

## **Written Answers.**

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

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

### **Information and Communications Technology**

11. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the provision of electronic tablets to school children to reduce the excessive weight of their school bags is feasible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43865/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The decision to use tablet devices is a matter for the Board of Management of a school. Where the introduction of new technology is planned, consultation with members of the school community including parents is advised. The cost and other implications must be fully considered by the Boards of Management before a decision is made.

An advice sheet on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the PDST-Technology in Education website which covers areas such as what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

As part of the new Digital Strategy for Schools my Department will provide advice on ICT equipment and digital learning tools that are best-suited to support learning and teaching in schools. €210m will be allocated over the period of the Strategy commencing in the next school year to fund equipment investment by schools.

### **Schools Health and Safety**

12. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she needs to be more assertive with local authorities in setting out the parking and road safety requirements of schools; if her remit, which includes administrative responsibility for over 3,000 rural schools, requires a formal school car parking policy that takes account of the reliance on car transport in rural areas; if the shortage of parking facilities in three schools (details supplied) in County Meath is a significant safety concern for teachers, parents, pupils and public representatives; what is required to address these risks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43695/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** In general, individual school authorities are responsible, in the first instance, for ensuring the safety and welfare of children and others in their care.

The issue of road safety measures outside the vested site areas of schools on public roads, such as road signage, traffic calming measures etc., is a matter, for the relevant Local Authority. Local Authorities have the power to decide on road safety measures outside schools to ensure that measures are in place to protect the safety of local school children. My Department has no function in this matter.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's Technical Guidance Document – TGD-020 sets out the general principles of Universal Design in schools, which includes guidance on car parking, set-down/pick up areas. In the case of school building projects, parking provision should be as stated in the guidance documents, subject to the planning requirements of the relevant Local Authority.

### **Teacher Data**

13. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers employed in the primary and post-primary sector; the number of teachers on part-time contracts; and her plans to address the pay disparity for newly qualified teachers. [43698/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** There are currently 34,896 primary teachers employed in either a permanent, fixed term, Contract of Indefinite Duration or Regular -Part-Time capacity in recognised primary schools paid on my Department payrolls. The corresponding figure for post primary teachers employed in Voluntary Secondary and Community / Comprehensive schools is 18,859. These figures include those who are job sharing.

There are 6,357 teachers paid on my Department payrolls with Contracts of Indefinite Duration in post primary schools and 315 at Primary.

There are 2,361 staff who have less than full contracted hours in post primary schools and 496 in primary with less than full time hours.

As the Deputy will be aware, I am currently implementing in full the recommendations of the Expert Group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Teaching, which should see a significant improvement to the job security and stability of employment for existing and future young teachers.

The Haddington Road Agreement took steps to partially address the salary imbalance between new and longer-serving teachers. This process has continued under the Lansdowne Road Agreement which has begun the process of restoring the reductions to public service pay which were implemented in response to the financial crisis.

We look forward to seeing the further restoration of public service pay levels as our economy continues to recover strongly.

*Question No. 14 answered orally.*

### **Schools Designation**

15. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the case of a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath that requires an upgrade to Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools band 1 status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43879/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The school referred to by the Deputy participates in the Urban Band 2 category of DEIS. The school was selected for this category following an extensive identification process to select schools for inclusion in DEIS which was conducted in 2005.

As the Deputy will be aware, a process for the review of the DEIS Programme which I announced earlier this year, is currently underway in my Department. This review is being undertaken over the course of the current school year and will consider all issues pertaining to educational disadvantage, including the methodology for identifying schools for inclusion in future programmes. While this process is underway, I do not intend to make any changes to the current programme, including the reclassification of any schools participating in DEIS.

### **School Curriculum**

16. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the implementation of junior cycle reform; the level of participation of teachers in training for the new curriculum and assessment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43880/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** In September 2014 implementation of the Junior Cycle commenced with a new specification in English and the availability of a number of short courses. The 2015 Junior Cycle Framework was published in August 2015. Agreement was reached with the leadership of the two unions in May 2015 on revised reform proposals and on supporting implementation resources in July 2015. Following a ballot of members in September, these proposals were accepted by members of TUI and rejected by members of ASTI.

A comprehensive professional development programme to support Junior Cycle is currently being rolled out. This includes seminars for school leaders, whole-school CPD, subject-specific seminars, teacher-led CPD and school visits. Whole school CPD is being implemented on a continuous basis. To date in 2015/26, 30 schools have engaged in whole school CPD, with a total attendance of 1,163 teachers.

482 school leaders have to date been invited to CPD, of whom 261 attended. 900 teachers of English have to date been invited to CPD, of whom 682 attended.

TUI members are participating in the CPD programme following the outcome of their union ballot. The ASTI has recently engaged in a consultative process with its members on the Junior Cycle proposals following the outcome of their ballot.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

17. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made in addressing infrastructure supports for a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43703/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of architectural planning. The Design Team appointment was finalised in July 2015 and the project was authorised to proceed to Stage 2(a) which is the developed design stage. Prior to the appointment of the Design Team my Department had already secured planning permission for the project using in-house Architectural resources. The Design Team will work on the basis established under that planning per-

mission to bring this project through the remaining stages of the architectural planning process.

Upon successful completion of Stage 2(a) and subject to no issues arising, the project will be authorised to complete Stage 2(b) which includes securing the Fire cert and Disability access Cert, the preparation of tender documents and prequalification of contractors.

This project was included in the six year programme I announced on 17 November and is scheduled to proceed to construction in 2016.

### School Patronage

18. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the transfer of school patronage and the numbers of schools that have requested a transfer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43702/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Programme for Government gives a commitment to move towards a more pluralist system of patronage for our schools. In this context, the Government established a Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. The Forum advised on how the education system can provide a sufficiently diverse number and range of primary schools catering for all religions and none and on the practicalities of transferring patronage of primary schools where it is appropriate.

Following surveys of parents in 43 areas, there was sufficient parental demand supporting change in 28 of these areas. To date, eight new primary schools have opened under the patronage divesting process.

In order to reinvigorate the patronage divesting process, I recently met with the Catholic Bishops and yesterday met with representatives from Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). I have also arranged to meet with representatives from Educate Together next week. My Department is continuing to work intensively with the main stakeholders to advance alternative choices for 2016 and beyond and to achieve greater diversity of school provision.

Count	Roll No	School Name	Address	Patron	Ethos	Year Opened
1	20430N	Canal Way Educate Together NS	Basin Lane, Dublin 8	Educate Together	Multi denominational	2013
2	20444B	Trim Educate Together NS	Glebe, Kilkalkey Road, Trim, Co Meath	Educate Together	Multi denominational	2014
3	20446F	Tramore Educate Together NS	Pond Road, Tramore, Co. Waterford	Educate Together	Multi denominational	2014
4	20445D	Malahide/Portmarnock Educate Together NS	Malahide Road, Kinsealy, Co. Dublin	Educate Together	Multi denominational	2014

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Count	Roll No	School Name	Address	Patron	Ethos	Year Opened
5	09040K	Newtown-white Educate Together NS*	Newtown-white, Ballysakerry, Ballina, Co. Mayo	Educate Together	Multi denominational	2014
6	20456I	Tuam Educate Together NS	Dublin Road, Tuam, Co. Galway	Educate Together	Multi denominational	2015
7	20458M	New Ross Educate Together NS	Barret's Park, New Ross, Co. Wexford	Educate Together	Multi denominational	2015
8	20461B	Gaelscoil na Laochra	Biorra, Co. Uíbh Fhailí	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Multi denominational	2015

\*This school resulted in the transfer of existing school from the Church of Ireland.

### **Addiction Treatment Services**

19. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budget for school-based prevention and education programmes on addiction; the programmes available at primary and at second level; the time provision for such programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43875/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** There are a number of ways in which education on addiction prevention is addressed in schools.

Schools have a role in supporting students to develop the key skills and knowledge to enable them to make informed choices when faced with a range of difficult issues, including drugs and alcohol. This is mainly done through the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme, which has a specific module on the use and misuse of a range of substances.

SPHE is mandatory in all primary schools and in junior cycle. It will also form part of the new mandatory 'Wellbeing' component of junior cycle. Schools are also encouraged to deliver the SPHE programme in senior cycle.

Schools have access to a number of resources that support the delivery of the substance use module of SPHE. Examples include the "Walk Tall" Programme for primary pupils and a post-primary resource called "On My Own Two Feet".

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

20. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she supports the principle of equal pay for all teachers. [43914/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** Since the beginning of the financial crisis, there has been a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure. These measures were implemented at a time of very difficult financial and budgetary cir-

cumstances for the State. Since first entering Government, we have been committed to achieving such reductions through negotiation. The Haddington Road Agreement, to which teacher unions are parties, saw negotiated decreases to public sector pay. That Agreement also began the process of addressing the salary imbalance between new and longer-serving teachers. This process has continued under the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

The issue of equalised pay scales was not one which could be resolved in the talks. However, the Lansdowne Road Agreement will, through salary increases and a reduction in the Pension-Related Deduction, begin the process of restoring the reductions to public service pay which were implemented over recent years. These flat-rate increases will be proportionately more favourable to new entrants to teaching (who are lower on the pay scale) than to longer serving teachers.

We look forward to seeing the further restoration of public service pay levels as our economy continues to recover strongly.

### **Skills Development**

21. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is focused on the need to ensure that the skills of those persons leaving the education system can be matched to the requirements of the workplace; the ongoing efforts to augment the process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43870/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Further Education and Training Strategy and the Higher Education Strategy have a major focus on employer engagement being responsive to the skill needs of the economy. Both sectors are closely engaged in the establishment of new Regional Skills Fora to engage with employers and inform the shape of education and training provision.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, which is funded by my Department, advises the Government on current and future skills needs of the economy. Its research informs the selection of targeted programmes designed to tackle the skills shortages such as Momentum, Springboard and the ICT skills conversion programme.

My Department is also leading the preparation of a new National Skills Strategy which will provide a framework for determining the volume, type and mix of skills required over the period to 2025.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

22. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied regarding her ability to meet the full requirements of special needs teachers and special needs assistants at primary and secondary level; the steps she is taking to address emerging needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43871/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** This year 11,940 SNAs are available for allocation to primary and secondary schools, which is an increase of 13% in the number of posts available since 2011.

The NCSE has allocated 6832 Resource teaching posts to mainstream schools this year, which is an increase of 29% since 2011.

In addition, over 150 new Special Classes have been opened for the 2015/16 school year, which means there are now over 1,000 special classes in place.

I welcome the fact, that 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 and to increase provision to address emerging needs in this area.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

23. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of resources hours for children with a disability in primary schools. [43915/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The NCSE has allocated 6832 Resource Teaching posts to mainstream schools this year. This is an increase of 29% in the allocation since 2011.

3965 of these posts have been allocated to primary schools, which is an increase of 11% over the allocation made last year.

The General Allocation Model (GAM) is now updated annually for all primary schools, to take account of increased enrolments. 4273 GAM posts have been allocated to primary schools this year to provide additional supports for pupils with learning needs and mild general learning difficulties.

The NCSE recommend that a new model for allocating resource teachers to schools should be introduced which would allow the allocation of resources to pupils based on actual learning needs rather than on a diagnosis of disability.

A pilot of this new model is taking place in a number of schools over the course of the current school year.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

24. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the evaluations that have taken place on the effectiveness of teaching resources provided to assist children with dyslexia under the general allocation model; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43873/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** All mainstream schools are allocated additional teaching resources to cater for children with High Incidence special educational needs, including Specific Learning Disabilities, of which Dyslexia is one such SLD.

The Special Educational Support Service provides training courses for schools in the area of Dyslexia as well as support for in-school seminars and attendance at relevant conferences and seminars.

The quality of teaching, the quality of learning and of care and support for pupils with special educational needs, including those pupils with dyslexia, is evaluated and reported on in all whole-school type evaluations at both primary and post-primary levels.

Inspectors will provide advice and support to teachers regarding their provision for pupils

with dyslexia, where relevant and appropriate.

At primary level, the Inspectorate is currently developing a new evaluation model that has a more specific focus on the use of teaching resources provided to the school to assist pupils with special educational needs.

### **Educational Disadvantage**

25. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the maximum support to all pupils in disadvantaged schools in 2015-16. [43918/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As the Deputy will be aware DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, is my Department’s main policy instrument for tackling educational disadvantage. Every effort is made to prioritise funding and support the objectives of improved educational outcomes through the DEIS programme, which includes additional funding and teaching resources in DEIS schools.

The Deputy may also be aware that a process for the review of the DEIS Programme is currently underway in my Department. This process is being undertaken over the course of the current school year and will consider all issues pertaining to educational disadvantage in order to inform future policy direction in this important area. While this process is underway, I do not intend to make any changes to the current programme.

### **School Funding**

26. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to fund primary schools to the same level as secondary schools. [43916/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** It is difficult to make precise comparisons between the levels of grants paid and the actual costs of running schools at primary and post primary levels. However it is self-evident that the maintenance and running costs for second level schools are much greater on a unit cost basis than those in primary schools.

In general, second level schools are larger than primary schools and have a lower pupil teacher ratio resulting in more classrooms and specialist rooms such as laboratories, workshops and kitchens. This leads to higher unit costs in second level schools for heat, light, power, maintenance and cleaning.

I do recognise however the need to improve capitation funding for primary schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. In the last Budget, I secured additional funding for education and I am determined to continue pressing the case for increased investment so that our schools are better resourced.

### **Teacher Data**

27. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of relief teaching days allocated to teachers on a departmental pension at primary and post-primary levels in 2013-14, in 2014-15, and in 2015-16; the value of these payments; the steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43867/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** During the 2013-14 school year a total of 9,421 teaching days were worked by 537 retired teachers: 302 retired Primary school teachers worked 5,259 days and 235 retired Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive schools teachers worked 4,162 days.

During the 2014-15 school year a total of 10,391 teaching days were worked by 560 retired teachers: 320 retired Primary school teachers worked 5,996 days and 240 retired Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive schools teachers worked 4,395 days.

During the 2015-16 school year up to the end of November 2015 a total of 3,270 teaching days were worked by 368 retired teachers: 234 retired Primary school teachers worked 2,002 days and 134 retired Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive schools teachers worked 1,268 days.

The policy of my Department is to ensure, as far as possible, that the Managerial Authorities of Primary and Post Primary schools give priority to unemployed registered teachers who are fully qualified when filling vacant teaching posts. It is schools that employ teachers and not my Department. However my Department has issued a number of Circulars addressing this issue in recent years.

Under these Circulars School Principals must maintain a list of unemployed registered teachers who are available for substitute work at short notice and report to the Board of Management on any exceptional occasion where they have had to engage a registered teacher who is retired. Circular 31/2011 details a cascade of measures for the recruitment of teachers, prioritising registered teachers over retired registered teachers and unregistered people.

A retired teacher who returns to teaching on or after 1 February 2012 will commence at the first point of the incremental salary scale (i.e. the lowest point or starting salary for teachers). Incremental credit for service prior to 1 February 2012, qualification allowances and certain job role allowances are also not payable. This measure represents a significant financial disincentive for teachers who retired at the top of their salary scale, often with a post of responsibility allowance, to return to teaching.

## **Health Promotion**

28. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the challenge by schools (details supplied) in Greystones in County Wicklow to the location of a fast-food restaurant close to their premises on public health grounds; and the progress she has made on the implementation of the Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 to 2025. [43881/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The manner in which the challenge was taken in this case is a matter for the schools involved. I would like to commend the school for prioritising the health of their students in deciding their school policy on this matter.

Schools and the wider education sector have a vital role to play in contributing to the Government’s ‘Healthy Ireland’ agenda set out in the Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025.

Healthy Ireland was published by the Department of Health in 2013, and is one of the most ambitious programmes we have ever seen focused on improving the health of the nation.

Healthy Ireland contains a number of goals for the education sector. The Department of Education and Skills is a key partner in the delivery of this agenda, and this work is a personal priority for me during my time as Minister.

Through their primary and post primary education students are equipped with the key skills and knowledge to enable them to make healthier life choices. Schools' efforts should be complemented by students' families and their community.

My Department issued guidance to post primary schools, this September, on promoting healthy lifestyles which includes healthy eating policies. Similar guidance will be provided to primary schools early in 2016. I want to see more active flags in schools, more schools growing their own food, and more schools adopting healthy eating policies – I will be continuing to engage with the education stakeholders to find ways of achieving these goals.

### **Departmental Policy Reviews**

29. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of consultation on the proposals contained in the review of education in the Gaeltacht policy published by her Department. [43869/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** Extensive consultation has taken place since I launched my Department's Policy Proposals on Gaeltacht education last May. The consultation has provided a valuable opportunity to hear the opinions of schools, stakeholders and Gaeltacht communities.

The consultation included a survey, written submissions, public meetings in three Gaeltacht areas, and meetings with a range of stakeholder groups. My Department together with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht organised a forum in October which provided a rich opportunity to reflect on all feedback. The discussions were open, honest and constructive.

Work is currently underway to finalise the policy for Gaeltacht education in light of the outcomes of the consultation process.

### **School Enrolments**

30. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the discussions she has had on the inclusion of provisions excluding denominational schools from using a child's religion in selection criteria for schools admissions in the forthcoming schools admissions Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43883/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** Under the Equal Status Act, schools are not permitted to discriminate in admission on any of the grounds set out in the Act. However the Act contains an exemption which permits schools in which the objective is to provide education that promotes certain religious values, to admit a student of a particular religion in preference to others.

The Deputy will be aware of the many positive elements of the Admissions Bill, which will put an end to parents being charged fees to apply for a school place, will tear down the soft barriers erected in front of some children with special needs, and will bring openness and transparency to all school admissions.

The issue of the need to amend the Equal Status Act was not a feature of the consultation

paper published in advance of the Admission to Schools Bill. When the Oireachtas committee considered this matter, it simply noted that “there is a potential tension between Articles 42 (Education) and 44 (Religion) of Bunreacht na hÉireann, and this poses a particular difficulty when legislating in this policy area.” No amendment to the Equal Status Act has been included in the published Admission to Schools Bill.

I have subsequently made clear my view that this is a matter that does need to be reviewed and addressed, and will need to be a priority for the next Government so that this matter can be dealt with in advance of the next school year.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

31. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children in primary and post-primary schools who have been diagnosed with dyslexia; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43866/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** All mainstream schools have been allocated additional teaching resources to cater for children with High Incidence special educational needs, including Specific Learning Disabilities, of which Dyslexia is one such SLD.

My Department therefore does not hold details of the number of children attending primary and post-primary schools who have been diagnosed with Dyslexia, as schools are not required to apply directly to my Department or to the National Council for Special Education for learning support for Specific Learning Disabilities. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) report on Supporting Students Special Educational Needs in Schools sets out that 0.5% of the student population in Ireland is estimated to have a Specific Learning Disability.

The Special Educational Support Service provides training courses for schools in the area of Dyslexia as well as support for in-school seminars and attendance at relevant conferences and seminars.

### **School Curriculum**

32. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to remove rule 68 from the school guidelines. [43700/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was published in April 2012. The Report recommended a review and updating of the Rules for National Schools and in particular, Rule 68. I believe that the language and tone of Rule 68 is archaic and doesn’t reflect the reality of today’s primary education sector and accordingly this is a recommendation that I accept.

I am currently engaged in a series of meetings with the different education bodies involved in implementing the recommendations of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism. I have already met with the Education and Training Boards, and with representatives of the Catholic Church. I will be meeting with Educate Together next week, and the Church of Ireland immediately after Christmas. After I have concluded those meetings, I will outline a number of actions to advance the recommendations which arose from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism, and these actions will include the immediate repeal of rule 68.

## State Examinations

33. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will introduce an assessment regime for allocating supports under the reasonable accommodations at the certificate examinations scheme for students sitting the leaving certificate, similar to that which exists for students sitting the junior certificate. [43699/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The State Examinations Commission (SEC), which has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations, has provided me with the following information. The SEC has a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations designed to assist candidates with special needs at the examinations. Within the context of the RACE scheme the term 'special need' applies to candidates who have a physical disability, (including visual and hearing impairments; behavioural and emotional conditions and other disorders), or a specific learning difficulty. Reasonable accommodations are intended to: (a) remove, as far as possible, the impact of the disability on the candidate's performance and thus enable the candidate to demonstrate his or her level of attainment and

(b) ensure that, whilst giving candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment, the special arrangements will not give the candidate an unfair advantage over other candidates in the same examination.

Accommodations can only be provided in accordance with the principles and requirements of the scheme and in line with the eligibility criteria that apply. Even though examination candidates may have special educational needs, they may not require the provision of any special facilities provided that they can read the examination papers at the required level and write legibly.

