Circular PS 21/ 2013. It is intended to issue further guidance on development contributions in due course, to assist local authorities in the implementation of changes to the development contribution regime as provided for in the recently-enacted Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015.

Irish Water Administration

251. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has raised the matter of connection fee increases by Irish Water over and above development levy reductions; if his Department has issued any instructions to Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33776/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it in accordance with a water charges plan to be approved by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER). Section 22(5) of the Act provides that a water charges plan may provide for charges in respect of the provision of a service connection (within the meaning of the Water Services Act 2007) to, or in respect of, a premises. In its decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan, published in October 2014, the CER stated that, until it made a decision on Irish Water's new connection charges, Irish Water should con-

tinue to apply the rates which were charged by the local authorities at 31 December 2013. Although Tipperary County Council is now the amalgamation of North Tipperary County Council and South Tipperary County Council, including Clonmel Borough Council, all of these entities were still in place as of 31st December 2013 and as such the various fees at that date still apply. Irish Water has informed my Department that there is not a single set fee for either a water or wastewater connection in Tipperary and the calculation for each composite connection charge (connection works fees plus development contribution fees) is calculated separately, depending on the location of the connection.

The CER published, in its Water Charges Plan Decision Paper of 5 March 2015, the areas that it will be progressing in 2015, which includes the development of Connection Charging Policy. Later this year, the CER intend to publish an Information Paper which will include a high level work plan relating to the CER's approach to consulting on Irish Water's Connection Charging Policy.

In so far as the fees charged in relation to a particular property are concerned, Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

252. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount spent in each year from 2010 to 2014 on the housing adaptation grant; the number of persons who benefitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33848/15]

253. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount spent in each year from 2010 to 2014 on the mobility aid schemes for older persons; the number of persons who benefitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33849/15]

254. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount spent in each year from 2010 to 2014 on the housing aid for older persons scheme; the number of persons who benefitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33850/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 to 254, inclusive, together.

The Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability were introduced on 1 November 2007. Information on Exchequer funding provided by my Department to each local authority for these schemes, and the numbers of beneficiaries, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.envron.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/>, by selecting 'Social and Affordable Housing', 'Housing Adaptation Grants by Area 2008 to date'.

Local Authority Housing

255. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the capital allocation for housing to local authorities in each year from 2011

to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33851/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The funding provided by my Department to local authorities through the capital initiatives to support social housing development from 20 11 to 2014 is as follows:

Year	Capital Expenditure
2011	€485,048,000
2012	€397,197,394
2013	€295,165,258
2014	€299,635,956

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

256. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the annual cost of carrying out inspections of private rental properties in each year from 2010 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33854/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations. Responsibility for enforcing the regulations rests with the relevant local authority, supported by a dedicated stream of funding allocated by my Department from the monies set aside from the registration fee income received under section 137 of the Residential Tenancies Act and held by the Private Rented Tenancies Board (PRTB) in a fiduciary capacity. Details of the amounts paid to each local authority in respect of the years 2010 to 2015 are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,23156,en.pdf>.

Control of Dogs

257. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware of a current review into the effectiveness of the Control of Dogs Act 1998 regulations being conducted by Veterinary Ireland; if he has been informed of its findings and recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33860/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I am advised that Veterinary Ireland is undertaking an in depth policy review at present, which includes, inter alia, an examination of the effectiveness of the Control of Dogs Regulations 1998. While the review is a matter solely for Veterinary Ireland, I understand that it will not be finalised for some time yet. Accordingly, it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further on the matter at this time.

Control of Dogs

258. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware of a petition currently calling on his Department to implement a compulsory dog breed-neutral policy of re-homing for dog breeds affected by his Department's

current Control of Dogs Act 1998 regulations; if he has been approached by, or met with, Dogs Trust Ireland or the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals recently regarding this specific topic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33861/15]

259. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware that a petition of over 2,500 signatures is calling for his Department to implement a compulsory breed-neutral re-homing policy in all dog pounds; that the breeds currently listed on his Department's Control of Dogs Act 1998 regulations are being affected in this way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33863/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 258 and 259 together.