There are differences in the operation of the scheme between the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. At Junior Certificate, school authorities determine eligibility in line with guidelines provided by the SEC and in general the SEC provides the accommodations as determined by the school. Accommodations approved for a Junior Certificate student will not automatically be granted at Leaving Certificate and this is clearly outlined to schools, candidates and their parents in the RACE documentation.

A centralised decision making process applies at Leaving Certificate which seeks to recognise the high stakes nature of this examination. Leaving Certificate applications on grounds of specific learning difficulties are referred to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), which is part of my Department. Each application must include information which supports the candidate's request for accommodations and which will inform the psychologist's recommendation to the SEC under the scheme's criteria. Applications on physical grounds are decided upon by the SEC in consultation with the school authority. The overall focus of the Leaving Certificate process is to ensure consistency in the application of the scheme's criteria and fairness and objectivity in decision making.

The guidelines provided to schools by the SEC outline the criteria to be used in determining eligibility for the Scheme for Junior Certificate candidates. These criteria are the same as used by the SEC for applications from Leaving Certificate candidates. The SEC recognises that the provision of reasonable accommodations at Junior Certificate does confer an expectation that the same supports should be provided at Leaving Certificate. The issues of consistency in the application process by schools and expectations about the provision of supports between the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations is currently under review by the SEC. In light of the number and range of supports available and the complexity of the Scheme of Reasonable

Accommodations this review is likely to take some months to conclude.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

34. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; the reason for the delay; when work will commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43874/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. A letter of Intent issued to the preferred tenderer on 2nd December. Subject to no issues arising in the supplementary tender report, it is anticipated that works will commence in early 2016.

### **School Transport Administration**

35. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is aware that a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath is in breach of its planning guidelines due to excessive traffic at the school gates since the withdrawal of the school’s bus service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43878/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Under the terms of my Department’s Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

I understand that there are a number of children who wish to avail of transport to the school in question who are not eligible for school transport as they reside less than 3.2 kilometres from the school.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may avail of transport on a concessionary basis subject to a number of conditions including the availability of spare seats and the payment of the annual charge.

In this regard, parents should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office in Athlone at 090 6473277.

In general, individual school authorities are responsible, in the first instance, for ensuring the safety and welfare of children and others in their care.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the issue of road safety measures outside the vested site areas of schools, such as road signage, traffic calming measures, parking etc., is a matter that should be raised in the first instance with the relevant Local Authority.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

36. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the apprenticeships approved by the new Apprenticeship Council; if these courses will include day-release rather than block-release, which will accommodate small businesses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37947/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Apprenticeship Council

devised and issued a call for proposals from enterprises and education and training providers for the development of new apprenticeships early in 2014. Following the receipt of proposals and an evaluation process, the Council reported to the Minister recommending 25 proposals for priority development. The Minister approved this recommendation and announced the 25 Category 1 proposals in July.

The Apprenticeship Council is now working with the 25 category one proposers on developing the new apprenticeships. Project plans have recently been submitted by consortia and the Council is engaging with them prior to approving the plans. The approved development plans will include timelines for delivery. The Council will work with consortia to commence enrolments on as many of the new apprenticeships as possible in 2016.

The consortia themselves will be developing the curriculum and delivery model for the new apprenticeships and will be taking account of the needs of employers in their sector. It is envisaged that some of the new apprenticeships will use a day release model.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

37. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will meet with the board of management of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal to discuss urgent accommodation matters; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43864/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As the Deputy is aware, the project for the school referred to, is included in the 6 Year Construction Programme that I announced on 17th November last, and is listed to proceed to tender and construction in the period 2019-21. Due to my diary commitments, I am not in a position to meet with the school in question. However, my Department will be in contact with the school authorities in the near future regarding the progression of the school project.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

38. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons employed on lower rates of pay due to participation in an apprenticeship or training. [37223/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I understand that currently there is a population of 8,106 employed apprentices at various stages of the Apprenticeship Programme. The on the job wages and off the job allowances paid to apprentices are determined as a percentage of the qualified rate for the occupation in question and were agreed by unions and employers in the relevant sectors. The rate increases as apprentices move through their apprenticeship and reflects the increased productivity they bring as their learning and experience progresses.

### **Schools Health and Safety**

39. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she needs to interact more directly and more proactively with local authorities in respect of road safety at rural schools; her views on the experiences of parents, teachers and pupils at three schools (details supplied) in County Meath, as examples of the problems that are arising from what she may regard as a current policy deficit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43696/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** In general, individual school authorities are responsible, in the first instance, for ensuring the safety and welfare of children and others in their care.

The issue of road safety measures outside the vested site areas of schools on public roads, such as road signage, traffic calming measures etc., is a matter, for the relevant Local Authority. Local Authorities have the power to decide on road safety measures outside schools to ensure that measures are in place to protect the safety of local school children. My Department has no function in this matter.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department’s Technical Guidance Document – TGD-020 sets out the general principles of Universal Design in schools, which includes guidance on car parking, set-down/pick up areas. In the case of school building projects, parking provision should be as stated in the guidance documents, subject to the planning requirements of the relevant Local Authority.

### **Education Policy**

40. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will introduce a national strategy for hunger prevention in schools; if her Department will retain responsibility for the development, implementation and monitoring of this strategy; and if a specific person within her Department will be given responsibility for the primary school age group. [43701/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is the Government’s overarching National Policy Framework for children and young people (aged 0-24 years). This cross-government approach will run from 2014 until 2020 and accommodate a number of constituent strategies. The Framework sets out common outcomes, policy commitments and key actions to ensure innovative and effective ways of working to improve the lives of children and young people. The underpinning principles will ensure that policy and practice protect the rights of children and young people, are family-oriented, promote equality and are evidence-informed and outcomes-focused.

The current focus of my Department is on its participation in the implementation process and on working with relevant Government Departments and non-governmental organisations to progress the education-related commitment of the Policy Framework. In this context I do not plan to introduce a National Strategy for Hunger Prevention in Schools.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

41. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the Apprenticeship Council which has recently marked one year in operation. [43868/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Apprenticeship Council devised and issued a call for proposals from enterprises and education and training providers for the development of new apprenticeships early in 2014. Following the receipt of proposals and an evaluation process, the Council reported to the Minister recommending 25 proposals for priority development. The Minister approved this recommendation and announced the 25 Category 1 proposals in July.

The Apprenticeship Council is now working with the 25 category one proposers on devel-

oping the new apprenticeships. Project plans have recently been submitted by consortia and the Council is engaging with them prior to approving the plans. The approved development plans will include timelines for delivery. The Council will work with consortia to commence enrolments on as many of the new apprenticeships as possible in 2016.

### **School Services Staff**

42. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address the anomaly whereby school secretaries are on inferior contracts compared to departmental secretaries and initiate a system of parity with this grade, including a defined pay scale and pension and sick leave entitlements. [43691/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** A scheme was initiated in 1978 for the employment of Clerical Officers in primary and secondary schools. While a small number of these staff remain in schools, the schemes are being phased out and have been superseded by a more extensive grant scheme.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial (and/or caretaking) services. Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs and the Department does not stipulate how these services are to be obtained. Where a school uses the grant funding to employ a secretary or caretaker, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department therefore does not have any role in determining the pay and conditions under which they are engaged. These are matters to be agreed between the staff concerned and the school authorities.

Notwithstanding the above, my Department recently engaged in an arbitration process regarding the pay of School Secretaries and Caretakers. The Arbitrator recommended increases in the hourly rates paid to School Secretaries and Caretakers and the establishment of a minimum hourly pay rate.

The Arbitrator’s recommendations have now been accepted by both sides. My Department will shortly issue a Circular giving effect to the measures to apply from 1 January 2016 i.e. an increase of 2.5% in the hourly pay rate and the introduction of a minimum hourly rate of €10.25.

### **Teacher Recruitment**

43. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address the continued use of the JobBridge scheme to employ teachers within schools. [43697/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** JobBridge is a national internship scheme administered by the Department of Social Protection. The scheme was introduced to provide a pathway to appropriate employment, training and education opportunities for a specific cohort of jobseekers on the Live Register. Changes to the scheme are therefore a matter for the Department of Social Protection in the first instance. In this regard I understand that Department is currently undertaking a planned independent evaluation of the scheme to determine its suitability, effectiveness and relevance as an activation programme. The outcome of this evaluation will provide an evidential basis upon which they can determine how the scheme may be improved.

Recognised Schools and Education and Training Boards may participate in the scheme if

they wish under Department of Education and Skills Circular 46/2011. An internship must not cause an existing member of staff to be displaced from the school or be used to fill a current vacancy in the school. Interns are in addition to any staffing allocation a school/ETB has.

In this regard it should be noted that Budget 2016 allows for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by one point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils. At post-primary the schedule will improve by 0.3 points, from 19:1 to 18.7:1. It is estimated that this measure and some other budgetary improvements in primary and post-primary schedules will result in an additional 300 posts at primary and 550 posts at post-primary.

### **School Curriculum**

44. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide a practical application to the right of a child to opt out of religion classes instead of continuing the current situation of forcing a child to remain present in a classroom during religious education against the wishes and judgment of the child's parents or guardians. [43692/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** Under the Constitution and in accordance with the Education Act 1998, parents have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes and it is expected that this right will be upheld by schools on foot of a parental request.

The practical arrangements by which schools ensure that the right to opt out of religion classes is accommodated is a matter for each individual school. On occasion there can be practical issues around supervision and arranging class times and these have to be considered by schools at local level and worked through in a pragmatic way.

In this regard, I believe that difficulties could be avoided if, from the outset, a school's arrangements for those students who do not wish to attend religious instruction are made clear to all parents concerned. It is for that reason that the forthcoming Admissions to School Bill includes a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school's arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction. The Bill was published in April of this year and is on the Government's legislative programme for enactment in this session.

### **School Management**

45. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to re-build a middle management structure in our primary and secondary schools. [43917/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** 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. Last week, I formally launched the newly established Centre for School Leadership (CSL). The Centre's responsibilities will

cover the continuum of professional development for school leaders, from pre-appointment training and induction of newly appointed principals, to continuing professional development throughout careers. The Centre is operating on a partnership basis between the Department of Education and Skills, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD). The partnership will have many benefits for the profession in terms of the quality of training programmes, coordination of provision, and increased accessibility.

The Deputy will be aware that I have made provision in Budget 2016 for some 2,260 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. These posts will provide for an improvement in the staffing schedules at primary and post primary levels, enhance the leadership and management roles of deputy principals at post-primary level by reducing their teaching time, an improvement to the scheme of release time for principal teachers at primary level and additional resource posts to meet special education needs.

### **Third Level Courses Availability**

46. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is aware of the practice whereby third level institutes do not fill all their places, but maintain points at an inflated level in order to make the course more attractive; if she has investigated this alleged practice; the action she has taken in respect of individual institutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43693/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** While the number of places offered on courses within Higher Education Authority (HEA) funded institutions is a matter for the institutions themselves to decide upon, the issue raised by the Deputy has arisen in the main due to the proliferation of specialist undergraduate programmes in recent years (and the limited number of places available on such programmes). This is a cause for concern for both my Department and the HEA. Accordingly my Department and the HEA have, since 2011, been working in partnership with key stakeholders and higher education institutions to broaden entry to undergraduate courses at level 8 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), while at the same time reducing the number of grading bands used in the Leaving Certificate examination and developing a new CAO points scale to correlate with these. Full details of this initiative to reform the transition from secondary to higher education, and the reports published on this, are available at <http://www.transition.ie/>. Under this on-going reform initiative, the seven universities have committed to achieving a significant reduction in the number of NFQ level 8 courses which they offer over the next 2 years.

### **Student Support Schemes**

47. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how she is responding to foreign students who, in some cases, experience language difficulties when dealing with the educational system. [43876/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The level of extra teaching support provided in respect of language support to schools is determined by the numbers of eligible pupils enrolled and the associated levels of those pupils' language proficiency.

Reforms introduced in the 2012/13 school year created a single simplified allocation process for both learning and language support. At primary level, learning/language support hours are allocated on the basis of mainstream classroom teaching posts in the school. At post-primary

level, learning/language support is allocated on the basis of pupil numbers. Schools have autonomy to deploy this resource between learning support and language support depending on the specific needs of the school.

These arrangements also provided for additional permanent teaching posts to be given to schools with high concentration of pupils that require language support.

Further additional temporary support is also provided, as necessary, to schools that have high concentrations of pupils that require language (EAL) support. At primary level, these allocations are made on the basis of appeals by any of these schools to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. Where at least 20% of the total enrolment of the school is made up of pupils that require EAL support, the school may lodge an appeal with the Appeals Board. Having considered the circumstances outlined by the school and having regard to the high number of pupils requiring EAL support, additional post(s) may be approved by the Appeals Board.

The Teaching Council's criteria for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) sets out the mandatory elements to be contained in all Initial Teacher Education Programmes. These include Inclusive Education, (Special Education, Multiculturalism, Disadvantage, etc) Literacy, Numeracy and Differentiation. The Council's criteria does not overly prescribe what should be covered in programmes, rather, the approach is that ITE is about the development of critical core skills, which can then be applied to any range of issues in the classroom, possibly with the benefit of further upskilling post-qualification.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers offer workshops and school support in the area of EAL to primary schools. The purpose of the workshops is to provide key information on EAL to both language support teachers and teachers supporting children with EAL under the general allocation model. At post-primary level, support is made available to schools on request in the area of EAL and work on literacy incorporates aspects of EAL in many cases.

### **School Staff**

48. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why, under the current staffing schedule, mainstream schools with 15 to 27 teachers require 37 extra pupils to gain or retain a teacher, while schools with more than 27 or fewer than 15 teachers only require an extra 26 pupils to gain or retain a teacher; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43882/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The staffing schedule at primary level operates on the basis of 1 classroom teacher for an average of every 28 pupils. More favourable ratios operate in DEIS Band 1 schools.

Under an agreement reached with the Education Partners for the 2010/11 school year my Department provided 50 additional posts to the primary sector and 100 additional posts to the post-primary sector. At primary level, as these posts were additional to those required to cater for demographic growth, some improvements were made to the staffing schedule for the 2010/11 school year. These improvements were targeted at medium-to-larger schools typically under the greatest pressure in relation to class sizes. At post-primary level, additional supports were targeted at co-educational schools in single post-primary catchment areas and at schools that join together with other local post primary schools to increase subject choice in a town.

The application of these additional posts to the primary staffing schedule resulted in the schedule operating on the basis of 1 classroom teacher for an average of every 27 pupils between the bands of 8 classroom teachers and 16 classroom teachers. The 37 pupil difference

arises only at the point between 16 and 17 classroom teachers. However given that the standard size of a school is 16 classrooms this issue does not typically arise. An average of 28 to 1 applies for the bands of 18 classroom teachers upwards.

The Deputy will be aware that I have announced a 1 point improvement to the primary staffing schedule in the context of Budget 2016. The improved staffing schedule which is available on the Department website will be implemented for the 2016/17 school year.

The application of this 1 point improvement to the primary staffing schedule will result in the schedule operating on the basis of 1 classroom teacher for an average of every 26 pupils between the bands of 8 classroom teachers and 16 classroom teachers.

The staffing arrangements for all schools for the 2016/17 school year will be published early in 2016.

### **Schools Designation**

49. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will award DEIS status to a school (details supplied) in County Mayo, so that its pupils will have parity with pupils in neighbouring schools and will not suffer any disadvantage through no fault of their own; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43694/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I would like to point out that an extensive identification process to select schools for inclusion in DEIS was conducted in 2005. In spite of a number of reminders issued by my Department, a completed survey form was not received at that time from the school in question and therefore it could not be assessed for participation in DEIS. Furthermore, the school did not participate in a follow-up appeal process to address the concerns of schools that did not qualify for DEIS status.

As the Deputy will no doubt be aware, a process for the review of the DEIS Programme which I announced earlier this year, is currently underway in my Department. This review is being undertaken over the course of the current school year and will consider all issues pertaining to educational disadvantage, including the methodology for identifying schools for inclusion in future programmes. While this process is underway, I do not intend to make any changes to the current programme, including the addition of any further schools.

### **Supplementary Welfare Allowance Data**

50. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the amount directly paid in allowances under the adult refugees programme to persons and their dependants residing in a hotel (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44362/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** A number of programme refugees are currently resident in Kildare. Programme refugees are generally entitled to supports under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, including weekly payments, assistance under the exceptional needs payments (ENP) scheme and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. Depending on the circumstances of the individual or family, payment of the relevant social welfare payment appropriate to their circumstances may also be payable including child benefit. ENPs are generally payable to assist meeting essential expenditure such as clothing, child related items and other incidental requirements.

The Department assesses the value of the non-cash benefits provided by the State to persons residing in the system of direct provision when determining rates of social welfare payments. This may result in a reduction of the weekly amount payable taking into account that basic requirements such as food, accommodation and other services are provided.

The amount paid to the individual families in the hotel referred to by the Deputy is a matter between the individuals and the Department.

### Domiciliary Care Allowance Data

51. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of children in receipt of a domiciliary care allowance in each of the years 2013 to date, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44258/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The number of recipients and children in receipt of domiciliary care allowance in 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015 are detailed in the following table.

No. in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance

Year	No. of Recipients	No. of Children
31/12/2013	25,510	27,363
31/12/2014	27,268	29,269
30/11/2015	29,241	31,548

### Fuel Allowance Applications

52. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a fuel allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44262/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Fuel Allowance is a payment under the National Fuel Scheme to help with the cost of heating a home during the winter months. It is paid to people who are dependent on long-term social welfare payments and who are unable to provide for their own heating needs. Only one Fuel Allowance is paid to a household.

Illness benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. Illness benefit is classed as a short term scheme and as such is not a qualifying payment for a fuel allowance.

### Rent Supplement Scheme Data

53. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why there are so many recipients of rent supplement in the local authorities where the housing assistance payment has been rolled out, given that the level of allowable rent is much higher under the housing assistance payment than under the rent supplement; and the number of new recipients of rent supplement since the housing assistance payment has been rolled out in the local authorities where it is available by local authority. [44265/15]

64. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number

of recipients under the rent supplement scheme, of active tenancies under the housing assistance payment scheme, the number of households who have applied to have their rent supplement increased above the current threshold, the number who have had their rent supplement increased, the number who have been refused, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44432/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):**  
I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 and 64 together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 62,000 people at a cost of €298 million in 2015. The provision for 2015 represents a transfer of funding in excess of €20 million to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to support the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Approximately 18,800 rent supplement tenancies have been awarded this year. A county breakdown of this information and current rent supplement recipients is provided in the following tabular statement, however a breakdown by local authority is not maintained.

The Department's strategic direction is to transfer responsibility of persons with long term housing needs to the local authorities under HAP. In local authority areas where HAP is in place, new applicants assessed as requiring social housing support will be considered for HAP rather than rent supplement. Rent supplement will continue to be paid to households who are already in the private rented sector but who, generally because of a loss of income through unemployment, require a short term income support to pay their rent. Progress is being made in transferring persons in receipt of rent supplement for periods in excess of 18 months to HAP, with almost 2,000 cases transferred to date. The complete transfer from rent supplement to HAP for those tenancies which require long term housing support will occur over time. Officials in the Department continue to work closely with those in the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the local authorities to further roll out HAP and to ensure that customers are supported in the transition from rent supplement. Policy responsibility and reporting on HAP is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

In view of the reduction of supply in the private rented market and increasing rents at this time, the Department of Social Protection has implemented a policy approach that allows for flexibility in assessing customers' individual accommodation needs on a case by case basis. Departmental staff administering rent supplement have a statutory discretionary power to award or increase a supplement for rental purposes, for example, when dealing with applicants who are risk of losing their tenancy or in danger of homelessness. This flexible approach has already assisted approximately 5,500 rent supplement households throughout the country to retain their rented accommodation. A county breakdown of the number of payments made in excess of the current rent limits is also provided in the tables following. Statistics are not maintained on the number of applications requested and refused rent supplement increases.

These measures and the reforms to the private rental sector announced last month will provide increased certainty for both tenants and landlords in the current market.

**Table 1: Rent Supplement Recipients by County, End November 2015**

County	Recipients
CARLOW	993
CAVAN	403
CLARE	1,074
CORK	6,955

Questions - Written Answers

County	Recipients
DONEGAL	1,316
DUBLIN	23,920
GALWAY	3,337
KERRY	1,618
KILDARE	3,468
KILKENNY	563
LAOIS	973
LEITRIM	327
LIMERICK	1,511
LONGFORD	381
LOUTH	1,508
MAYO	1,535
MEATH	1,538
MONAGHAN	276
OFFALY	847
ROSCOMMON	604
SLIGO	476
TIPPERARY	1,704
WATERFORD	974
WESTMEATH	1,421
WEXFORD	2,283
WICKLOW	2,004
Total	62,009

**Table 2: New Rent Supplement Recipients in 2015**

County	Recipients
CARLOW	263
CAVAN	198
CLARE	382
CORK	2,343
DONEGAL	414
DUBLIN	6,117
GALWAY	1,045
KERRY	718
KILDARE	854
KILKENNY	139
LAOIS	378
LEITRIM	151
LIMERICK	335
LONGFORD	209
LOUTH	377
MAYO	573
MEATH	588

County	Recipients
MONAGHAN	73
OFFALY	218
ROSCOMMON	261
SLIGO	276
TIPPERARY	784
WATERFORD	202
WESTMEATH	561
WEXFORD	874
WICKLOW	460
Total:	18,793

**Table 3: Total Increased Rental Payments by County at 07/12//2015**

County	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
Carlow	21		21
Cavan	13		13
Clare	60		60
Cork	204	68	272
Donegal	-		-
Dublin	2,058	1,588	3,646
Galway	101		101
Kerry	18		18
Kildare	189		189
Kilkenny	110		110
Laois	97		97
Leitrim	44		44
Limerick	7		7
Longford	90		90
Louth	71		71
Mayo	3		3
Meath	235		235
Monaghan	1		1
Offaly	49		49
Roscommon	12		12
Sligo	-		-
Tipperary	165		165
Waterford	26		26
Westmeath	89		89
Wexford	7		7
Wicklow	82		82
Total	3,752	1,656	5,408

## **Civil Registration Legislation**

54. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will address a query from a person (details supplied) in County Cork about an Irish citizen marrying a non-European Union citizen. [44286/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** The Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 was signed into law in December 2014 and contains a wide range of provisions.

The right to marry is a basic right and the institution of marriage is protected under our Constitution. EU citizens and their families have the right to move and reside freely within the territories of the Member States. Following a ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Metock case in 2008, the right of EU citizens and their families to move and reside freely within the territories of the Member States was extended to non-EU national spouses of non-Irish EU nationals. However, these rights are being abused by unscrupulous individuals who are using marriage laws in Ireland to gain an automatic right of residency in the EU. There is concern that a potential link exists to the trafficking of women, particularly young women, where they are coerced into taking part in marriages of convenience.

The Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 includes provisions that make it more difficult to broker a marriage of convenience in the State. This is achieved by making a marriage of convenience an impediment to marriage and allowing a registrar the right to investigate. The Act also provides for increased sharing of information in relation to suspected marriages of convenience between the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Justice and Equality with regard to marriages of convenience.

The provisions related to preventing marriages of convenience taking place in the State were commenced on 18 August 2015.

However, due to industrial action by staff of the Civil Registration Service in the Health Service Executive (HSE), the scheduling of interviews, where one or more of the parties to the proposed marriage is a non-EU national, is being delayed.

Staffing and resolution of industrial relations issues in the Civil Registration Service are a matter for the HSE. However I am concerned about the matter and my officials, while not directly involved in the dispute, have made the HSE aware of these concerns. I understand that discussions are ongoing and that good progress has been made and it should be possible for marriages, such as that referred to by the Deputy, to go ahead as planned in 2016.

## **Free Travel Scheme Applications**

55. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for a companion free travel pass for a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary will be finalised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44297/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The application for a Companion Free Travel Pass from the person concerned was medically assessed by a Medical Assessor on 8 December 2015. The medical opinion has been conveyed to Household Benefits Section, Sligo and the applicant will be contacted shortly regarding the decision on their application.

## **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

56. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and when a decision will be made. [44298/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 10 December 2015. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements for the hearing.

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

## **Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility**

57. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the support systems in place to assist a person (details supplied). [44305/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The person in question is currently in receipt of maximum rate disability allowance for her circumstances insofar as the department is aware of them. Fuel allowance is also in payment during the relevant season. The person concerned is advised to contact their local citizens information centre who will advise her if there are any other forms of assistance appropriate to her specific circumstances.

## **Disability Allowance Applications**

58. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for a disability allowance will be finalised for a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44311/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The application for DA from the person in question, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 12 November 2015.

Further medical evidence has been received in this case and referred to a deciding officer for review. When the deciding officer has reached a decision on this review, notification of the outcome will issue directly to the person in question.

## **Disability Allowance Applications**

59. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for a disability allowance will be finalised for a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44319/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The entitlement of the person concerned (RIP) to disability allowance has been established and payment of DA is due with effect from 16 September 2015 to 6 October 2015. The Department is currently mak-

ing the necessary enquiries so that arrangements for the issue of payment due may be made.

Please convey my sympathy and that of the Department to the bereaved family of the person in question.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

60. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for a disability allowance will be finalised for a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44335/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The person in question has been awarded a disability allowance payment with effect from 6 May 2015. First payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 30 December 2015.

### **Water Conservation Grant Applications**

61. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will accept a late application for the water conservation grant as the person was not aware of the closing date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44354/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The eligibility criteria for the Water Conservation Grant are set out in the Water Services Act 2014 (Water Conservation Grant) Regulations 2015. Under regulation 5(1) a person who registers with Irish Water, as required under section 5(2)(a) of the Water Services Act 2014, on or before 30 June 2015 shall be eligible to receive the grant in 2015 if they were normally resident at the principal private residence on that date.

To date Irish Water has transferred details of over 1.3 million registered households to this Department. A letter issued to those householders at the address given inviting them to apply for the grant before the deadline of 8 October 2015 and advising them that they could make this application either online or with the assistance of the Water Grant Support Team by telephone. Statutory Instrument 434 of 2015 provided for the extension of the deadline for the submission of a completed application for the Water Conservation Grant to the Department of Social Protection from 8 October 2015 to 22 October 2015. A nationwide campaign utilising press, radio and social media to promote information on the grant was conducted. This campaign extensively advertised the eligibility criteria, the application process and the original and extended deadlines. Late applications for the grant cannot be accepted.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility**

62. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an entitlement to the Christmas bonus for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44397/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I wish to advise you that there were no changes to illness benefit in the recent budget announcement. Illness benefit is classed as a short term payment so the award of a Christmas bonus does not apply.

The Department of Social Protection legislation provides that illness benefit can be paid

for a maximum of 104 weeks (624 pay days) in respect of claims made from January 2009 onwards. As the person concerned was in receipt of illness benefit prior to 2009 they held their entitlement to illness benefit.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

63. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when the appeal of an application under the disability allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will be paid, if this payment will include the Christmas bonus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44398/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The person in question has been awarded a disability allowance payment with effect from 29 October 2014. First payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 30 December 2015.

Arrears of DA due will issue in due course once any necessary adjustment is made in respect of other overlapping payments the person was getting in the interim and/or in respect of outstanding overpayment. I can confirm that the gross DA arrears due, i.e. before adjustment, will include the 2014 and 2015 Christmas bonuses.

*Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 53.*

### **Insurance Coverage**

65. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to ensure home insurance companies provide better information to customers in order that they are in a better position to provide an accurate figure for buildings sums insured, as the current lack of information can often lead to persons being over-insured; the regulatory changes he proposes in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44338/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In my role as Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation.

I have consulted with the Central Bank of Ireland and Insurance Ireland on this issue. The Central Bank has advised that there are no statutory requirements on insurance companies to provide information to customers on the calculation of rebuilding costs. The Central Bank also stated that it is unaware of any systemic issue around the over-insurance of property.

Insurance Ireland has stated that insurance companies have always advised their customers that they should insure their homes for the rebuilding cost and not the market value. Also, insurance companies advise policyholders at renewal date to check their sums insured for both buildings and contents to avoid over and under insuring. Both the insurance companies and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission ([www.consumerhelp.ie](http://www.consumerhelp.ie)) advise consumers to consult with the “Guide to House Rebuilding Costs” by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (<https://www.scsi.ie>) which includes a cost calculator to assist them in estimating rebuild costs.

### **Tax Yield**

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the income generated from

the extension of betting duty to online bets to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44257/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the duty generated to date from the remote sector, including from betting intermediaries, is €3.3 million. As the Deputy is aware, this provision only commenced 1 August 2015, and this amount relates to the two months that have been returnable so far.

### Departmental Staff Remuneration

67. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff within his Department earning over €100,000 by grade in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44266/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the number of staff within my Department earning over €100,000 in 2014 is as follows:

Grade	Number
Secretary General	1
Second Secretary	1
Assistant Secretary	8
Principal Officer	5
Total	15

All of these salaries are in line with Government pay policy.

### Tax Code

68. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Finance if it is standard practise for the Revenue Commissioners to issue the detailed calculations of a person's income to be included with the self-assessment notice of assessment, even if the net income of that person is below €2,000. [44304/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, from 2013, a taxpayer must self-assess when submitting his or her return of income. Self-assessment is where a taxpayer makes his or her own assessment to income tax or capital gains tax as appropriate. Prior to 2013, Revenue raised the assessment based on a person's income or capital gains on the basis of the information entered by them in the income tax return.

Where a taxpayer completes an income tax return on Revenue's Online Service (ROS); the online system provides a detailed calculation of the person's indicative liability based on the information on income, allowances, etc. that was included in the tax return. The indicative calculation of income tax, USC and PRSI was introduced to assist taxpayers in making their self-assessment, and meeting their legal obligations.

I am further advised by the Commissioners that for 2015 and subsequent years, where a taxpayer files a return on ROS and accepts Revenue's indicative calculation as their self-assessed liability, Revenue will attach a copy of this calculation with the acknowledgement of the self-assessment.

In relation to the situation where a person's net non-PAYE income is below €3,174, that person may contact Revenue to have their tax credits reduced to take account of this non-PAYE income. Where this can be done, the taxpayer will not be considered a 'chargeable person' and will not need to file a Form 11 nor make a self-assessment. The Deputy may wish to note that I have made provision in this year's Finance Bill to increase this limit from €3,174 to €5,000 for 2016 and subsequent years.

### **Flood Prevention Measures**

69. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will ensure that the Office of Public Works dredges the Tolka river from the Luke Kelly bridge to the sea to protect against future floods in Clonliffe, Ballybough, North Strand and East Wall in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44290/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** The River Tolka has a history of flooding following heavy rainfall, which has been well documented after major flood events in 1954 and subsequent years. The river has been the subject of a number of investigations, and of most significance were those carried out in 1955 and 1986. Severe flooding from the Tolka River and its tributaries occurred in the Dublin City, Meath and Fingal areas in November 2000 and November 2002.

In July 2001 Dublin City Council commissioned the Greater Dublin Strategic Drainage Study (GSDSDS), a multi-million euro engineering study of the strategic drainage requirements of the Greater Dublin area. A full study of the Tolka was not included in the GSDSDS. In view of the November 2000 flood the OPW requested that it be included.

The Tolka River Flooding Study was underway when the November 2002 flood occurred. The consultants were asked to produce Interim Reports for all three local authorities concerned (Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Meath County Council) to identify works that could be undertaken straight away to reduce the risk of flooding in the worst affected areas. The Final Report on the Tolka was completed in November 2003 and this brought together many of the recommendations contained in the Interim Reports and also much additional information, which provided the basis for further decisions in relation to the catchment as a whole. As a result of the Interim Reports, works began in the Dublin City and County Meath areas in 2003 and were largely finished by 2009.

Works carried out in the Dublin City Council area included: new walls and embankments, replacement footbridge, widening of banks, lowering of Distillery Weir, scour damage repair and general channel maintenance. Responsibility for the maintenance of this scheme rests with Dublin City Council.

### **Urban Renewal Schemes**

70. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on proposals unveiled in the Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021 to develop and regenerate Waterford city's north quays to support jobs and tourism in the region; the timeframe for delivery; the estimated Exchequer funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44292/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** In the context of finalising the capital plan entitled "Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021", there were discussions on proposals to develop and regenerate Waterford

City North Quays, to support jobs and tourism in the region. I committed in the Plan that support will be provided under the Exchequer Programme for this development when details are finalised.

As of yet, as I understand it, there is no finalised plan for the regeneration project in question, which continues to be a work in progress. However, once finalised, as committed in the Capital Plan, support will be provided through the Vote of the relevant Government Department to progress the initiative - if necessary, in the context of the mid-term review of the programme. However, in terms of the details of the project to be implemented, or the timeframe for delivery, my Department has no direct role in the selection or implementation of individual projects within the overall capital programme - which are matters for the relevant Government Department with responsibility for the initiative in question, and/or their agencies.

### **Flood Relief Schemes Status**

71. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a contractor to the Foynes flood relief scheme will be appointed, if all relevant stakeholders to the project have been consulted; the statutory and public agencies that have been engaged with; their position in the provision of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44322/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** The provision of flood defences in Foynes is being undertaken by Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) with funding from the Office of Public Works (OPW). The Council has developed a scheme which has been approved under Part VIII of the Planning and Development Regulations. The Council is currently progressing the procurement of a civil works contractor to undertake the scheme works and is expecting to appoint a contractor shortly. The Scheme is expected to be completed in the summer of 2016.

The Council received approval for the Scheme following completion of a Part VIII process and it has confirmed that it consulted with the relevant bodies as required under that planning process.

The OPW has confirmed approval to LCCC of funding for the scheme.

### **Flood Prevention Measures**

72. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 67 of 11 November 2015, his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding flood relief schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44384/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** My previous reply to this question sought to explain that the design of OPW funded flood relief schemes including the design height of any flood defence walls included as part of the schemes must satisfy the required standard to provide protection against the 1 in 100 year flood event in the case of rivers and the 1 in 200 year event in the case of coastal or tidal flooding. This is a fundamental requirement but, subject to this, the OPW has regard also, as appropriate, to the appearance of the flood defence structures included in schemes especially in scenic locations.

## Public Sector Pensions

73. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the concerns of the Alliance of Retired Public Servants that while legislation provides for gradual restoration of pensions from 2016 to 2018 to 65,000 public service pensioners, there is no end in sight for the remaining 25,000 pensioners who continue to have their pensions reduced under emergency powers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44400/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** I refer to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 185 of 8 December 2015.

## IDA Data

74. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if, when and where the Industrial Development Agency Ireland plans to open new offices outside Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44269/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** IDA Ireland has informed me that its current footprint of offices is aligned with its new strategy. There are no plans to open any further overseas offices at this time.

IDA Ireland's overseas offices are opened in specific locations globally depending on the business requirements of the organisation and in those locations best suited to sourcing Foreign Direct Investment.

In recent years IDA has increased its international presence through the expansion of existing offices in the US and the development of new offices/representatives in France, China, Russia and Brazil, as part of a significant redeployment of personnel to its overseas activities from elsewhere in IDA.

In total, IDA Ireland has 22 overseas offices in locations in Europe, North America, India and Asia and has a presence in Brazil, Russia, Australia and Taiwan.

## Import Costs

75. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the quantity of goods that was imported into Ireland from Western Sahara in each of the past five years; why Ireland is importing goods from Western Sahara considering its occupation by Morocco is contrary to international law and considering the indigenous population does not benefit from this trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44288/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Information from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) on imports of goods from Western Sahara is only available as follows:

### Imports into Ireland from Western Sahara

2013 (€ 000)	2014(€ 000)	Jan-Sep 2014 (€ 000)	Jan-Sep 2015 (€ 000)
161	214	102	328

The data from the CSO indicates that the imports from Western Sahara are primarily in the category of *Miscellaneous manufactured article*. This accounted for 91% (or €194,000) of

imports in 2014.

Trade sanctions on imports of goods from outside the EU are a foreign policy matter, decided upon by the EU and applied directly through EU regulation. The role of my Department, in regard to any such sanctions on goods, is to ensure compliance with the relevant EU regulations. As regards Western Sahara, the EU has not adopted any such trade sanctions.

### **Work Permits Applications**

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 182 of 24 November 2015 and the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow, if the review will be undertaken on foot of this parliamentary question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44363/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In this instance, an Employment Permit was sought for the position of Shop Assistant, which is on the Ineligible Categories of Employment List. The application was refused and the applicant chose not to seek a review of this decision within the statutory timeframe (which has expired), instead indicating that she would like a refund of the fee. This request is currently being processed.

### **Departmental Agencies Staff Recruitment**

77. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to his reply to Parliamentary Question No. 104 of 26 November 2015 wherein he states that he received only one request from the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement for additional staff, why he did not report on the request for seven additional staff which was made in 2014; the reason for the delay in approving these critical staff given that recruitment has only started this month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44426/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In my reply to Question 104 of 26 November 2015 information was included regarding the request for seven additional staff, namely six Professional Accountants as well as an additional Higher Executive Officer with IT expertise to the ODCE.

While the Director of Corporate Enforcement is statutorily independent in the exercise of his or her functions, staffing of the ODCE, as with any business unit of my Department is made in line with Government policy. In recent years that policy was governed by the recruitment Moratorium aimed at reducing staff numbers in the Civil and Public Service as part of reducing the Exchequer pay bill. During the lifetime of the Moratorium, sanction of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform was required for any recruitment and the Employment Control Framework (ECF) set maximum numbers in the Department's employment (including the Agencies under our aegis) year on year. In that context, my Department engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on sanctioning the filling of key vacancies within the ECF/Moratorium framework, including in respect of the ODCE. Nonetheless, the respective managements of each Office, including the ODCE, have had to reconfigure their organisations and adapt to a constrained-resources environment in continuing to deliver their mandates.

There are always competing demands on limited Exchequer resources. Strategic deployment of limited resources in response to Workforce Planning reviews, ongoing prioritising and reprioritising of work and advocating for key or mission-critical posts to be filled to enable my Department meet its current mission were, and remain the key tools at my Department's dis-

posal regarding staffing resources. However, the level of resources available to my Department and/or any Office or Agency is only one element of its capacity to deliver. How those resources are managed, deployed and developed is as important as the level of resources available.

The request for the seven additional posts for the ODCE was first registered in my Department's HR Unit in late 2013 as identified in my Reply to the earlier Question from Deputy Shortall. Sanction was received in late 2014 to allow the filling of certain mission-critical posts across my Department, including the seven posts for the ODCE on foot of my Department's efforts to meet its ECF obligations.

In the context of the ODCE staffing requirements being a subset of my Department's overall Workforce Planning considerations and the Department securing its delegated sanction on staffing matters as of June 2015, my Department has been working diligently to fill mission-critical vacancies, including the 7 posts for the ODCE. In that regard my Department has worked with the ODCE and subsequently with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to identify the requirements of the respective ODCE posts in order for PAS to initiate the appropriate open recruitment competition which culminated in the public advertisement placed recently in the media and on publicjobs.ie. As the deadline for applications to fill the Professional Accountants/ Investigator posts is 17 December, we will soon thereafter be able to move to the selection and appointment process such that the additional staff would be in post early in 2016.

### **Dairy Equipment Scheme Applications**

78. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary will be approved for a grant under the dairy equipment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44263/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Interest in TAMS to date has exceeded expectations and clearly many Irish farmers are looking once again at the benefits of investing in their enterprises and expanding production. Under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme a total of 520 applications have been received with over 200 of these applying for dairy investments while over a thousand applications have been submitted for the Dairy Equipment Scheme.

All applications received are being examined and approvals will commence when all of the required checks have been undertaken. This is a complex process and as all applications for TAMS 2 must be made under a tranche-based approach, we are required to evaluate, rank and assess all applications received together. Applications cannot be approved individually or on a rolling basis as they are submitted.

It is anticipated that approvals will commence shortly and will continue throughout December and into the New Year. Every effort is being made to facilitate approvals in cases where milking equipment is urgently required.

### **Single Payment Scheme Applications**

79. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application under the single payment scheme by persons (details supplied) in County Limerick; if all payments will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44264/15]

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

named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department to transfer the entitlement allocation and value to a Registered Farm Partnership. This application has been processed and payment will issue shortly. An official from my Department has been in contact with the persons named to outline the position in relation to their application and the date payment can be expected.

### **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

80. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment under the single payment scheme and the disadvantaged areas scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; the reason for delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44295/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An application under the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme was received from the person named on 29 May 2015. Processing of this application is currently ongoing, with a view to finalising for payment at the earliest possible date.

My Department also received a 2015 Transfer of Entitlement Allocation Right and Reference Value application from the person named. As the name on the herd number quoted above had changed from another person to the person named after the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme application was submitted, it was necessary for the person named to complete and submit a Declaration of Undertaking form. This form has been received by my Department, the case is being processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue shortly.

### **Íocaíochtaí Deontas**

81. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar cinneadh maidir le hiarratas ar theidlíochtaí faoin "Maolú Albanach" maidir le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí tugtha); cén fáth go bhfuil moill ar an gcinneadh seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [44300/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Sheol na daoine a ainmnítear iarratas ar Mhaolú Albanach ar aghaidh an 8 Bealtaine 2015 ach níor sheol siad iarratas ar Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair 2013 ar aghaidh. Faoi rialacha an AE a rialaíonn an Scéim Buníocaíochta, is gá na cásanna seo a phróiseáil faoin gCúlchiste Náisiúnta.