The rehoming policy in respect of dogs in local authority shelters, for dogs seized, accepted or detained for the purposes of the Control of Dogs Acts, is a matter for each local authority and one in which my Department has no role. Accordingly, my Department does not intend to introduce a compulsory rehoming policy and I have had no meetings with the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Dogs Trust Ireland or any other bodies on the matter.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

260. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to review the current staffing levels at Inland Fisheries Ireland, given the reduction in these levels from 440 to 291 in five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33859/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 99 and 1550 of 22 September 2015.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

261. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department has any plans to extend broadband cover to a certain location in County Cork (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33718/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is a Government initiative which aims to deliver high speed broadband to every citizen and business in Ireland. This is being achieved through a combination of accelerated commercial investment by telecoms operators, and a proposed State intervention to provide high speed broadband to those parts of the country where the commercial sector will not invest. On Tuesday 29 September the Government approved an allocation of €275m for the National Broadband Plan, which will provide the initial stimulus required to deliver the Government's intervention. Combined with commercial investment, this will ensure that 85% of Ireland's premises have high speed broadband by 2018, with 100% coverage by 2020.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The map shows Ireland with two colours, BLUE and AMBER and was developed based on the most up to date information available at the time of publication. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either

currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services by the end of 2016 and includes part of Fountainstown in County Cork.

The areas marked AMBER represent those areas where the State intends to intervene to ensure those areas will have access to high speed broadband services. My Department's map indicates that 32% of premises in Fountainstown will be covered by the NBP intervention, which means that all other premises in the area will have high speed broadband of at least 30mbps by the end of 2016.

My Department is currently in the process of updating the Map, taking into consideration any new information received or operator announcements made of any new plans in 2016 and beyond. We expect to publish an updated version of the Map before the end of this year.

I would encourage members of the public to consult both my Department's map and the information being provided by the commercial operators on their respective websites to establish the precise situation regarding their individual premises.

The NBP proposed Intervention Strategy document, which was published on 15 July last, sets out a series of detailed proposals by Government in respect of the proposed State intervention. It sets out the key elements of the intervention - what services are proposed and how they will be delivered. It outlines various aspects of the proposed intervention including the type of network envisaged, the minimum speeds being demanded, the length of the contract for services, and whether the network should be public or privately owned.

It is intended that the network will be built out as quickly as possible and engagement with industry stakeholders has indicated that this could be achieved within 3-5 years of the contract award. This will allow us to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland will have access to high speed services, by 2020 at the latest.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

262. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of commercial and residential premises in County Mayo that will benefit from the roll-out of next-generation broadband, the timeline for the roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33769/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is a Government initiative which aims to deliver high speed broadband to every citizen and business in Ireland. This is being achieved through a combination of accelerated commercial investment by telecoms operators, and a proposed State intervention to provide high speed broadband to those parts of the country where the commercial sector will not invest. On 29 September the Government approved an allocation of €275m for the National Broadband Plan, which will provide the initial stimulus required to deliver the Government's intervention. Combined with commercial investment, this will ensure that 85% of Ireland's premises have high speed broadband by 2018, with 100% coverage by 2020.

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The areas marked AMBER represent those areas where the State intends to intervene to

ensure those areas will have access to high speed broadband services.

This exercise identified 33,336 premises that will be covered by commercial operators (27,640 residential and 5,696 business) by the end of 2016. 50,831 premises currently fall within the NBP intervention area (39,218 residential and 11,613 business).

My Department is in the process of updating the Map, taking into consideration any new information received or operator announcements made of any new plans in 2016 and beyond. We expect to publish an updated version of the Map before the end of this year.

The NBP proposed Intervention Strategy document, which was published on 15 July last, sets out a series of detailed proposals by Government in respect of the proposed State intervention. It sets out the key elements of the intervention - what services are proposed and how they will be delivered. It outlines various aspects of the proposed intervention including the type of network envisaged, the minimum speeds being demanded, the length of the contract for services, and whether the network should be public or privately owned.

It is intended that the network will be built out as quickly as possible and engagement with industry stakeholders has indicated that this could be achieved within 3-5 years of the contract award. This will allow us to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland will have access to high speed services, by 2020 at the latest.

Rail Network Maintenance

263. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to meet the chief executive officer of Iarnród Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33664/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have periodic meetings with the Chief Executive Officer of Iarnród Éireann. While I have no immediate plans at present to meet with him there is, of course, regular interaction between my Department and the CEO and his management team.