Cuirfear tús le híocaíochtaí a dhéanamh leis an ngrúpa seo d'fheirmeoirí maolaithe Alban-  
aigh in Eanáir 2016.

### **Íocaíochtaí Deontas**

82. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Shriantacht Nádúrtha agus faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta do 2015 le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí tugtha); cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis na híocaíochtaí seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [44312/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Sheol an duine a ainmnítear iarratas faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta/Scéim na Limistéar Sriantha Nádúrtha 2015 (ANC) chuig mo Roinn an 29 Bealtaine, 2015. Eisíodh íocaíocht faoi Scéim an ANC go díreach

le cuntas ainmnithe bainc an duine a ainmnítear.

Faoi Scéim Buníocaíochta, níor deimhníodh go raibh aon teidlíochtaí ag an duine a ainmnítear agus, dá bhrí sin, níl aon íocaíocht ag dul dó faoi Scéim seo. Tugann taifid na Roinne le fios gur ghlac an duine a ainmnítear seilbh ar an uimhir thréada an 11 Deireadh Fómhair 2013, ach níor ghabh ceart leithdháilte leis an uimhir thréada seo chun teidlíochtaí a fháil faoi Scéim Buníocaíochta 2015. Níor sheol an t-iar-úinéir tréada iarratas faoi Scéim Buníocaíochta 2013 ar aghaidh, agus is gá seo a dhéanamh chun ceart uathoibríoch a dheimhniú chun teidlíochtaí nua a fháil faoi Scéim Buníocaíochta.

Déanfaidh mo Roinn teagmháil leis an duine a ainmnítear go díreach ag féachaint le hiar-ratas a sheoladh ar aghaidh ar leithdháileadh teidlíochtaí faoi Scéim Buníocaíochta 2016.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments**

83. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the length of time it will take for payment under the disadvantaged areas scheme to issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44328/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An application under the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme was received from the person named on 1 April, 2015. This application has been fully processed and payments will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

### **Íocaíochtaí Deontas**

84. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoi scéim na limistéar faoi shriantacht nádúrtha do 2015 le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí tugtha); cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [44333/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Fuarthas iarratas faoi Scéim na Limistéar Srianta Nádúrtha ón duine a ainmnítear an 28 Aibreán, 2015. Tugadh próiseáil an iarratais seo chun críche go hiomlán agus eiseofar íocaíochtaí go luath do chuntas bainc ainmnithe an duine a ainmnítear.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments**

85. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when head-age payments will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44345/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An application under the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme was received from the person named on 1 May, 2015. Processing of the application 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.

### **Agriculture Scheme Applications**

86. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why an application under the national reserve scheme by a person (details supplied) was not successful; if there is any action the person can take to have the application deemed successful; if the person is classified as being an old young farmer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44347/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person named did not submit an application under the 2015 National Reserve. He submitted a 2015 Review of Entitlements application seeking to amend the number/value of his entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme. He was notified in writing on 12 November 2015 that his application was unsuccessful and was given the right to appeal this decision.

The ‘old young farmer’ category under the 2015 National Reserve was available for farmers who commenced their agricultural activity between 1 January 2008 and 31 December 2009. My Department’s records show that the person named commenced his agricultural activity in 2006 and on that basis he does not meet the eligibility criteria for the ‘old young farmer’ category under the 2015 National Reserve.

### **Ash Dieback Threat**

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to make required funding available to nurseries to help combat and prevent the spread of ash tree disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44349/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Over the last number of years the Department has operated a Reconstitution Scheme to restore forests established under its afforestation schemes back to their original form following significant damage by natural causes. The Scheme has been used to assist forestry owners who have been affected by Ash dieback disease. The objective of the Scheme is to eradicate/contain ash dieback in forests by supporting the removal and destruction of trees and leaf litter and to reconstitute the forest by replanting with alternative species. The Scheme provides funding in respect of costs necessarily incurred in clearing the site and reconstituting the forest, subject to the maximum limits laid down. The Scheme is restricted to forestry and currently there are no plans to either broaden the scope of the Scheme or to introduce any other Scheme for individuals or nurseries that have been affected by outbreaks of plant diseases including ash dieback.

My Department continues to provide funding for the development of the horticultural industry including commercial nurseries through the Horticultural Grant scheme. In the recent budget I allocated €4.5 million for the Scheme in 2016 and the Scheme is currently open for applications until the 18 December of this year.

### **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

88. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme and the young farmer scheme will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44351/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The above named is approved in GLAS with a contract start date of 1 October 2015. GLAS applicants with a GLAS contract start date of 1 October 2015 are entitled to a 2015 part-year payment in respect of 2015 eligible actions and covering the three month period 1 October 2015-31 Decem-

ber 2015. It is intended that these 2015 part-year payments will commence later this month.

The person named submitted applications for the National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. Processing of National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme applications, which involves administrative and on farm checks and verification of land details submitted under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme application is well advanced. These checks are required under EU Regulations. When all checks have been completed and processing of applications has been finalised, my Department will correspond directly with each applicant to advise them of the outcome of their application. Payments to successful applicants under the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme will commence in the week beginning 14 December.

### **Dairy Equipment Scheme**

89. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why cluster flushers, which are dairy equipment, are not eligible for grant aid under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme 2. [44373/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** A very wide range of Dairy Equipment is eligible for grant aid under the TAMS II Scheme. However, as cluster flushers are not a requirement for a basic milking machine they are not being grant aided.

### **Bovine Disease Controls**

90. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why dairy farmers whose herds are locked up due to inconclusive tests for tuberculosis in cattle are not compensated for the loss of income from having to dispose of their milk for the first four months; and if he will re-examine this matter. [44374/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Dairy farmers in whose herd some animals have had an inconclusive reaction to the TB test are not prohibited from selling milk for human consumption. The position is that milk from TB infected or inconclusive animals cannot be used for human consumption or the manufacture of milk-based products for human consumption. However milk from healthy animals in TB restricted herds may be used for human consumption provided it is first heat-treated at an establishment authorised by my Department. In addition, milk from an inconclusive animal may be supplied provided the animal subsequently tests negative for TB, at a minimum of 42 days from the date of the original test. These procedures are designed to ensure the safety of the milk supply to the consumer.

### **Fishing Vessel Licences**

91. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a fishing licence by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44399/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Applications for aquaculture licences are assessed under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act which provides for extensive consultation with stakeholders and also a period of general public consultation. Licence decisions in each case are made following detailed advice from my

Department's scientific and technical advisers.

The application referred to by the Deputy is currently under examination by the Marine Engineering Division of my Department in respect of its technical and engineering elements.

Every effort is being made by my Department to expedite this application and a determination will be made as soon as possible.

### **Air Corps Recruitment**

92. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence if he will hold a further recruitment drive for the Air Corps early in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44268/15]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, at 31 October 2015, the latest date for which details are available, was 9155, comprising 7345 Army, 756 Air Corps and 1054 Naval Service.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force, targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels.

A General Service recruitment campaign for the Army was launched on 4 August 2015 and is ongoing. Air Corps General Service Recruits are drawn from the Army General Service Recruit campaign panels as required.

The intake of Cadets into the Permanent Defence Force is normally carried out on an annual basis taking into consideration the operational requirements of the Defence Forces and the resource envelope allocated to Defence. 10 Air Corps Cadets were inducted on 21 September 2015. The Military Authorities advise that a new Air Corps Cadetship campaign will be advertised in either the first or second quarter of 2016.

Direct Entry Competitions are also held as required from which specialist appointments are filled. 24 Apprentice Trainee Technicians have been inducted in to the Air Corps to date this year, and it is intended to advertise a further competition in the first quarter of 2016.

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

### **Parental Leave Framework Agreement**

93. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to extend the age limit for children from eight to 12 years of age in order that parents can draw down parental leave, as children up to that age cannot be left unsupervised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44310/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó**

**Ríordáin):** The basis for the current age limit is contained in Council Directive 2010/18/EU giving effect to the revised Parental Leave Framework Agreement negotiated by the European social partners in 2009. The essential point is that the upper age limit was negotiated and agreed by employers and Trade Union representatives at EU level and their agreement was then given force of law by the Directive. There are no plans at present to extend this limit. However, I should refer the Deputy to the announcement in the recent Budget of a new entitlement to two weeks paternity leave from work for fathers together with a social welfare payment to take effect from September 2016.

### Garda Overtime

94. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the overtime budget allocation to and the amount spent by An Garda Síochána in 2013 and in 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44267/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and in that context I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Overtime Budget Allocations, including supplementary estimate provisions, for An Garda Síochána in 2013 and 2014 and the actual amounts incurred in these years are as follows:

Year - €m	Budget - €m	Expenditure - €m
2013	42.6	44.04
2014	36.0	37.70

The overtime expenditure incurred in 2013 and, in part in 2014, related to the provision of policing services for the EU Presidency. The provision of sufficient policing services for the Belmullet District and at Shannon airport incurred further overtime expenditure in 2014.

### Immigration Controls

95. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures she is taking to deal with the outrageous system of queueing that is currently in place for the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44275/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** In relation to persons seeking to obtain re-entry visas, I would inform the Deputy that a new on-line appointments service for re-entry visas was introduced on 11 November, 2016 allowing applicants to make appointments prior to attending the Public Office. Applicants wishing to apply in person for a re-entry visa now make an appointment on-line, and are seen at the confirmed date and time. There is no need for people to queue for this service.

As has been stressed on previous occasions, the simplest and easiest way to apply for a re-entry visa is by registered post. There is no necessity to attend at the Public Office and INIS urges all applicants to make full use of the postal service insofar as possible. Postal applications are normally processed within 10 working days and should always be the first option. Special arrangements are made for emergency cases through the new on-line system.

In relation to the persons seeking to register their permission with An Garda Síochána, I would refer the Deputy to my reply to Dáil Question No. 180 of 13th October, 2015 which sets out in detail the arrangements that were put in place with effect from 30 September, 2015 by An

Garda Síochána National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), with the assistance of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS).

These measures addressed the queues at the GNIB Registration Office in Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 during the peak autumn period and worked very effectively by improving throughput and relieving the congestion in the public office that occurs in this period as demand for registration increases from students returning to their studies. I also arranged for additional staff resources from INIS to be made available to assist GNIB in this period.

Another of the measures taken was the implementation of separate arrangements for students from certain colleges. I would like to acknowledge the support of and cooperation of the Colleges in making these arrangements work successfully.

The measures taken at the GNIB public Office means that the peak demand has been met ahead of schedule compared to previous years with demand now restored to normal levels. Accordingly, there is no need for anyone using the service to queue outside the building in advance of opening hours. For example, I am advised that at 1pm yesterday there were still 100 tickets available for that day with the office open until 9:30 p.m.

I would like to commend the staff of both INIS and the GNIB for their work in dealing with such a large volume of registrations and re-entry visa applications, including working over weekends to ensure these demands were met in the shortest possible timeframe.

### **Garda Recruitment**

96. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a particular percentage of the posts in An Garda Síochána's recruitment process is being reserved for serving members of An Garda Síochána Reserve; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44287/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Recruitment competitions to An Garda Síochána are open to all who meet the eligibility criteria which are set out in the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013.

The recruitment campaign for 2016 for full-time members of An Garda Síochána, which I announced recently, includes a special stream for eligible members of the Garda Reserve. As the Deputy will appreciate the reserve members have undergone training in many of the skills required to be an effective full-time member of An Garda Síochána and have gained experience in operational policing. It is right, therefore, that satisfactory service by a reserve member be given due recognition in the selection process. It is not the case, however, that a percentage of trainee Garda positions is being reserved for successful candidates who meet the eligibility requirements for the special stream.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is organising the recently announced 2016 recruitment competition on behalf of the Garda Commissioner and I have no direct involvement in the matter. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. I would encourage all reserves who satisfy the eligibility criteria to apply through the PAS website at [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie).

### **Garda Reserve**

97. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a member of An Garda Síochána can, on retirement, go directly into the Garda Síochána Reserve force without

any formalities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44330/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the recruitment and training of the Garda Reserve is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister have no direct role in the matter.

Applications to become a members of the Garda Reserve can currently be made through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) website. PAS process applications on behalf of An Garda Síochána, and admission to become a Reserve member is subject to the provisions of the Garda Síochána (Reserve Members) Regulations 2006. The Regulations provide that a former member, who has on retirement received an “exemplary”, “very good” or “good discharge” is required to meet the trainee reserve Garda medical and age requirements. However, they are deemed to meet the eligibility requirements for trainee reserve Garda regarding good character, nationality and residency and are also exempt from the educational requirements. Former Garda members are required to complete only phase 1 of 5 of the required training for Garda Reserves.

### **Garda Deployment**

98. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda Síochána numbers in Dublin 12; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44339/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including new probationer Gardaí, 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.

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 have been six intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College, giving a total intake of 550. So far 295 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. On attestation, new probationer Gardaí are assigned to 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 new probationer Gardaí. I have been inform that this year 19 new Probationer Gardaí were allocated to the DMR South Division, 4 and 5 of which have been assigned to Crumlin and Sundrive Road Garda Stations respectively.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced the opening of a recruitment campaign for new members of An Garda Síochána on 27 November last. This new campaign is necessary to fulfil the Government’s commitment to recruit 600 Gardaí in 2016. The 600 new Gardaí to be recruited next year will bring to 1,150 the total number of new recruits since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. This ramped-up recruitment underscores the determination of this Government to deliver an effective, responsive police service to protect our communities and respond to emerging crime trends. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is organising the recruitment competition on behalf of the Garda Commissioner and applications may be made through the PAS website at [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie). The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016.

A key part of An Garda Síochána strategy in the fight against crime is to work in partnership with the community. As of 31 October the latest date for which figures are available there were 53 dedicated Community Gardaí working in the DMR South Division. It is, of course, the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in addressing community policing issues as and when the need arises. In that sense, community policing involves far more than a single unit within An Garda Síochána, a point highlighted by the Garda Inspectorate in their third report entitled “Policing in Ireland—Looking Forward” in which they stated that community policing is a fundamental policing philosophy and that there is a strong foundation for it in Ireland. An Garda Síochána operates a model of Community Policing which aims to build upon, and enhance, progress made so far. I fully support this renewed emphasis on Community Policing, particularly in light of the priority given to this in the Programme for Government. The model is about renewing, reinvigorating and restructuring the community policing function within An Garda Síochána to deliver a consistent national structure to the community policing function, a more co-ordinated and efficient Garda service to the community and a spread of good practice and quality of service in community policing on a national basis.

### **Residency Permits**

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if it is unusual for an application for residency to take eight years to determine, as appears to be the case for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44353/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that if the person concerned has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection in the State, the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications until they have fully completed the Protection Process. This is in accordance with Section 19(1) of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) which provides for the protection of the identity of protection applicants.

With regard to residency status, the Deputy is reminded that protection applicants are issued with a temporary residence permission pending a final decision on their application. In the event that an applicant is finally determined not to be in need of protection, consideration is then given to whether the person should be granted leave to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds.

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.

### **Legal Costs**

100. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why she consented to the order of the Supreme Court in case No. 219 JR of 2003 (details supplied) which provided for the awarding of costs for an unsuccessful High Court action to the applicant and the striking out of an appeal and cross-appeal in the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44368/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Decisions to settle cases involve a careful balancing of the circumstances pertaining in the case, including consideration of legal advice, with a view to limiting the State's exposure to further costs or expense.

I am satisfied that the correct procedures in the case raised by the Deputy were followed in deciding to settle the proceedings.

### Garda Data

101. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in each of the Dublin metropolitan divisions on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015 in tabular form. [44376/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

In 2014, this Government ended the moratorium on Garda recruitment introduced by the last Government in 2009. To date, there have been six intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College, giving a total intake of 550. So far, 295 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. On attestation, new probationer Gardaí are assigned to stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. The Deputy will be aware that I announced the opening of a recruitment campaign for new members of An Garda Síochána on 27 November last. This new campaign is necessary to fulfil the Government's commitment to recruit 600 Gardaí in 2016.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) on the 31 October 2010, and on 31 October 2015 the latest date for which figures are readily available, is as set out in the following tables.

DMR Total strength 31 October 2010				
Division	District	Station	Total	
D.M.R. EAST	BLACKROCK	BLACKROCK	98	
		DUNDRUM	79	
		STEPASIDE	31	
		Total		208
	DÚN LAOGHAIRE		CABINTEELY	39
			DALKEY	31
			DÚN LAOGHAIRE	112
			KILL-O-GRANGE	28
			SHANKILL	60
		Total		270
Total			478	
D.M.R. NORTH	BALBRIGGAN	BALBRIGGAN	67	
		GARRISTOWN	3	
		LUSK	7	

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DMR Total strength 31 October 2010			
Division	District	Station	Total
		RUSH	6
		SKERRIES	11
	Total		94
	BALLYMUN	BALLYMUN	129
		DUBLIN AIRPORT	22
		SANTRY	83
		WHITEHALL	49
	Total		283
	COOLOCK	COOLOCK	120
		MALAHIDE	38
		SWARDS	84
	Total		242
	RAHENY	CLONTARF	80
		HOWTH	41
		RAHENY	74
	Total		195
Total			814
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	BRIDEWELL	BRIDEWELL	180
	Total		180
	FITZGIBBON STREET	FITZGIBBON STREET	117
		MOUNTJOY	102
	Total		219
	STORE STREET	STORE STREET	303
	Total		303
Total			702
D.M.R. SOUTH	CRUMLIN	CRUMLIN	107
		SUNDRIVE ROAD	77
	Total		184
	RATHMINES	RATHMINES	68
		TERENURE	105
	Total		173
	TALLAGHT	RATHFARNHAM	76
		TALLAGHT	200
	Total		276
Total			633
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	DONNYBROOK	DONNYBROOK	133
		IRISHTOWN	57
	Total		190
	KEVIN STREET	KEVIN STREET	157
		KILMAINHAM	83

DMR Total strength 31 October 2010			
Division	District	Station	Total
	Total		240
	PEARSE STREET	HARCOURT TER- RACE	81
		PEARSE STREET	269
	Total		350
Total			780
D.M.R. WEST	BLANCHARD- STOWN	BLANCHARD- STOWN	197
		CABRA	70
		FINGLAS	124
	Total		391
	CLONDALKIN	BALLYFERMOT	100
		CLONDALKIN	97
		RATHCOOLE	29
	Total		226
	LUCAN	LUCAN	82
		RONANSTOWN	95
	Total		177
Total		47 Stations	794

DMR total strength 31 October 2015			
Division	District	Station	Total
D.M.R. EAST	BLACKROCK	BLACKROCK	88
		DUNDRUM	85
	Total		173
	DÚN LAOGHAIRE	CABINTEELY	38
		DÚN LAOGHAIRE	105
		SHANKILL	64
	Total		207
Total			380
D.M.R. NORTH	BALBRIGGAN	BALBRIGGAN	64
		GARRISTOWN	2
		LUSK	10
		SKERRIES	9
	Total		85
	BALLYMUN	BALLYMUN	121
		DUBLIN AIRPORT	21
		SANTRY	87
	Total		229
	COOLOCK	COOLOCK	104
		MALAHIDE	29
		SWARDS	64
	Total		197
	RAHENY	CLONTARF	66

Questions - Written Answers

DMR total strength 31 October 2015			
Division	District	Station	Total
		HOWTH	28
		RAHENY	65
	Total		159
Total			670
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	BRIDEWELL	BRIDEWELL	161
	FITZGIBBON STREET	MOUNTJOY	189
	STORE STREET	STORE STREET	246
Total	Total		596
D.M.R. SOUTH	CRUMLIN	CRUMLIN	93
		SUNDRIVE ROAD	64
	Total		157
	TALLAGHT	RATHFARNHAM	69
		TALLAGHT	176
	Total		245
	TERENURE	RATHMINES	55
		TERENURE	85
	Total		140
Total			542
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	DONNYBROOK	DONNYBROOK	108
		IRISHTOWN	48
	Total		156
	KEVIN STREET	KEVIN STREET	118
		KILMAINHAM	75
	Total		193
	PEARSE STREET	PEARSE STREET	279
Total			628
D.M.R. WEST	BLANCHARD-STOWN	BLANCHARD-STOWN	154
		CABRA	68
		FINGLAS	106
	Total		328
	CLONDALKIN	BALLYFERMOT	86
		CLONDALKIN	89
		RATHCOOLE	21
	Total		196
	LUCAN	LUCAN	74
		RONANSTOWN	94
	Total		168
Total		40 Stations	692

## Legislative Programme

102. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will support reform (details supplied) to the Coroners Bill 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44381/15]

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

The 2007 Bill is out of date and needs review in the light of:

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

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

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

## Criminal Law

103. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps she is taking to address the serious issues relating to prostitution and trafficking, as highlighted in the RTE "Prime Time" programme on 30 November 2015. [44429/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** In September, I published the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015. The Bill provides for two new offences of purchasing sexual services in the context of prostitution. The purpose of these offences is to target the demand for prostitution. These proposals have been developed following extensive consultation, and implement the recommendation of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence which called for the introduction of an offence criminalising the purchase of sexual services. This Bill builds on already strong legislative, administrative and operational measures that have been put in place in Ireland to combat and prevent trafficking in human beings, in particular, the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008, with penalties of up to life imprisonment for human trafficking.

A key focus of Garda actions in this area is the link that exists between the organisation of prostitution and organised crime, including the trafficking of persons for the purpose of prostitution. An Garda Síochána has a dedicated unit established to target individuals engaged in organised prostitution. This unit works directly with the Human Trafficking Investigation and Coordination Unit in coordinating a response to tackle trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation. Gardai have had considerable success with these operations, disrupting criminal networks, including where prostitution was being organised. Gardai have also worked in part-

nership with police forces in other jurisdictions to target those involved in the sexual exploitation of women and girls, including the international trafficking of persons for the purpose of prostitution. There are a number of operations ongoing in the area of organised prostitution.

An Garda Síochána works with both Government and Non-Government agencies in tackling crimes of this nature, through a strategy of prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership. A coordinated and holistic approach is taken to training and joint training takes place twice yearly, between An Garda Síochána and Ruhama, for frontline members of An Garda Síochána and the PSNI. This training provides members with an insight into the complex needs of individuals engaged in prostitution. The Human Trafficking and Co-Ordination Unit also run a course ‘*Tackling Trafficking in Human Beings, Prevention, Protection and Prosecution*’ twice a year, for members of An Garda Síochána.

A draft Second National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking of Persons was issued for public consultation during the summer of this year; this consultation process was recently completed and it is anticipated that the new National Action Plan will be published in the coming months. The new National Action Plan will outline both the Government’s strategic approach to this issue as well as setting out a clear work programme for the relevant state authorities to collaborate with civil society and agencies in other jurisdictions in advancing the fight against trafficking and enhancing the protection of victims.

### Road Traffic Legislation

104. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the options open to An Garda Síochána in policing the use of quad bikes on public roads and in public parks, given the ongoing public safety issues associated with their widespread use, especially by minors, and if she will issue a warning to parents who are considering buying these bikes for Christmas 2015 on the dangers and illegality associated with them. [44430/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Garda authorities that members of An Garda Síochána have the power to require a vehicle in a public place to stop under Section 109 of the Road Traffic Act 1961, and that failure by the driver to do so is an offence. I am further advised that mechanically propelled vehicles used in a public place must comply with the Road Traffic Acts, including in relation to motor tax, insurance and possession of a valid driver licence or learner permit, and that non-compliance is also offence. In addition, a vehicle may be seized where the driver has no driving licence or learners permit, where the driver has no insurance, or where there is no motor tax paid for a period of over three months after the expiry of the road tax payable on the vehicle.

I share the Deputy’s concerns in relation to the public safety issues associated with the misuse of such vehicles, and will raise her suggestion concerning warnings in relation to such vehicles with the Road Safety Authority and with the Garda authorities.

### Legal Aid Applications Data

105. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons waiting on civil legal aid by geographical area. [44431/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy will be aware that the Legal Aid Board is independent in the exercise of its functions, in accordance with Section 3 (3) of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1994. As a result, I am not responsible or account-

able to the Dáil for the manner in which the Board carries out its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I can inform her that the information sought is published monthly by the Legal Aid Board on its website. The data for October 2015 can be accessed via the following link.

[http://www.legalaidboard.ie/lab/publishing.nsf/650f3eec0dfb990fca25692100069854/6b3224ddb74a480e80257f09005569d8/\\$FILE/October%202015.pdf](http://www.legalaidboard.ie/lab/publishing.nsf/650f3eec0dfb990fca25692100069854/6b3224ddb74a480e80257f09005569d8/$FILE/October%202015.pdf)

### Capitation Grants

106. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs why a person (details supplied) in County Carlow is not in receipt of the higher level of capitation, E73. [44334/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** Pre-school services qualify for the higher rate of capitation under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme when they satisfy the qualification requirements under the Programme. In services seeking the higher rate of capitation, the pre-school leader must hold a Level 7 Qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (or equivalent) and all pre-school assistants must hold, as minimum, a Level 5 Qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (or equivalent).

I understand that an application has been made to my Department for sanction for the higher rate of capitation and that a query was raised with the pre-school provider on 25 November 2015 in relation to the pre-school assistant qualification. The matter will be considered further when a response to the query has been received.

### Child Care Services Data

107. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children waiting to be allocated a social worker by length of time waiting, geographical area, and whether the children are deemed to be high priority. [44416/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** In September 2015 Tusla reported there were 19,466 children (open cases) who had an allocated social worker dealing with issues of assessment, child protection, and children in care. There were a further 7,013 children (open cases) who had been assessed as needing a dedicated social worker, and were waiting for one to be allocated. Some of these cases may have had an allocated social worker, but due to a social worker leaving, they are reclassified as awaiting a social worker. I wish to assure the Deputy that all urgent and emergency cases are dealt with immediately. This could involve cases of abandonment, allegations of physical and sexual abuse, parental ill health and the need to find an immediate placement, or threat to the safety or life of a child by a third party.

The priority (or category) of high, medium or low given to the case after a preliminary enquiry, is based on the information known at that time. It is important to note that “high priority” should not simply be equated with risk. Social work duty teams keep high priority cases under review with regular checks to ascertain risk to the child, and where necessary, will re-prioritise the case. Duty teams manage the cases awaiting allocation on a risk management basis by checking on the circumstances, and observing any changes that would increase or decrease

risk. An example could be the presence or absence of a stable grandparent where a parent has a mental health problem which could impact on the priority associated with the case.

This Department continues to monitor the number of cases that are reported as awaiting the allocation of a social worker. The additional funding of €38 million which has been secured for Tusla in 2016 will provide increased resources to meet identified risks and service demands. The additional resources are intended to alleviate service pressures in child welfare and protection services, in particular pressures being faced in the areas of unallocated cases, private residential and foster care and domestic, sexual and gender based violence services. The information requested by the Deputy relating to geographical area and priority level is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Number of Cases Awaiting Allocation by Priority Level and Area**

Area	Low	Medium	High	Total
Dublin North	709	494	10	1,213
Cork	429	324	160	913
Dublin South Central	143	365	266	774
Dublin South West/ Kildare/ West Wicklow	260	236	136	632
Midlands	171	305	36	512
Dublin North Central	277	184	2	463
Waterford/Wex- ford	70	282	56	408
Louth/Meath	40	108	176	324
Carlow/ Kilken- ny/ South Tip- perary	20	99	191	310
Galway/ Roscommon	40	188	61	289
Sligo/Leitrim/ Roscommon	11	194	68	273
Donegal	58	144	55	257
Midwest	138	40	66	244
Cavan/ Monaghan	10	183	7	200
Dublin South East/Wicklow	89	81	15	185
Kerry	6	3	-	9
Mayo	6	1	-	7
Cases awaiting allocation by priority level, Q3 2015	2,477	3,231	1,305	7,013

The information requested by the Deputy relating to waiting time and priority level is outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2: Length of Waiting Times for Cases Awaiting Allocation by Priority Level**

High Priority/Time Waiting	Q2 2015	Q3 2015
1 week	131	94
1 -2 weeks	119	145
2 - 3 weeks	65	144
3 - 4 weeks	103	82
1 - 2 months	241	148
2 - 3 months	240	165
>3 months	606	527
Total	1,505	1,305
Medium Priority/Time Waiting	Q2 2015	Q3 2015
1 week	170	94
1 -2 weeks	193	165
2 - 3 weeks	193	152
3 - 4 weeks	195	185
1 - 2 months	505	378
2 - 3 months	528	451
>3 months	1,591	1,806
Total	3,375	3,231
Low Priority/Time Waiting	Q2 2015	Q3 2015
1 week	32	51
1 -2 weeks	98	74
2 - 3 weeks	108	86
3 - 4 weeks	139	87
1 - 2 months	238	290
2 - 3 months	329	320
>3 months	1,307	1,569
Total	2,251	2,477

### Child and Family Agency Staff

108. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff and the number of social workers in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in whole-time equivalent terms at 31 December in each year of its existence. [44417/15]

109. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff vacancies and of social worker vacancies in whole-time equivalent terms in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, by geographical area. [44418/15]

110. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost to the Exchequer of recruiting each additional ten social workers. [44419/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 to 110, inclusive, together.

The Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) was established in January 2014. Tusla has advised that there were 3453 whole time equivalent staff employed as at 31 December 2014. Of

these, 1396 were social workers.

Tusla has further advised that at 31 October 2015 there are 343 posts under recruitment and of these 239 relate to social worker posts. The following table shows a breakdown by geographical area of the current posts being recruited .

REGION/AREA	SOCIAL WORKER	OTHER	TOTAL
Dublin Mid Leinster	80	18	98
Dublin North East	72	8	80
South	34	9	43
West	53	7	60
Residential		39	39
Educational Welfare		7	7
Early Years		3	3
Domestic		8	8
Corporate		5	5
OVERALL TOTAL	239	104	343

The cost for every additional ten social workers is estimated at €0.4000m per annum. This includes both pay and non pay costs.

### Child Safety

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if school medical examinations continue to identify children with issues requiring urgent attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44415/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** School Health services remain an important component of child health services. All children, for example, have their vision and hearing checked as part of the service with referrals onwards to specialist services occurring as required. Like any service, there is a continual need to examine the evidence for effectiveness of what we do. There are variations across the country in how services are currently configured, variations which have often not arisen not out a consideration of the evidence of effectiveness.

With that in mind, the HSE is currently involved in reviewing the evidence for improving outcomes in child health, and will be making recommendations about the best way to deliver services when the review is completed next year. Parents and teachers continue to engage with child health services including those delivered in schools.

### Medical Card Eligibility

112. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in receipt of domiciliary care allowance who also have medical cards in each of the years 2013 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44260/15]

113. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide automatic access to a medical card to all children who are in receipt of a domiciliary care allowance, the estimated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44261/15]

128. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health his views on extending the

eligibility for medical cards to all children in receipt of a domiciliary care allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44346/15]

137. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware that 9,000 of the 26,000 children who qualify for the domiciliary care allowance are without medical cards, if he will end this injustice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44379/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 112, 113, 128 and 137 together.

Under the provisions of the Health Acts, medical cards are provided to persons who are, in the opinion of the HSE, unable without undue hardship to arrange GP services for themselves and their dependants. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Where deemed appropriate in particular circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card even though an applicant's means exceed the prescribed threshold. Where a person does not qualify for a medical card, they may be provided with a GP Visit Card, appropriate therapy or other community supports or drugs.

The Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) payment is made by the Minister for Social Protection to carers in respect of a child at home under 16 years of age with a severe disability, where it has been determined that the child requires ongoing care and attention, substantially over and above the care and attention usually required by a child of the same age. Eligibility for the DCA is not based primarily on the medical or psychological condition, but on the resulting lack of function of body or mind necessitating the degree of extra care and attention required. As such it is not possible to say if a particular child or any particular medical condition or disability will qualify for a payment under the DCA scheme.

The Deputies will be aware that the report of the Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility, known as the Keane Report, recommended that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card and that it was not feasible, desirable, nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions for medical card eligibility. Nonetheless, it is clear that there are people – including children - with medical needs and it is important that they should be able to access necessary assistance in a straight forward manner.

Consequently, the Clinical Advisory Group on medical card eligibility was established by the HSE to develop a framework for assessment and measurement of the burden of disease and appropriate operational guidelines for the medical card scheme. However, the Clinical Advisory Group has not recommended that children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance should automatically qualify for a medical card. In advance of the Group completing its work, there are no proposals to issue automatic medical cards to one particular group.

The Government is committed to making the medical card system as responsive as possible to the circumstances of people with significant medical needs. As a result of a range of improvements, the HSE is exercising greater discretion. Consequently, the number of discretionary medical cards has increased by about 84% - from about 52,000 in mid-2014 to nearly 96,000 at the beginning of November this year.

As the DCA payment is not an element of the assessment for a medical card, data on the payment is not routinely collated by the HSE. However, analysis undertaken in 2015 shows that out of an approximate population of 1 million people under the age of 16 years, almost 450,000 held a medical card or a GP visit card. Approximately 29,000 children qualified for the DCA payment in 2014. It is estimated that about two-thirds of children qualifying for a DCA payment also hold a medical card. In addition, from 1 July 2015, all children under the age of 6 years are entitled to access a GP service free of charge, as part of the first phase of introducing

a universal GP service in Ireland. It has been estimated that the average expenditure per medical card was €973 in 2013. However, it is not possible to provide the actual cost of extending a medical card to all children in receipt of DCA as it would depend on the variable nature of the individuals' requirements as well as the number of individuals and the quantum and cost of health services that would be used.

Ultimately, the proper way to address this issue is to develop a system of universal health care, which is at the centre of Government health policy. Otherwise, whenever there are qualifying rules, there will always be a person who is above the means test, does not have the selected disease, or is not in receipt of the specific social welfare payment.

### **Health Services Provision**

114. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason for service disruptions to an outpatient clinic (details supplied) at Dungloe Community Hospital in County Donegal; when this clinic will be fully re-instated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44276/15]

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

115. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting lists for outpatient appointments at Letterkenny University Hospital in County Donegal per outpatient clinic, who have been waiting up to six months, from six months to 12 months and more than 12 months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44277/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and my officials will follow up the matter.

### **Health Services Provision**

116. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive in Cork will provide accommodation for a person (details supplied) while the person is undergoing treatment. [44296/15]

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

### **Primary Care Reimbursement Service Payments**

117. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health what information is sufficient for self-employed persons to provide to the primary care reimbursement service concerning their tax affairs; and if a self-assessment notice of assessment without the calculations is sufficient if a person's net income is below a certain amount. [44303/15]

**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, he should contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

### Primary Care Centres Data

118. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the names, status and expected opening dates of the primary care centre projects announced in 2012, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44306/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** While the Government's objective is to deliver a high quality, integrated and cost effective health care service the mechanism and timescale for delivery of primary care infrastructure is dependent on a number of factors. Regardless of the delivery mechanism, all potential primary care infrastructure is subject to suitable locations being offered/provided/available, to successful planning processes and GP commitment to sharing accommodation and delivering health care services with HSE staff. In addition the operational lease mechanism is subject to market pressures such as the developers' access to adequate financing. Delivery of primary care infrastructure is a dynamic process, constantly evolving to take account of changing circumstances including the feasibility of implementation. Some of these factors are outside the control of the Health Service Executive. It is not possible to accurately predict completion dates in advance of the award of planning permission and start of construction. However expected operational dates are given for the PPP locations and Kells. Supporting infrastructure, procured through a combination of public and private investment, will facilitate the delivery of multi-disciplinary primary health care.

Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	July 2012 - 35 locations	PQ 44306/15	answer - 08/12/2015
Count	HSE Region	County	Location/PCT Name	Delivery Mechanism	Status at 30 September 2015
1	DML	Dublin	Rowlagh/North Clondalkin	Direct/own build	Finalising site purchase. Purchase will be subject to planning permission.

Questions - Written Answers

Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	July 2012 - 35 locations	PQ 44306/15	answer - 08/12/2015
Count	HSE Region	County	Location/PCT Name	Delivery Mechanism	Status at 30 September 2015
2	DML	Dublin	Crumlin/Drimnagh		Planning not completed in timeframe for PPP
3	DML	Dublin	Knocklyon/Rathfarnham		Planning not completed in timeframe for PPP
4	DML	Wicklow	Rathdrum	Operational Lease	Construction scheduled 2016 Q1
5	DML	Kildare	Kilcock	PPP	2017 Q1
6	DNE	Dublin	Coolock/Darndale	PPP	2017 Q2
7	DNE	Dublin	Summerhill, north inner city Dublin	PPP	2017 Q2
8	DNE	Dublin	Balbriggan	Operational Lease	In construction
9	DNE	Dublin	Swords	Operational Lease	In discussions with a potential developer
10	DNE	Louth	Drogheda north	Operational Lease	HSE has issued an LoI. Please see ** at table end.
11	DNE	Meath	Laytown and Bettystown	Operational Lease	Identified property has new owners. Discussion underway with new owners.
12	DNE	Meath	Kells	Operational Lease	Expected to be operational late 2015
13	DNE	Monaghan	Carrickmacross	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery	Progress challenging. No expressions of interest received following the 2014 advertisement.

Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	July 2012 - 35 locations	PQ 44306/15	answer - 08/12/2015
Count	HSE Region	County	Location/PCT Name	Delivery Mechanism	Status at 30 September 2015
14	South	Carlow	Tullow/Rathvilly/Hacketstown	Direct/own build	Project brief approved. Discussions underway on purchase of adjoining strip of land.
15	South	Kilkenny	Kilkenny city	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery - suitable for further consideration	Please see * at table end
16	South	Wexford	Wexford town	PPP	2017 Q2
17	South	Waterford	Dungarvan	PPP	2017 Q1
18	South	Waterford	Waterford city	PPP	2017 Q2
19	South	Cork	Cork city - Togher	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery - suitable for further consideration	Please see * at table end
20	South	Kerry	Tralee	Operational Lease	LoI withdrawn. Review required. Please see ** at table end
21	South	Tipperary	Carrick-on-Suir	PPP	2017 Q1
22	South	Tipperary	Clonmel	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery - suitable for further consideration	Please see * at table end

Questions - Written Answers

Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	July 2012 - 35 locations	PQ 44306/15	answer - 08/12/2015
Count	HSE Region	County	Location/PCT Name	Delivery Mechanism	Status at 30 September 2015
23	West	Tipperary	Thurles	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery - suitable for further consideration	Please see * at table end
24	West	Limerick	Limerick city (Ballinacurra/Weston)	PPP	2017 Q1
25	West	Clare	Ennis	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery - suitable for further consideration	Please see * at table end
26	West	Galway	Tuam	PPP	2017 Q1
27	West	Galway	Gort	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery - suitable for further consideration	Please see * at table end
28	West	Roscommon	Boyle	PPP	2017 Q1
29	West	Roscommon	Ballaghaderreen	Nov 2014 advertisement for operational lease mechanism delivery - suitable for further consideration	Please see * at table end
30	West	Mayo	Westport	PPP	2017 Q1
31	West	Mayo	Claremorris	PPP	2017 Q2

Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	Primary Care Infrastructure	July 2012 - 35 locations	PQ 44306/15	answer - 08/12/2015
Count	HSE Region	County	Location/PCT Name	Delivery Mechanism	Status at 30 September 2015
32	West	Sligo	Ballymote	PPP	2017 Q1
33	West	Donegal	Dungloe	Direct/own build	Progress challenging: absence of GP interest.
34	West	Donegal	Donegal town		Progress challenging: absence of GP interest.

Coolock and Darndale were announced as two separate locations in July 2012

\* The HSE is engaged in evaluating the submissions received, following the November 2014 advertisement, to determine which are eligible to be progressed to the next stage of the process. The HSE expects to complete this part of the process in late 2015.

\*\* The term letter of intent (LoI) is used in the context of primary care infrastructure being delivered using the operational lease mechanism. The HSE issues a letter of intent when it has selected a preferred bidder based on submissions received. On receipt of this LoI the preferred bidder must, inter alia, obtain planning permission and provide evidence that finance for the development is in place. Legal discussions commence after the LoI is issued.

### Medical Card Administration

119. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of adjusting medical card thresholds to take account of the minimum wage increase on 1 January 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44307/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As the HSE does not record whether medical card holders are earning the minimum wage, it would not be possible to provide an estimate.

### Tattooing and Body Piercing Regulation

120. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce registration, inspection or operational standards for tattoo parlours with particular emphasis on parental consent for those under 18 years of age using these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44308/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** On 7 December, my Department published a draft document “Tattooing and Body Piercing Infection Control Guidance”. The consultation document is available on the Department’s website and will remain open until 15 January 2016.

Tattooing and body piercing is performed without incident in the vast majority of cases, but it is important that customers understand the nature of procedures, and that practitioners brief clients in advance of the potential risks involved.

Specific issues covered in the draft Guidelines are

- Good practice for infection control and preventing contamination, including personal hygiene and clean premises
- The use of template consent forms, and aftercare advice leaflets to clients;
- The need to provide information, instruction, training and supervision to employees on health and safety.