Road Network

264. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to replace and-or renew the community involvement scheme and the local improvement scheme; if he is aware of the increased deterioration of many roads in rural Ireland, which would benefit from increased funding through the continuation of such schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33727/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A separate pilot Community Involvement Scheme (CIS) was run in 2013 and 2014. The scheme has reverted back to allowing local authorities to set aside 7.5% of their Restoration Improvement (RI) and Restoration Maintenance (RM) grants for CIS schemes if they so wish.

The Local Improvement Scheme remains in place but there is no separate allocation available towards this grant category. Instead local authorities may use up to 15% of their initial Discretionary Grant towards Local Improvement Schemes should they wish to do so. The local contribution for these schemes remains at 20% of the total cost of the project. I take the view that local authorities are best placed to assess whether funding should be allocated to LIS.

In addition to the funding provided at the start of the year, a further €24 million (Stimulus) was allocated to local authorities in July 2015 under Restoration Improvement Programme and local authorities were allowed to use up to 20% of their additional Restoration Improvement Grant towards CIS and 10% towards LIS should they wish to do so.

Road Network

265. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the proposed cost of the M17-M18 Gort to Tuam motorway in County Galway; the amount spent to date on the project; when the project will be completed; when the Tuam bypass will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33730/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and 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 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) formerly 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 TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

National Car Test

266. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the detection rate of excess omissions from Volkswagen and Audi vehicles registered since 5 July 2008 in national car test centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33738/15]

267. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which national car test regulations concerning emissions standards have been circumvented by the fitting of software in Volkswagen and Audi vehicles registered since 1 July 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33739/15]

268. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the implications for motorists who are owners of Volkswagen and Audi diesel vehicles affected by the recent revelation that software is being used to give false readings of emissions, when the vehicles are being tested in laboratory conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33740/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 266 to 268, inclusive, together.

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).

The recent Volkswagen disclosure relates to laboratory pollution emission testing during the Type Approval Testing procedure. The disclosure applies solely to emitted pollutants, centred primarily on nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions from diesel engines.

I am advised that the level of NOx emissions is not tested as part of the NCT current testing

regime as it is not part of the criteria that is specified under the European Roadworthiness Directive. The results of NCT tests by make and model of vehicle for 2013 and 2014 are available on the RSA website.

This is a new and emerging issue and my Department is working closely with other Departments and Agencies in monitoring developments as the matter evolves, to fully understand the impact of this disclosure on the Irish market. The situation relating to car emission controls is to be discussed today by the relevant Member State Ministers at a meeting of the European Competitiveness Council, the outcome of which is awaited.

Road Traffic Offences

269. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider an amendment to section 12 of the Road Traffic Act 2002 to allow for suspension of parking fines when such fines are under appeal to either the local authority concerned or to the Ombudsman; if he is satisfied that section 12(c), which allows local authorities to increase the amount of a fine by 50% if it is unpaid after 28 days, is fair and equitable in the circumstances of an appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33787/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The provisions referred to by the Deputy relate to fixed charge offences, and I have no plans to change them.

Under section 3 of the Local Government (Traffic Wardens) Act 1975, as substituted by section 12 of the Road Traffic Act 2002, traffic wardens are empowered to issue fixed charge notices for certain offences, including parking offences. This measure was introduced under the 2002 Act in tandem with the power of An Garda Síochána to issue fixed charge notices.

The fixed charge notice system has proven very effective as a tool for enforcement and deterrence. It also has the advantage, to both the public and the courts, of providing a means by which many of the cases can be resolved without recourse to the courts, with the inevitable added cost and burden to the courts which this would involve.

Fixed charge notices, whether issued by An Garda Síochána or by traffic wardens, allow a 28 day period in which the fixed charge penalty may be paid, after which the person has a further 28 days to pay the original penalty plus 50%. Where the penalty has not been paid within 56 days, a prosecution for the offence can be initiated. If payment is made within the 56 day period, there is no prosecution.

In cases where people wish to offer a defence regarding the alleged offence, they have the option to refuse to pay, and defend the case in court.

I see no reason to change this system in the manner proposed by the Deputy.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

270. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review and advance the Metro west project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33821/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Metro West was proposed under *Transport 21* as an orbital metro connecting Tallaght and Blanchardstown in the west of Dublin with the original Metro North proposal to Swords. The project was to be

procured as a Public Private Partnership, however a significant Exchequer contribution would also have been required.

In October 2010 the then Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) submitted an application to An Bord Pleanála for a Railway Order for the metro project. In light of the financial crisis, it was decided that the Railway Order application for Metro West should be withdrawn in September 2011.