The draft guidelines were developed by public health practitioners and environmental health experts in conjunction with the Department of Health. I look forward to receiving views on the draft guidelines during the consultation process.

There is no specific regulation or legislation in this area but it is hoped that this guidance document will help drive high standards of infection control and prevention in this sector.

### **General Medical Services Scheme Data**

121. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who are receiving anti-depression medication through the general medical services scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44309/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the primary care schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

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

### **General Practitioner Services Provision**

122. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if negotiations have begun with the general practitioner unions on the free general practitioner care for children under 12 scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44314/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** In Budget 2016, the Government made financial provision for the extension of GP care without fees to all children aged 6 to 11 years. It is envisaged that, subject to enactment of appropriate changes to the legislation, this extension will take effect in the latter part of 2016. This will also be subject to negotiation with the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) in relation to the scope of the service to be provided and the fee arrangements to apply. The necessary contractual provisions will be developed in the context of overall new GP contract arrangements and not as a stand-alone extension or amendment to the current contract. Negotiations in relation to the new GP contract have commenced with the IMO.

### **Orthodontic Services Provision**

123. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for orthodontic treatment by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and the reason for the

delay in issuing an appointment. [44315/15]

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

### **Health Services Data**

124. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients who have had to wait on trolleys for over 24 hours between 2010 to 2015 to date in tabular form. [44331/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and my officials will follow up the matter.

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

125. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when a home care package will be completed in order for a bed to become available for a person (details supplied) who is currently awaiting transfer to Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44337/15]

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

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme**

126. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the fair deal package for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [44343/15]

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

### **Health Care Professionals**

127. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health if he has received the report on regulation of physiotherapists and physical therapists; the outcome of the report and if it will ensure protection of both titles under the one register, given that Ireland currently lacks regulation to protect these titles, thus causing a significant risk to public safety where any persons can call themselves a physiotherapist or a physical therapist even with just months of part-time training and given that his Department is currently reviewing regulation of the professions

which would allow physical therapists their own register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44344/15]

129. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the status of the regulation of physical therapists. [44348/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 129 together.

The Physiotherapists Registration Board will soon make the necessary bye-laws under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 to allow it to establish its register early next year. The title of physiotherapist will, as a consequence, be protected for the exclusive use of the board's registrants when the register's 2 year transitional period ends in 2018.

I am currently examining the issue of also protecting the title of physical therapist under the Act. In the rest of the English speaking world the titles of physical therapist and physiotherapist are interchangeable and their users are qualified physiotherapists. In Ireland, however, the title is used by a number of practitioners who are not physiotherapists but who are competing with physiotherapists in the private sector in the provision of musculoskeletal therapies.

Earlier this year, having consulted with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, I wrote to a number of relevant organisations regarding my proposal to protect the title of physical therapist as a variant of the title of physiotherapist and invited them to submit their views. The submissions are now being examined and I expect that I will make a decision on the matter before the end of the year that ensures public protection and appropriately addresses the legitimate concerns of all parties.

*Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 112.*

*Question No. 129 answered with Question No. 127.*

### **Health Services Provision**

130. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the status of the establishment of a headstrong jigsaw site in the north inner city of Dublin following from a meeting held with an organisation (details supplied) in summer 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44352/15]

**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 the next 15 days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

131. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocation for home care packages and home help services per community health care office, the basis on which these amounts are determined; and the current waiting times for services in each case. [44369/15]

**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 the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days she should contact my

Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### Health Services Data

132. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of early intervention teams in each local health office; the waiting time for assessments and the numbers on the waiting list by team. [44370/15]

**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 for direct reply to the Deputy. If she has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days she should contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

133. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on an orthodontic waiting list by geographical area. [44371/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** The HSE provides orthodontic treatment to those who have been assessed and referred for treatment before their 16th birthday. It should be noted that the nature of orthodontic care means that immediate treatment is not always desirable. It is estimated that in up to 5% of cases it is necessary to wait for further growth to take place before treatment commences. Patients are assessed by the HSE Orthodontic Service under the modified Index of Treatment Need. Patients with the greatest level of need are provided with treatment by the HSE. The most recent information available is for Q3 of 2015.

Area	TOTAL
HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster	5,135
HSE Dublin North East	4,162
HSE South	4,213
HSE West	4,596
Total	18,106

### Hospital Appointments Status

134. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be performed on a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44372/15]

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

### **Mental Health Services**

135. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list figures for child and adolescent mental health services by the number waiting and by duration. [44375/15]

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

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the eligibility for a medical card for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44377/15]

**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 he should contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

*Question No. 137 answered with Question No. 112.*

### **Health Services Provision**

138. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied) who requires advice and support from a social worker; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44383/15]

**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 the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and

my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Speech and Language Therapy Provision**

139. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for speech and therapist services in primary care by age category, geographical area and time waiting. [44391/15]

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

### **Health Services Data**

140. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for physiotherapy in primary care by age category, geographical area and time waiting. [44392/15]

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

### **Health Services Data**

141. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for occupational therapy by age category, geographical area and time waiting. [44393/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As this is a service issue, 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 the Executive.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

142. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists in primary care in whole-time equivalent terms on the public payroll and in active service, and the number of vacancies that exist in this service by geographical area. [44394/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. If she has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days she should contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

143. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists in primary care in whole-time equivalent terms on the public payroll and in active service, and the number of vacancies that exist in this service by geographical area. [44395/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. If she has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days she should contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

#### **Health Services Staff Data**

144. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of physiotherapists in primary care in whole-time equivalent terms currently on the public payroll and in active service, and the number of vacancies that exist in this service by geographical area. [44396/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. If she has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days she should contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

#### **Health Services Staff Data**

145. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the details of all vacant posts in the Health Service Executive by speciality. [44424/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. If she has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days she should contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

#### **Health Services Data**

146. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the level of late payment of payroll taxes in the Health Service Executive and in bodies under its control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44425/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Deputy's question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If she has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days she should contact my Private Office who will follow up on the matter.

#### **Health Care Professionals**

147. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in introducing regulation of the counselling and psychotherapy sector, if this is urgently required in the public interest, his intentions in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44427/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Psychotherapists and counsellors are not currently regulated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. However, the Act provides that the Minister for Health may, by regulation, designate a health and social care profession not already designated if he or she considers that it is appropriate and in the public interest to do so and if specified criteria have been met.

In accordance with the Act, the Health and Social Care Professionals Council has been consulted on the question of regulating counsellors and psychotherapists. Its detailed report on the matter is being examined carefully in my Department with a view to deciding the next steps in the coming months. These steps will, I envisage, include a wider round of consultation involving the various professional bodies and other interested parties.

### **Legislative Programme**

148. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will explain the undue delay in the public health (alcohol) Bill and his intentions in this regard, given the ongoing problems with alcohol misuse and the burden which these impose on the health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44428/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill was approved by Government yesterday and will be published shortly.

The Bill includes provision for:

- minimum unit pricing to tackle cheap alcohol set at 10c/gram of alcohol;
- strict separation of alcohol products in retail outlets;
- compulsory health labelling on drinks requiring grams, calorie count, health warnings and a link to a public health website on alcohol containers;
- a requirement to display health warnings and a link to a public health website and to provide access to information on grams and calories in pubs and off-licences;
- advertisements to be strictly informative about the product concerned and subject to criminal sanction;
- a ban on advertising near schools, playgrounds and public transport;
- a 9pm broadcasting watershed for alcohol adverts;
- a prohibition of price-based promotions and general restrictions on promotions, and
- an enforcement regime with inspections by authorised HSE officers and penalties for non-compliance, including fixed payment notices.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

149. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he last met formally with the Irish ambassador to China, Mr. Paul Kavanagh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44270/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that I last met formally with the Irish Ambassador to China, His Excellency Mr Paul Kavanagh, on 17th May 2015 at Ashford Castle, on the occasion of the visit of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to Ireland.

### **Military Aircraft Landings**

150. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 127 of 3 November 2015, wherein he stated that permission would not be granted for the landing of an aircraft of the type specified by the Deputy, that is, a United States of America gunship AC-130W as was used in the bombing of the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz in Afghanistan, if he will explain why United States of America Air Force AC-130W, registration number 87 - 9288, arrived in Shannon Airport on 5 September 2013 and departed on 6 September 2015; if permission was granted on that occasion; and if he will correct the record. [44355/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The landing referred to by the Deputy has been raised in this House on a number of previous occasions. In response to a parliamentary question regarding compliance by foreign military aircraft with conditions applied by my Department, my predecessor stated that contrary to notification, one US military aircraft landed in Shannon Airport in September 2013 armed with a fixed weapon. This was not in accordance with the policy conditions which apply to the landing of foreign military aircraft in Ireland. The Government views breaches of the conditions attached to permission for such landings with the utmost concern and the case in question was subsequently raised at the highest possible level with the US Embassy.

The Embassy official expressed regret at this incident, explained that it was due to an administrative error and provided assurances that steps have been taken by the US authorities to ensure that there is no recurrence.

My reply of 3 November stated that permission would not be granted by my Department for the landing of the aircraft of the type specified by the Deputy. Permission was not provided for the landing in September 2013 to which the Deputy refers and the issue of correcting the record does not arise.

### **Shannon Airport Facilities**

151. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 880 of 3 November 2015, his views that it is appropriate that records are not kept of the number of military personnel transiting through Shannon Airport on military aircraft, as indicated by his reply; what he proposes to do regarding this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44356/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Arrangements under which permission is granted for foreign military aircraft to land at Irish airports are governed by strict conditions. These include stipulations that the aircraft must be unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives and must not engage in intelligence gathering, and that the flights in question must not form any part of military exercises or operations. In considering requests for the landing of foreign military aircraft, my Department's primary focus is on whether the flights in question are in compliance with these conditions which do not include a requirement in relation to the numbers and designation of passengers. I do not propose to change the strict conditions currently in place.

### **Shannon Airport Facilities**

152. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 880 of 3 November 2015, wherein he stated that a small number of requests were approved for the carriage of weapons by personnel protection officers on very

important persons flights passing through Shannon in 2015, the number of such requests; the nature of their visits; and the purpose of their onward journey. [44357/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The decision to grant a firearms certificate is made by the Minister for Justice and Equality, in consultation with the Garda Síochána, which at all times retains responsibility for law enforcement matters generally and in relation to visiting VIPs.

### **Air Navigation Orders**

153. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 882 of 3 November 2015, where he stated that permission was granted for landings of 46 aircraft that can operate as refuelling aircraft between January and 20 October 2015, wherein he stated that none of these had Saudi Arabia as a next destination, if he will answer the actual question asked, which was the numbers that were en route to Saudi Arabia. [44358/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Where permission is being sought for the landing of a military aircraft, the requesting state is required to confirm that the aircraft is unarmed, carries no arms, ammunition or explosives, is not engaged in intelligence gathering and that the flight in question does not form part of a military exercise or operation. In addition, the requesting state is required to provide the airports of origin and destination. I can confirm that Saudi Arabia was not listed as a destination for any of the aircraft in question.

### **Military Aircraft Landings**

154. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 863 of 3 November 2015, regarding the presence of 4 Hercules C-130s in Shannon Airport on 18 April 2015, wherein he stated that the purpose of the landings was crew rest, if the crew were resting, in between or during military operations; how this tallies with the condition on which such landings are granted permission, namely that they are not forming part of a military exercise or operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44359/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In my reply of 3 November I stated that in requesting permission from my Department, the US Embassy indicated that the purpose of the landings was crew rest. My reply also set out the conditions which apply to landings by all foreign military aircraft, including that the flights in question must not form part of a military exercise or operation. I am satisfied that the US authorities are fully aware of the need to comply with these conditions.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

155. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the decision of the United Kingdom to engage in military actions in Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44367/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** It is for individual States to determine in what way they might best contribute to the concerted international effort underway to tackle the threat posed by Daesh and other UN-designated terrorist groups.

Security Council resolution 2249 grants authority for States to take all necessary measure to suppress and eradicate terrorist acts by Daesh and Al-Nusra Front in territory under Daesh control within Syria and Iraq and to eradicate the safe haven they have established inside Syria and Iraq. Any action undertaken under this resolution must be in compliance with international law, in particular the UN Charter, as well as international human rights, refugee, and humanitarian law.

### EU Meetings

156. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent agreement reached between the European Union and Turkey on the refugee crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44388/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** On 29 November, the Taoiseach attended an EU heads of state or government meeting with Turkey, at which it was agreed to activate the Joint Action Plan aimed at managing the current refugee and migrant crisis, as well as several further shared commitments and actions. The Joint Action Plan contains short- and medium-term measures to be undertaken by the EU and Turkey to assist Turkey in managing the influx of refugees and to prevent uncontrolled migratory flows from Turkey to the EU. As part of this, the EU has agreed to provide a financial package worth an additional €3 billion, with the establishment of a ‘Refugee Facility for Turkey’ to coordinate and streamline actions financed by this package. Turkey, for its part, has committed to implement immediately actions to stem the flow of irregular refugees and migrants to the EU and to improve the situation of refugees and migrants under temporary protection in Turkey. The EU and Turkey have also agreed to further steps on re-admission agreements and visa-liberalisation. In addition, the EU has agreed to re-energise Turkey’s accession process, and it is expected that Chapter 17 of the *acquis communautaire*, covering economic and monetary policies, will be opened this month. Turkey and the EU also agreed to explore further the great potential of EU-Turkey relations and to maintain regular and enhanced dialogue through more frequent summits and high-level political meetings. For example, the Turkish Foreign Minister has been invited to participate in a working lunch with EU Foreign Ministers at the next Foreign Affairs Council.

Ireland has supported the renewed and intensified engagement between the EU and Turkey in recent months, including the outcomes of the 29 November meeting, and the Joint Action Plan. The relationship between the EU and Turkey is important, not only in the context of the migration crisis and because of Turkey’s status as an EU candidate country: increased cooperation with Turkey will also be critical in any political and diplomatic resolution to the crisis in Syria, a primary root cause of the current migration crisis, as well as in the fight against terrorism.

At the same time, the EU and Member States will continue our dialogue with Turkey in relation to ongoing concerns at the internal situation in Turkey, including with regard to freedom of expression and the media.

### Northern Ireland

157. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress made in talks with the British Government and the five Northern Ireland Executive parties on the outstanding issues following the Fresh Start agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44389/15]

158. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of discussions he has had with groups representing survivors and families of victims on their serious concerns and disappointment with the Fresh Start agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44390/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 158 together.

Implementation and follow-up to the Fresh Start Agreement, agreed on 17 November 2015 following 10 weeks of intensive discussions, is already underway. The Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly have already taken measures to implement what was agreed on welfare reform and finance matters. Contacts have begun at official level on delivering the financial commitments agreed by the Irish Government under the Agreement. There will also be a trilateral ministerial meeting later this month between the justice ministers of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that Minister Fitzgerald will attend. This meeting will discuss further enhanced law enforcement co-operation and the setting up of a Joint Agency Task Force on cross border organised crime.

The forthcoming plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council, in Armagh on 11 December 2015, will also provide a timely opportunity for the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to review progress on the implementation of the all-island aspects of the Stormont House Agreement.

I very much regret that the Fresh Start Agreement did not in the end include agreement on the implementation of provisions of the Stormont House Agreement dealing with the legacy of the past. I share the deep disappointment of the victims and survivors of the Troubles and their families.

I would stress again that it was not the Irish Government who pressed for an agreement that completely left aside the legacy of the past. However, when it became clear that the choice was between having an agreement which uncoupled the past and having no agreement at all, the Government most reluctantly agreed to have a less comprehensive deal that would at least ensure that the devolved institutions would be protected and placed on a stable and sustainable footing.

What is important now is that we find a way forward that banks the good progress already achieved during the talks and secures a solution to outstanding matters, including the key issue of striking the right balance between the onward disclosure needs of families and the national security requirements being sought by the British Government.

To this end, contacts are continuing at official level with the British Government, the five main political parties in Northern Ireland and most importantly with various Victims' Groups. I met with Northern Ireland's Victims' Commissioner on 26 November to discuss the concerns of victims and possible ways to take the issue forward in a way that satisfies these concerns. I also hope to meet the Northern Minister for Justice, David Ford, in the coming days and with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers, later this month in order to take stock of the implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement and to explore potential options aimed at resolving the outstanding issues on dealing with the past.

The provisions of the Stormont House Agreement for dealing with the legacy of the past offer the best possible way of bringing whatever healing is possible to those affected by the Troubles. For this to be achieved it is vitally important that these new institutions have the trust and confidence of the victims and survivors and their families. Their needs will therefore remain central to the Government's work in this area.

The Government remains committed to finding a way forward so that the establishment of the new institutional framework on the past can take place on an agreed basis as envisaged in the Stormont House Agreement. We are determined to achieve the establishment of these institutions so that we can in a fundamental way deal with the past, foster reconciliation and build a society for future generations that is free from hurt and suspicion. This is essential if the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement is to be realised.

### **Schools Amalgamation**

159. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she considered the Pobal Haase-Pratschke deprivation index of an area when eligibility for delivering equality of opportunity in schools was considered for an amalgamated school (details supplied) in County Mayo, considering that it is located in an area which is largely regarded as being disadvantaged; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44278/15]

160. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools and post-primary schools that have lost DEIS status following amalgamation, by location and number of pupils involved, since the status was first introduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44279/15]

161. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why DEIS status was removed from a school (details supplied) of 450 pupils in County Mayo when it amalgamated with another school of 28 pupils which did not have this status; if the loss of this status has a severe impact on those pupils coming in from primary schools with this status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44280/15]

162. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills what exactly was advised in 2011 at the time of amalgamation of schools (details supplied) in County Mayo regarding DEIS status; if it was made known to the boards of management and principals that the amalgamation would result in the loss of this status for pupils; who actually made the decision for the amalgamation to proceed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44281/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 to 162, inclusive, together.

The school in question was established on 1st September 2011 following the amalgamation of a DEIS post-primary school and non-DEIS post-primary school. In accordance with the approach adopted in relation to all such amalgamations, additional non-teaching resources are provided by my Department in respect of eligible pupils from the former DEIS school by way of continued support for the targeted cohort of pupils as a transitional measure. In the case of a post primary school, these supports continue to be supplied for 6 years following the amalgamation. A total of 14 schools, 7 at primary and 7 at post primary have undergone this process to date. The details of same are being compiled in a suitable format and will be forwarded separately.

Proposals for school amalgamations are a matter for the Patron/Trustees of the schools in question, and are subject to approval by the Minister for Education and Skills. Schools proposing to amalgamate are invited to meet with relevant sections of my Department to inform their decision making process.

As the Minister of State will be aware, a review of the DEIS Programme which will inform future policy in relation to educational disadvantage is currently being undertaken by my Department. While this process is underway, I do not intend to make any changes to the current

programme.

### **Superannuation Schemes**

163. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a special needs assistant employed since 2001 must retire on age grounds at 65 years of age; if there are exemptions to this regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44285/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** In accordance with the Superannuation scheme a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) who is not “a new entrant” under the terms of the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004, must retire at the end of the school year in which he/she reaches age 65.

The abolition of the compulsory retirement age under the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 applies to new entrants only. The retirement provisions, which apply to public servants (including SNAs) who are not new entrants, are not affected by the Act.

Therefore a Special Needs Assistant employed prior to the Act is not a new entrant and must retire at the end of the school year in which he/she reaches the age of 65.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

164. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the new post-primary schools proposed for the Stepside and Kilternan areas in Dublin 18, including their locations; if they will both be open from their scheduled date in September 2016 at these locations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44289/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I wish to advise the Deputy that a suitable permanent site for a new post primary school to serve the Ballinteer/Stepaside area has been identified and the acquisition process is underway.

Given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time. I can, however, assure the Deputy that the acquisition of a new site for the school is a priority for my Department and that the patron body, Educate Together, will be informed of the location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

Officials from my Department have been in contact, and will continue to liaise, with Educate Together in relation to arrangements for temporary accommodation to facilitate the school opening in September 2016.

### **Student Grant Scheme Appeals**

165. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps she will take to have an application for a higher education grant by a person (details supplied) in County Cork dealt with given the time delay to attach supporting documentation to the grant application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44323/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland

(SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

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

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at [oireachtas@susi.ie](mailto:oireachtas@susi.ie). Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

166. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision for a special needs assistant; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44324/15]

**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 has 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](http://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**

167. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans for the proposed secondary level school in Kingswood Heights in Tallaght in Dublin 24; if she will confirm the catchment area for the school; the priority that will be given to families in Kingswood Heights and Kilnamanagh in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44325/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The school to which the Deputy refers will open in September 2016 to meet the demographic needs of the Tallaght area, including the areas referred to by the Deputy. While school authorities are responsible for their school’s enrolment policy, as new schools are being established to meet the needs of a defined geographic area, enrolment policies are expected to be consistent with the criteria under which each school is being established.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

168. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions she is taking on the planning conditions for the proposed secondary level school in Kingswood Heights in Tallaght in Dublin 24 regarding the request for details of the enhanced drop-off facilities at the school, and her response to the condition that the developer is required to provide a pedestrian crossing on the public road serving the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44326/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The School Building Project to which the Deputy refers has recently been granted planning permission by the Planning Authority.