Based on the outcome of the recent Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study undertaken by the National Transport Authority, the Government has decided that a revised Metro North scheme is the most appropriate public transport solution to address the transport needs of the Swords/Airport/City Centre Corridor. Funding is being made in the new Capital Plan *Building for Recovery* for new Metro North but there are no plans and no funding to proceed with the Metro West proposal.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) whose statutory remit covers planning of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area is currently updating its long term strategy for the wider GDA which will cover all the main corridors in the GDA. The draft Strategy will be published for public consultation shortly.

Road Network

271. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be made available to local authorities to complete design and planning work in respect of upgrading the R178 Dundalk to Cavan strategic route; if he is aware that there is an urgent need to have this road upgraded, given the very heavy volume of traffic, particularly heavy vehicles, and the importance of this route for the further economic development of Counties Cavan, Monaghan and Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33902/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants.

The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Cavan County Council was provided with over €2 million between 2007 and 2013 from my Department in connection with this project under the Strategic Non-National Road Grants Scheme in order to bring this 75 km route to preliminary design stage. A further allocation of €100,000 was provided in 2014 to facilitate completion of the preliminary design.

Allocations for 2015 have been made and no further funding is available. Due to budgetary constraints it will not be possible to progress the project further at this point.

Air Services Provision

272. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in light of the profound opposition of the population of the Aran Islands, and their relations and contacts on the mainland, if she will ensure that the Aer Arann connection is maintained; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33737/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): My position from the outset has been to ensure a continued air service to the Aran Islands, with significant financial support from the Government, in line with EU rules in regard to Public Service Obligation (PSO) air services.

My Department is continuing in its efforts to reach an agreement for an interim service with the holder of the air service.

Departmental Expenditure

273. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide information, in tabular form, on allocations made under the auspices of her Department for projects in the Dublin Fingal area since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33689/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of the annual funding allocation to my Department at subhead level are published in the annual Revised Estimates Volume. Through these subheads, my Department administers and delivers a wide range of programmes and measures, descriptions of which are available on its website at <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/> Expenditure under these programme areas is recorded and accounted for on a national basis and it is not possible to give a regional or county-by-county breakdown of that expenditure. For example, a number of my Department's programmes are delivered through agencies and other intermediary bodies that operate across county boundaries and in respect of which there is no detailed breakdown on a county basis held by my Department. Groups and organisations that receive grants directly from my Department are not typically constituted on a single-county basis.

In view of this and because of the wide range of my Department's schemes and programmes, and the large volumes of payments and grants involved, it is not possible to provide the information sought. However, if the Deputy has specific queries relating to a particular programme or grant, I would be glad to seek to provide him with relevant information in that regard. Similarly, if the Deputy would like specific information in relation to a particular scheme, I would be glad to arrange to have any such request from him examined.

Historic Towns Initiative

274. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to expand the historic towns initiative beyond the three towns covered by the pilot project; her views on the success of the pilot scheme to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33753/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) aims to promote heritage-led regeneration of the historic cores of our rural historic towns by harnessing the cultural heritage assets of participating towns. The wider objective is to help stall and, ultimately, reverse the trend towards depopulation, loss of vibrancy, vacancy and dereliction which currently exists. During 2013 and 2014, the Department, in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, the Heritage Council and three local authorities, ran a pilot HTI programme in Youghal, Listowel and Westport. Central to the programme was that it was driven at local level, with guidance by a national steering group comprising officials from each local authority, DAHG, the Heritage Council and Fáilte Ireland. An HTI guidance manual was also developed to assist each town in the pilot programme. The pilot scheme is considered

to have been a success in the three towns that participated. Plans to further develop the Initiative will be contingent on the availability of funding in the context of the many competing priorities in 2016 and beyond for the conservation, preservation and presentation of the State's heritage.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

275. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to recruit staff at Killarney House; if she will provide details of the breakdown of staff; when the recruitment process will begin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33765/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The works to Killarney House that began last year - including the new extension - are now substantially completed and work on the interpretative exhibitions is in train. Once this latter element has been moved forward sufficiently, the staffing requirements can be addressed. In this regard, staffing requirements at the location referred to by the Deputy, as with all other areas of my Department, will remain the subject of ongoing consideration in light of the overall business needs and within the pay framework to be approved for 2016. The nature of the posts required, as well as the numbers involved and the budgetary implications, will be determined in due course.