Following the grant of planning permission, revised design options have been explored to satisfy the requirements for enhanced drop off and a pedestrian crossing as requested by the Local Authority. A preferred option has been developed for an enhanced drop off area within the site. The access to this is independent of the access to the main parking area. A pedestrian crossing has also been added to the design at the main pedestrian entrance to the school on Ballymount Road.

The layout for both of these have been submitted to the relevant Council planning department for comment prior to final approval.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

169. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a proposed school building (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44329/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning – Stage 2b. This stage includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability

Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents.

As the Deputy is aware on Tuesday 17th November 2015 I announced details of the major school building projects where construction is expected to commence over the next 6 years. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the project to which she refers is included in this plan. Information in respect of all projects on this 6 year plan is available on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

### **Student Grant Scheme Appeals**

170. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will expedite an appeal under the Student Universal Support Ireland grant scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry, as all relevant information has been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44336/15]

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

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

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at [oireachtas@susi.ie](mailto:oireachtas@susi.ie). Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

171. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why a person (details supplied) in County Dublin is losing an entitlement to a special needs assistant; if she will reinstate the person's special needs assistance hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44341/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I wish to advise the Deputy that Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are allocated to Special Schools and to mainstream Primary and Post Primary schools to assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), sets

out my Department's policy in relation to the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme. The Circular explains that SNA support is not provided to pre-school services which operate outside of the primary or special school provision.

I can advise the Deputy however that the vast majority of supports for childcare, including pre-school education, is provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The principal vehicle for the delivery of pre-school education is the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme which was introduced in January 2010 and provides for early learning in a formal setting to children in the year before they commence primary school.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) currently provides for care support for pupils with special needs attending a range of HSE funded pre-schools. As such, questions relating to provision of such services should be addressed to the HSE, or to my colleague, the Minister for Health.

### State Examinations Data

172. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the latest data from the State Examinations Commission and her Department on the percentage of school leavers from all 192 secondary level schools with DEIS status who sat the leaving certificate, and the percentage of these who went on to third level education, further education and to do an apprenticeship by name and location of school. [44342/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

However, SEC does not identify candidates by category of schools. The SEC would not identify DEIS schools within their system. Neither does the SEC retain details of what candidates do after they complete their Leaving Certificate examination. This is not, nor has it ever been, a function of the SEC.

All that the SEC can provide is a list of all second level schools and the number of candidates from each school that sat the Leaving Certificate in each year.

### Schools Data

173. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 500 of 1 December 2015, the number of primary schools, by county, by ethos and denomination, in tabular form. [44350/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The information requested by the Deputy is available in the following table.

Number of primary schools in each county and a breakdown by their ethos/denomination

County	Catholic	Church of Ireland	Inter-Denominational	Multi-Denominational	Presbyterian	Muslim	Jewish	Methodist	Quaker	Total
Carlow	38	3		1						42
Cavan	65	10		1						76

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County	Catholic	Church of Ireland	Inter-Denominational	Multi-Denominational	Presbyterian	Muslim	Jewish	Methodist	Quaker	Total
Clare	109	1		3						113
Cork	316	20		8						344
Donegal	140	22	3	1	9					175
Dublin	355	33	3	46	2	2	1	1		443
Galway	221	2		6						229
Kerry	131	2		1						134
Kildare	87	6	1	7						101
Kilkenny	70	2		1						73
Laois	57	7	1	1						66
Leitrim	36	3								39
Limerick	134	3		2						139
Longford	35	3								38
Louth	65	2		3	1					71
Mayo	163	2		1						166
Meath	103	4	2	5						114
Monaghan	54	5			3					62
Offaly	61	3		1						65
Roscommon	89	2								91
Sligo	61	4		1						66
Tipperary	152	6								158
Waterford	68	3		2					1	74
Westmeath	67	4	1	1						73
Wexford	94	6	1	2						103
Wicklow	58	17	4	4						83
Total	2829	175	16	98	15	2	1	1	1	3138

### National Educational Psychological Service Data

174. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children waiting to be assessed by the National Educational Psychological Service by geographical area and by time waiting. [44387/15]

**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 oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention pro-

cess 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.

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will improve pupil-teacher ratios at primary and second level schools over the next twelve months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44402/15]

**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 criteria for the allocation of posts are communicated to school managements annually and are available on the Department website.

The Deputy will be aware that I have made provision in Budget 2016 for some 2,260 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. These posts will provide for an improvement in the staffing schedules at primary and post primary levels, enhance the leadership and management roles of deputy principals at post-primary level by reducing their teaching time, an improvement to the scheme of release time for principal teachers at primary level and additional resource posts to meet special education needs.

At primary level there will be a one point improvement to the primary staffing schedule to be implemented for the 2016/17 school year. This will see the primary staffing schedule operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils. At primary level lower thresholds apply for DEIS Band 1 schools.

At post-primary level the schedule will improve by .3 points, from 19:1 to 18.7:1 for the 2016/17 school year.

When the allocation for guidance was brought within quota under Budget 2012 measures, DEIS schools were protected from the change by providing for a 18.25:1 allocation compared to the general 19:1 allocation. The position of DEIS schools will be further enhanced by a change to an allocation on the basis of 17.95:1.

### **Skills Development**

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the education system, at all levels, will meet the skills demand in the workplace; if apprenticeships will impact on the situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44403/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** My Department has a number of strategies and initiatives in place to ensure that education and training meets the skills requirements of the workplace. SOLAS, with the assistance of relevant experts such as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), employers and local and national organisations, have published a five year strategy for the further education and training sector which provides

us with a strategic roadmap for this crucial element of the education and training system. The strategy includes a vision of a flexible, quality-driven, labour market-relevant, integrated and responsive sector that supports learner progression, transitions into employment and personal development. The higher education system is also going through a process of transformation through structural change arising from the Higher Education Strategy.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), which is funded by my Department, advises the Government on current and future skills needs of the economy. It has a central role in ensuring that labour market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met. The expert group's membership is broad and specifically includes representation from enterprise. Its research provides an input to the development of course curricula and informs the selection of new targeted programmes designed to tackle the skills shortages in particular elements of the economy, such as Momentum, Springboard and the ICT skills conversion programme.

As part of the Action Plan for Jobs 2015, my Department has committed to review the National Skills Strategy. The review will provide an opportunity to determine the volume, type and mix of skills required to meet the Government's goal of full employment by 2018 and the challenges to be addressed to achieve this.

Direct engagement between employers and education and training providers is also critical to ensuring that programmes are aligned to changing skills needs. As well as the actions that are being implemented across the education and training system as part of the Further Education and Training and Higher Education reform programmes to enhance links with enterprise and prepare learners for the different roles they will have over their working lives, work is also underway in the context of the Skills Strategy review to develop the regional and national infrastructure for engagement between education providers, employers and other enterprise stakeholders, in communicating and addressing skills needs. My Department is leading a project to establish a network of regional skills fora to foster better engagement between the public education and training system, employers and other regional stakeholders so as to identify and address the skills needs of each region.

Apprenticeship has a major contribution to make to meeting the skills demands of the workplace. In apprenticeship, employers are engaged in the definition of occupational profiles, contribute to curriculum development and ensure the required skills are developed on the job. The expansion of the apprenticeship system is one of my key priorities and I am encouraged by the increase in apprenticeship registrations in existing trades and the progress being made in introducing new apprenticeships, focusing initially on the 25 priority proposals identified by the Apprenticeship Council through their public call.

### **Schools Building Projects Administration**

177. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied with the adequacy of the school building programme and, in particular, with the completion of the replacement of temporary or prefabricated classrooms; if she will meet the requirements projected by the various school authorities for special needs teachers in the coming year at primary and at second level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44404/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** As the Deputy is aware, I announced details on 17th November last, of the major school building projects that are scheduled to proceed to construction over the next six years, as part of the Government's €2.8 billion capital investment programme. The intention also, is to replace all purchased prefabs with permanent accommodation over the lifetime of the programme. This investment programme is

about looking to the future and ensuring that our school infrastructure is well prepared to accommodate our growing school population.

Information in respect of all schools included in the Six Year Programme is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for the provision of a range of educational services at local and national level for students with special educational needs.

This responsibility includes planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs including the allocation of Resource Teaching and Special Needs Assistant support as well as the establishment of special classes and staffing allocations for special schools in various geographical areas as required.

The NCSE has allocated 6,832 Resource teaching posts to mainstream schools this year, which is an increase of 29% since 2011, which means there are over 11,500 Resource and Learning Support Teachers in place this year.

11,940 SNAs are available for allocation to primary and secondary schools, which is an increase of 13% in the number of posts available since 2011.

In addition, over 150 new Special Classes have been opened for the 2015/16 school year, which means there are now over 1,000 special classes in place.

I welcome the fact, that 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 and to increase provision to address emerging needs in this area.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if adequate resources are in place to meet the teaching and accommodation requirements of children with Asperger's syndrome and autism at primary and secondary level, if she has identified the areas of great demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44405/15]

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if adequate resources are in place to meet the teaching and accommodation requirements of children with Asperger's syndrome and autism at primary and secondary level school throughout County Kildare, if she has identified the areas of great demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44406/15]

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the number of autism classes throughout County Kildare will increase in line with demand in the coming year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44407/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 to 180, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware my Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools which have enrolled pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), including Asperger's Syndrome, in order to ensure that, wherever a child is enrolled, they will have access to an appropriate education.

Children with ASD may be enrolled in a mainstream school and can attend all mainstream classes. In such cases these children will receive additional teaching support through the learning support and/or the resource teacher and, where appropriate, will receive access to Special Needs Assistance and assistive technology if required.

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

Progress in developing this network has been significant and in addition to the special school placements there are over 1,000 special classes throughout the country at primary and post primary level. The number of special classes at post primary level has risen by approximately 70 classes in the last 3 years.

The NCSE have advised that there are 56 ASD classes in Co. Kildare. 5 of these are Early Intervention classes for children with ASD who are not yet school going age, 40 ASD classes are at primary school level and there are 11 ASD classes at post primary level. A full list of special classes is available at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has recently submitted their Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In developing this policy advice, the NCSE has consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research. The policy advice is currently under consideration in my Department.

My officials will consider and report to me on any recommendations in the report which relate to the issues raised by the Deputy.

### **School Enrolments**

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the new enrolment process will address difficulties that have emerged in recent years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44408/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015, which was published in April of this year and is on the Government’s legislative programme for enactment in this session, introduces a number of important changes to make enrolment policies fairer and more transparent.

These changes include new powers for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Child and Family Agency to designate a school place for children who have no school place. The Bill will also enshrine in law a ban on schools charging parents to apply for a place in school.

The Bill, while including provision for single sex schools and denominational schools to reflect in their admission policy the exemptions applicable to such schools under equality legislation, provides for schools to explicitly state in the school’s admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on the grounds of disability, special educational needs, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the traveller community, race, civil status, gender or religion. The Bill also requires schools to publish an enrolment policy which will include details of the school’s arrangements for students who do not want to attend religious instruction.

The Bill seeks to strike an appropriate balance between school autonomy and the interests of parents in our education system. This can be achieved through regulations that foster greater transparency and consistency in terms of how schools communicate and interact with parents. To that end the Bill sets out clearly matters relating to enrolment that regulations may address. The regulations have not been finalised; following enactment of the Bill, the draft regulations will be updated and published for consultation with the relevant education partners.

### **School Patronage**

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if issues relating to school patronage will be addressed in the short to medium term; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44409/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Programme for Government gave a commitment to a more pluralist system of patronage for our schools. This commitment is being progressed on a number of fronts. Firstly, the government established a Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. The Forum advised on how the education system can provide a sufficiently diverse number and range of primary schools catering for all religions and none and also advised on the practicalities of transferring/divesting patronage for individual primary schools where it is appropriate and necessary. Arising from the work of the Forum, eight new primary schools have opened under the patronage divesting process and work is continuing to advance choices in other identified areas. Secondly, in 2011 the Government announced the establishment of new arrangements for the recognition of new primary and second-level schools. New schools are generally established to meet demographic need. The new arrangements give an opportunity to patrons to seek to apply for patronage of new schools. The criteria used in deciding on patronage of new schools place a particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity of patronage. Since 2011, 42 new schools have opened (24 primary and 18 post-primary). 39 of these schools have a multi-denominational ethos.

The Department is continuing to work intensively with the main stakeholders to advance alternative choices for 2016 and beyond to achieve greater diversity of school provision.

### **Education Policy**

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will continue her support smaller urban or rural schools with a denominational ethos; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44410/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I am very aware of the importance of small schools to rural communities and particularly the most dispersed and remote communities. In this regard, I made two particular improvements to the staffing schedule for small schools this school year. The first measure provides for improved teacher retention thresholds for schools of 1 - 4 teachers. The second measure is an improved teacher allocation threshold for isolated 1-teacher schools that are more than 8km distant from the next nearest school of the same type of patronage and language of instruction. Both these improvements are intended to support small schools and to sustain the communities they serve.

### **Student Accommodation**

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if and how she will address issues relating to student accommodation in the short to medium term; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44411/15]

**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 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](http://homes.usi.ie) website, to communicate more effectively to student and homeowners, and to carry out research into this important issue.

Secondly, the establishment of an inter-departmental steering group to oversee this work, the first meeting of which took place on 1 October 2015. 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. A significant number of Action points have been identified for follow up arising from the first meeting.

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>

### **Bullying in Schools**

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the issue of school bullying will be monitored to ascertain the best methodology to deal with it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44412/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Deputy will be aware that my Department published new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year.

The procedures are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. They include specific requirements in relation to the use of prevention and education strategies and the consistent investigation, follow up and recording of bullying behaviour.

There is no requirement that schools report incidents of bullying behaviour to my Department.

However, the procedures for schools include important new oversight arrangements that involve the school Principal reporting regularly to the Board of Management and a requirement

for the Board to undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation that the annual review has been completed must be provided to the Parents' Association and published on the school website.

### Gaelscoil Issues

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she continues to evaluate progress on the provision of a Gaelcholáiste in north Kildare, having particular regard to the case being articulated by the local support group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44413/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** On 17 November last I announced the details of the new schools to be provided nationwide in 2017 and 2018. I also announced, in view of the anticipated enrolment numbers in the Irish-medium Aonad of Maynooth Community College and the continued support for a Gaelcholáiste in the North Kildare area, that a Gaelcholáiste will be established in 2019, subject to sufficient viability of the Aonad. My Department will continue to liaise with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board in this regard. The Gaelcholáiste will open under the joint patronage of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta.

### Student Grants Data

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications for higher education grants for the current school year that have been approved, refused, are pending; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44414/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** SUSI has received almost 108,000 student grant applications for the 2015/16 academic year. This figure includes 16,500 applicants which were received after the Priority Processing deadline.

93,000 (86%) of these applications have been processed to completion. Of which 74,500 applications have been awarded a grant and 18,500 have been refused or cancelled.

Of the 15,000 pending applications, SUSI is currently awaiting documentation from 9,000 students and will continue to finalise grant applications as this documentation is received.

### Residential Institutions

188. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 533 of 17 November 2015 in respect of the 2002 indemnity agreement in which she stated that properties to the value of €30.93 million are still outstanding, her plans to ensure that the necessary transfers take place without further delay; the official in her Department who is responsible for overseeing this matter; and the steps that have been taken to recoup this outstanding debt. [44421/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** As I explained to the Deputy in my response to her previous question of 17 November, under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement the 18 participating congregations are contributing €128m in cash, counselling services and property. The cash contributions of €54.42m under the agreement have been received while information has been provided to my Department that confirms that counselling services in ex-

cess of the €10m provided for in the agreement have been funded directly by the contributing congregations.

In relation to property transfers, to date 46 properties have been fully transferred and there are no outstanding issues. These properties have been valued at €42.65m for the purposes of the Agreement. Some 15 properties with an estimated value of €20.93m have yet to be fully transferred. Work on the transfer of these properties is well advanced and I am hopeful that a number of further transfers will be completed in the near future. I should point out also that in most cases the physical transfer of the properties has been effected and work is taking place to finalise the outstanding requirements.

Every effort is being made to complete the remaining transfers. In this regard my Department is continuing to actively engage with the Chief State Solicitor's Office who liaise with the solicitors for the congregations and the solicitors acting on behalf of the HSE in relation to the completion of these transfers.

### **Child Abuse**

189. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of claims against the State by persons who were abused in day schools; the number of cases which have been settled and which are pending; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44423/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** In cases where the Department was in possession of relevant information which, if acted upon, could have prevented abuse occurring, the State will admit that it has some liability and will enter into settlement negotiations. The only such cases to date number 13 in total. In each such case, the State has accepted partial liability and accordingly paid a specific proportion of the settlement amount with the relevant religious congregation paying the remaining proportion.

Separate to the above cases, in its response to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgment, the Government agreed in December 2014 that out of court settlements be offered in those extant cases of school child sexual abuse being brought against the State where the cases come within the terms of the ECtHR judgment and satisfy the Statute of Limitations. In this regard, the State Claims Agency (SCA) has made settlement offers which have been accepted in 6 cases and the SCA has written to the other 28 litigants advising that the circumstances do not appear to come within the parameters of the judgement and inviting them to revert with any contrary evidence. Where a litigant does not accept the offer in settlement of his/her case or where the SCA is not satisfied that the case comes within the terms of the judgment, the case will proceed before the domestic Courts.

Subsequently, in July of this year, the Government approved proposals to offer ex-gratia payments up to a maximum of €84,000 to those who initiated legal proceedings in cases of school child sexual abuse against the State but who subsequently discontinued their claims against the State where, similarly, the circumstances of the claims come within the terms of the ECtHR judgment and where the claims were not statute barred prior to the proceedings being discontinued. It is not possible to assess at this stage how many cases in this category will satisfy these criteria. Persons who believe that their cases come within the criteria can contact the SCA and provide supporting evidence. Where there is a disagreement between the SCA and the individual as to whether their circumstances come within the terms of the ECtHR judgment, provision will be made for the application to be reviewed by an independent assessor. In offering these settlements, the State will not be covering the liabilities of the perpetrators, school

managers or patrons or other co-defendants.

To be eligible for the above settlement or payment arrangements, cases must involve sexual abuse of a school child by a primary or second level school employee in respect of whom there was a prior complaint of sexual abuse to a school authority (including an authority of a school in which the teacher had previously taught), prior to the issue of the Department of Education guidelines to primary and post-primary schools in 1991 and 1992 respectively. This rationale has been adopted as it is the basis of the ECtHR judgment.

To date over 140 new claims of school child sexual abuse have been notified to the SCA.

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

190. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the new builds and acquisitions to be completed and the new units to be provided by housing associations under the capital assistance scheme by local authority area in the second half of 2015 in tabular form. [44272/15]

191. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the figures provided to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht on 24 November 2015 projecting 950 local authority new builds and acquisitions and 440 new units under the capital assistance programme by the end of 2015 when compared with the latest on his Department's website for the first six months of the year showing 246 local authority new builds and acquisitions in the first half of 2015, including 20 new builds and 226 acquisitions, and 157 new housing association units, mean that there will be 704 local authority new builds and acquisitions in the second half of 2015, including in excess of 180 local authority new builds, plus 283 new units provided by voluntary housing associations under the capital assistance scheme; and if not, to provide alternative figures broken down under these headings. [44273/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 and 191 together.

The Social Housing Strategy 2020 provides a comprehensive response to the need for social housing and targets the provision of over 110,000 social housing units to 2020, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme.

The output target for 2015 is set at 15,900 across the current and capital-funded programmes. Within that, a target of just over 2,500 units is to be delivered through the capital-funded programmes of building/acquiring new social housing units by local authorities, and new sheltered housing by approved housing bodies, and the returning of vacant properties to productive use. Current data shows that over 2,500 units have already been delivered through the capital programmes as follows:

Local Authority Housing – construction and acquisition	569
Capital Assistance Scheme	199
Regeneration	109
Vacant Units returned	1,630

Local authorities have advised me that they are advancing the purchase of some 750 new units this year, many of which will be finalised between now and the end of the year, which is

traditionally the time of greatest funding drawdown by local authorities. Combined with the further numbers of vacant housing units that I expect will be returned by the end of this year, this should mean that the capital target set for 2015 will be further exceeded. All 31 local authorities are actively engaged in the delivery of these units in 2015, so the impact will be felt across all areas in terms of new social housing provision. However as some of these units may not be finalised until early 2016, the end-2015 final outcome cannot be predicted with certainty at this stage. Data on the full year breakdown across the different categories of delivery across all the local authorities will be compiled in early 2016.

We now have a strong pipeline of new social housing construction projects in place following from my announcement in May of the first major social housing build programme under the Social Housing Strategy, with a further substantial announcement in July of approvals for local authorities and approved housing bodies. The outcome has been half a billion euro allocated for 2,900 social housing new builds and acquisitions to end 2017. I also propose to make further announcements in this regard in the New Year. Coupled with new housing acquisitions and tackling vacant units, this means that progress towards achievement of the overall capital targets for the period out to 2017 is well advanced.

Information on social housing units constructed and acquired in respect of all local authorities and approved housing bodies is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.envron.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls>.

### Housing Data

192. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has analysed the proportion of council homes purchased under previous tenant purchase schemes that have ended up owned by landlords in the private rented sector; and how many of these are rent supplement, housing assistance payment or rental accommodation scheme tenancies. [44274/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** Under section 90(12)(a) of the Housing Act 1966, a person who bought a house from a local authority under a tenant purchase scheme must obtain the authority's consent to re-sell the house within a specified period after tenant purchase (20 years in the case of the 1995 Tenant Purchase Scheme). The enactment empowers the housing authority to refuse to consent to the resale of the house where

- the intended purchaser is not in need of housing,
- the intended purchaser is, or has been, involved in anti-social behaviour, or the intended sale would not be in the interest of good estate management, or
- the sale would leave the seller, or any person who might reasonably be expected to reside with them, without adequate housing.

In relation to the existing scheme for the purchase of certain newly-built local authority houses and also the scheme for existing local authority houses coming into operation on 1 January 2016, the legislation provides for the consent of the housing authority to re-sell the house within the period of the incremental charge placed on the house. The legislation also empowers the housing authority to refuse its consent where :

- the proposed sale price is less than the market value,

- the new purchaser is or was engaged in anti-social behaviour or the sale is not in the interest of good estate management, or
- the sale would leave the vendor or a household member without adequate housing.

It is a matter for individual housing authorities to deal with applications for consent to the re-sale of tenant purchased houses. Information regarding the incidence of such applications or the ownership history of these houses following their subsequent re-sale by the tenant purchaser is not available in my Department.

### **Flood Relief Schemes**

193. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware of the proposals around building the sea wall in the Clontarf and Raheny area in Dublin; the objections from the local community; the response from Dublin City Council to these objections; if alternatives to a sea wall have been analysed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44291/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** I understand that this project comprising a cycleway proposal as well as flood alleviation works to address higher tides and sea levels was originally approved by An Bord Pleanála in 2011 under section 226 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, relating to foreshore developments. The environmental impacts of the project were assessed as part of this process.

Dublin City Council subsequently made some alterations to the cycleway aspects of their proposals which were progressed under the Part VIII requirements of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, relating to local authority own developments. This process involved extensive public consultation with local community groups. Planning approval for the revised proposals was granted by Dublin City Council in May 2013.

Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular planning case with which a planning authority, including An Bord Pleanála, is or may be concerned.

### **Planning Issues**

194. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will immediately designate the Dublin north fringe region and Fingal south as a strategic development zone to ensure the urgently needed new homes in Dublin Bay North and Dublin North are delivered by 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44301/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** A significant quantity of land has been zoned for new residential development along the northern edges of Dublin City, situated within the Fingal County Council and the Dublin City Council administrative areas.

The future development of these lands has been comprehensively planned by the relevant planning authorities through the preparation of several local area plans (LAP's) including the Baldoyle-Stapolin LAP and Portmarnock South LAP (Fingal) and the Clongriffin-Belmayne LAP (Dublin City).

These LAPs provide for the future delivery of substantial levels of new and badly needed housing in a sustainable fashion in tandem with the provision of new educational, transport, recreational, community and other infrastructure.

I am satisfied that the existing planning policy frameworks that have been developed for these areas by the relevant local authorities are robust and forward looking, having been developed through the statutory Local Area Plan process under Section 18 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and formally adopted by the Elected Members of the each Council.

I am therefore of the view that sufficient effort has been expended by the relevant planning authorities in planning the future development of these areas and both I and the Government expect to see the areas developed to meet the needs for housing rather than a further forward planning exercise being undertaken.

In view of the fact that I have not received any proposals for designation of this area as an SDZ from the local authorities concerned, I consider that what we require at this point is implementation of the plans in place and delivery of urgently required housing.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

195. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will request the National Asset Management Agency to undertake and organise a major programme of social housing in the Dublin north fringe and Fingal south fringe zones, given the failure of private developers to develop the north fringe as a high specification new urban region since the late 1990s; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44302/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) is at present playing an ongoing role in the delivery of social housing. To the end of September 2015, a total of 1,600 NAMA residential properties had been delivered for social housing use, comprising 1,241 completed properties and a further 359 that have been contracted and where completion work is ongoing. A further 486 properties are considered as being active transactions whereby terms are agreed or active negotiation is on-going by all parties concerned or where a detailed appraisal is being carried out. An additional 440 properties are to be further appraised. Overall, I expect that in excess of 2,000 units will be secured for social housing purposes from this engagement with NAMA. Full details of units offered and delivered under this process including a breakdown by Local Authority is available on the website of the Housing Agency at [www.housing.ie](http://www.housing.ie)

Under this process 827 units were identified in the Dublin City Council area and 399 had demand confirmed by the Council, of which 377 had been delivered to the end of September 2015. In the Fingal County Council area, 270 units were identified and 105 had demand confirmed by the Council, of which 60 had been delivered to the end of September 2015.

The process of reviewing units previously deemed unsuitable by local authorities is ongoing. Local Authorities, particularly those in high demand areas, are continually reviewing the list of available NAMA properties.

In addition, NAMA is funding the construction of new residential properties to help meet demand in the major urban centres. The overall programme will be funded from NAMA's own resources and will lead to the development of an estimated 20,000 units by 2020, mainly in the Greater Dublin area where the current residential supply shortage is most acute. Residential

developments funded by NAMA are subject to the same planning and regulatory requirements as all other developments and this includes policy relating to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. As such, I expect 10% of the output of this investment by NAMA, or about 2,000 units, to become available for social housing.

### **Wastewater Treatment**

196. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the deadline for achieving mandatory European Union quality standards for wastewater treatment; the implications for the State if they are not achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44321/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The requirements at EU level with regard to the standards for urban waste water treatment are set out in Directive 91/271/EEC. For example, secondary treatment was required by 31 December 2000 for all discharges from agglomerations of more than 15,000 population equivalents, and by 31 December 2005 for those agglomerations with population equivalents between 10,000 and 15,000. Secondary treatment was required by 31 December 2005 for all agglomerations with population equivalents greater than 2,000 for discharges to freshwater and estuaries.

The most recent EPA report, Urban Waste Water Treatment in 2014, shows 31 out of 174 large urban areas (i.e. population equivalents of greater than 2,000) did not comply with the effluent quality and sampling standards for secondary treatment set down in the Directive. If compliance is not addressed there is a risk of escalated infringement proceedings and fines against the State for non-compliance with the Directive.

Since 1 January 2014 Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels including the management of urban waste water collection and treatment infrastructure. In line with the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, Irish Water has put in place a Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP); this was published in October 2015 and is available online at: <http://www.water.ie/about-us/project-and-plans/future-plans/>.

The WSSP specifically notes that it is an objective of Irish Water to ensure compliance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and sets out target dates to achieve compliance.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. They may be contacted via email to [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on 1890 578 578.

### **NAMA Social Housing Provision**

197. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that more than 10% of the 20,000 houses being built by the National Asset Management Agency in the coming years are provided for social housing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44327/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) continues to play an important role in the delivery of social housing. To the end of September 2015, a total of 1,600 NAMA residential properties had been delivered for social housing use, comprising 1,241 completed properties

and a further 359 that have been contracted and where completion work is ongoing. A further 486 properties are considered as being active transactions whereby terms are agreed or active negotiation is ongoing by all parties concerned or where a detailed appraisal is being carried out. An additional 440 properties are to be further appraised. Overall, I expect that in excess of 2,000 units will be secured for social housing purposes from this engagement with NAMA.

In addition, NAMA is funding the construction of new residential properties to help meet demand in the major urban centres. The overall programme will be funded from NAMA's own resources and will lead to the development of an estimated 20,000 units by 2020, mainly in the Greater Dublin area where the current residential supply shortage is most acute. Residential developments funded by NAMA are subject to the same planning and regulatory requirements as all other developments and this includes policy relating to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. As such, I expect 10% of the output of this investment by NAMA, or about 2,000 units, to become available for social housing.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

198. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the commencement date for rent certainty measures as outlined in recent legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44332/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 provides for a number of measures which, taken together, will bring much-needed stability to the rental sector pending the coming on-stream of the supply of new housing. Firstly, section 25 of the Act provides for the extension of the period between rent reviews from 12 months to 24 months. The provision is subject to a sunset clause such that the period will revert to 12 months in 4 years' time. Secondly, section 26 of the Act extends the period of notice of a new rent that a landlord must give their tenant from 28 days to 90 days and, thirdly, section 31 of the Act provides for graduated increases in the periods of notice of termination of further Part 4 tenancies, so that a landlord will have to give a tenant up to a maximum of 224 days notice for tenancies of 8 years or more. Section 1 of the Act provides for the commencement of these three provisions on enactment so they came into effect on 4 December 2015.

A number of additional provisions which were announced in the package of measures to support housing supply and rent stability are also given effect in the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015. These include:

- that notice of new rent sent from a landlord to a tenant must be in a prescribed form setting out specified information, including details of dispute resolution procedures available through the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB);

- that notification of a rent increase to the PRTB will include, among other things, a signed statement by the tenant that they are aware of their rights in relation to rent and rent reviews;

- that confirmation of a tenancy registration, which is currently sent to the landlord, would also be sent to the tenant, together with information setting out landlord and tenant rights and obligations;

- that the confirmation of a tenancy registration will inform the landlord and tenant that the PRTB routinely discloses information to the Revenue Commissioners;

- that a minor mistake or omission in a Notice of Termination will not invalidate that Notice

where there is no prejudice to the tenant;

- stronger verification arrangements in relation to the termination procedures under section 34 of the Act;

- the enforcement of PRTB determination orders through the District Court instead of the Circuit Court.

These provisions will be subject to Commencement Orders, the first of which will be made early in the New Year.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Data**

199. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of applications received from Donegal County Council for social housing units under the Social Housing Strategy 2020; the number of applications made with respect to long-term voids and to new builds; the cost which these applications collectively represent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44365/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Social housing targets out to 2017 for all local authorities issued in April 2015. This also included funding allocations with, nationally, over €1.5 billion to be invested in a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes by all local authorities. In the case of Donegal County Council, 507 is the target set for new social units under both Current and Capital-funded programmes for 2015-17, supported by €34.1 million in funding. Following on from the announcement of targets, in May and July this year I announced major social and voluntary housing construction and acquisition programmes, with almost half a billion euros of investment covering all 31 local authorities in delivering almost 3,000 housing units. Donegal County Council submitted capital appraisals in respect of a number of projects for which funding was approved, involving the delivery of 63 new social housing units an estimated cost of some €8.2 million. Full details of the project approvals are available on my Department's website at the following links:<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,42225,en.htm>

I expect that capital appraisals in respect of further social housing units will be submitted to my Department by Donegal County Council and if sanctioned for funding, they are likely to be included in the next major announcement of approvals that I expect to make early in the New Year.

Apart from the new social housing units sanctioned for funding for Donegal as set out at the above links, the local authority is also working to acquire new social houses and bringing forward projects under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme, which are also part of its target for delivery out to 2017.

Donegal County Council has sought funding from my Department to return 154 vacant properties to use in 2015 and support for all these units will be provided. The exact cost involved will not be known until the work is completed. In 2014, Donegal County Council returned 167 vacant properties to use with funding support from my Department of €919,797.

### **Housing Provision**

200. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to support rent supplement and housing assistance payment limits and introduce rent certainty as short-term housing measures, as advised by the National Economic and Social Council; to make better use and provide quicker turnaround of State properties and local authority voids that are empty; to enhance prevention and early intervention measures to support persons in their homes; to explore the efficacy of modular homes, ensuring that this does not become a long-term measure; to access affordable housing with support, as a solution to the housing and homeless crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44378/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** A shortage of supply is at the heart of the current challenges in the housing sector and the Government is addressing this on a number of fronts. The Government's Construction 2020 Strategy, published last year, is aimed at addressing issues in the property and construction sectors and ensuring that any bottlenecks that might impede the sector in meeting the estimated residential demand of 25,000 units per annum are resolved. My Department and other relevant Government Departments and agencies are actively implementing the range of commitments set out therein. In addition, NAMA is aiming to deliver a target of 20,000 residential units before the end of 2020. Of these units, 90% will be in the greater Dublin area, with approximately 75% of the units being starter homes.

With regard to social housing delivery, the Social Housing Strategy 2020 sets out clear, measureable actions to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the social housing list. The Strategy has been supported by two successive budgets with €1.7 billion allocated to housing, with associated delivery targets of over 33,000 units across both Capital and Current programmes. Given the pressing need to recommence a house building programme, almost €3 billion in capital funding will be provided in support of the Social Housing Strategy under the Government's Capital Plan - Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021.

The unprecedented support and funding being allocated to bring vacant and boarded-up social housing units back into use is a notable example of the Social Housing Strategy's focused and realistic approach. Over 2,300 units were delivered in 2014 and I expect 2,500 units to be completed in 2015.

The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a key Government priority and a major pillar of the Social Housing Strategy. There are currently more than 5,400 households in receipt of HAP and the scheme has been rolled out to all categories of household in 18 local authority areas.

The maximum rent limits for different household classes that apply in each local authority where HAP has been commenced are set out in regulations and are generally based on the Rent Supplement limits as set out by the Department of Social Protection (DSP). In prescribing these limits, household size and prevailing rents in the relevant areas are taken into consideration. My Department works closely with the Department of Social Protection and monitors data which it gathers, along with PRTB data, and data gathered through HAP pilot authorities, in relation to the rent limits applying. This matter will be kept under active review in all HAP pilot authority areas.

On 10 November 2015, Government approval was given to a package of measures to address rent stability and housing supply. The measures will act to stabilise rents in the short to medium term while the additional supply of housing comes on stream. In relation to rent stability, the measures were given effect by the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015, enacted on 4 December 2015. This Act provides, *inter alia*, that the minimum period between

rent reviews for tenancies is being increased from 12 to 24 months and this new provision will apply for a 4 year period. In addition, the minimum period of notice of new rent is increased from 28 days to 90 days and longer notice periods for the termination of long-term tenancies have been introduced. Each of these new provisions commenced on enactment.

Further amendments in the Act regarding rent and tenancies will be the subject of commencement orders. Details of the full package of new rent stability and housing supply measures are available at the following link:

*<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,43556,en.pdf>*

With regard to modular housing provision, this programme of 500 units is being implemented to mitigate the issues associated with an increasing volume of homeless families accommodated in inappropriate commercial hotel arrangements. These units will provide emergency accommodation in the first instance, with each unit providing accommodation for a single household at a given time. While the placement of individual households in these units is intended to be on a short term basis, such placements will offer a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning for access to all required services, including welfare, health and housing services.

Cognisant of the difficulty faced by households in accessing the housing market, Budget 2016 provided for an affordable rental pilot scheme, with €10 million being made available from the proceeds of the sale of Bord Gáis Éireann to fund a pilot in 2016. The Scheme will be an ongoing annual commitment to secure a long term increase in the supply of affordable properties to meet the needs of those households that would struggle to make rental payments under present market conditions. Details of the Scheme are currently being finalised in my Department and will be completed by end-year, for rollout in early 2016.

### **Local Authority Services**

201. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will given further consideration to a request (details supplied) from Ballybay and Clones Municipal District; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44420/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The provision and maintenance of public lighting is the responsibility of each individual local authority. Local authorities receive income from a variety of sources including grants from Central Government, Local Property Tax (LPT) proceeds, commercial rates and other locally-raised charges.

It is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities, including funding towards the provision and maintenance of public lighting, in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources. Those local authorities that voted to reduce LPT rates locally must accept the effect of that reduction on local service provision. I note that Monaghan County Council (MCC) has decided to reduce the local rate of LPT by 7.5% for 2016, which will have the effect of reducing the funds available to the Council by €278,664 in 2016.

## Housing Issues

202. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware of reports of land hoarding taking place in the Dublin area in respect of land zoned for housing, if this is a factor in the depressed supply of housing, why he wrote to the chief executives of the four Dublin local authorities in June 2015, advising them not to rezone any further land for housing; and if he will review this advice. [44422/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I refer to the reply to Question No 157 of 11 November 2015 which sets out the position in this matter.

I am not aware of reports of land hoarding referred to by the Deputy and, furthermore, I have not at any time directed the Dublin local authorities not to rezone additional lands for housing. However, Minister of State Coffey and I jointly wrote to the Chief Executives of the four Dublin Local Authorities on 10 June 2015 in the context of their role in preparing and finalising the development plans for their areas.

At that time my Department's analysis and that of the Dublin Housing Supply and Co-ordination Task Force was that there was sufficient supply of land to meet immediate housing requirements and that proposals to zone any additional residential land would have to be strongly evidentially grounded and consistent with core strategies. We also strongly encouraged the four Dublin local authority Chief Executives and Councils to focus around practical measures that can be adopted in their development plan preparation and implementation processes to boost housing supply and ensure that good quality housing in suitable locations is available at affordable prices.

I firmly believe that increasing supply is key to addressing the range of housing issues we face today. The First Report of the Dublin Housing Supply and Coordination Task Force concluded that across the four Dublin authorities there is land immediately available with planning permission for development of 12,785 houses and 7,925 apartments, equating to circa. three years supply. A further 25,507 units were deemed permissible in the immediate to short term. A further study of additional zoned residential lands that could be brought on stream by the Task Force has identified specific infrastructural interventions to facilitate additional housing supply in the Dublin Region.

Therefore, a considerable array of work has been undertaken in identifying and profiling the availability of key sites and their current activity status across Dublin, all of which is accessible to the public on my Department's website [www.myplan.ie](http://www.myplan.ie)

In addition, and in the context of the Government's "Stabilising Rents – Boosting Supply" interim package on housing, I have recently announced a range of initiatives to be implemented from January, including a targeted rebate of development contributions in Dublin and Cork for housing supplied under certain price levels, and revised statutory planning guidelines on apartment standards, to be issued under Section 28 of the Planning Act and given legal effect through the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2015, which will reduce the cost of apartment building in Dublin City by approximately €20,000 per unit, on average.

These measures combined with previous announcements, including streamlined Part V arrangements under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 and the commitment by NAMA to fund 20,000 mainly starter homes in the greater Dublin area are visible demonstration of the Government's commitment to, and investment in, measures that will enhance supply.

However, if in the near future a sufficient supply response is not forthcoming from a con-

struction sector that has seen its development contributions substantially reduced or rebated altogether for starter homes, its Part V commitments streamlined and costs of construction reduced as part of new apartment standards, then I will be requesting local authorities to vigorously implement the Vacant Site Levy, which will come into force from 2019 and to take what further steps are possible to ensure the clear housing needs of citizens are met.

However, I am confident that as key loan portfolios are divested by financial institutions and receivers and major land banks such as in some of the Strategic Development Zones move into the control of new developers who are suitably financed and attuned to today's market realities in terms of affordability, supply will recover.

The Government will remain vigilant in closely monitoring the market response.

### **Wild Atlantic Way Project**

203. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application from Donegal County Council for funding to further develop the potential of Malin Head in County Donegal, Ireland's most northerly point and a key location on the Wild Atlantic Way. [44271/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism propositions such as the Wild Atlantic Way, it is not directly involved in developing or managing these, as this is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Similarly, the allocation of grant funding is a matter for the board of Fáilte Ireland.

I have referred the Deputy's Question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. He should advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Greenways Funding**

204. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the various reports and the details and assessment of projects that were submitted for greenway funding, the order of merit they were placed in, the projects that received funding, the amount of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44282/15]

205. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport why the application for funding for a greenway project at Blessington in County Wicklow did not receive funding, details of any project that received funding but received lower points in an assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44283/15]

206. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding that was allocated for greenway development that has not been utilised to date, his plans to reallocate this funding to other projects such as the Blessington project in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44284/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 to 206, inclusive, together.

A total of 38 proposals for cycleway/greenway projects were submitted from 28 local authorities to my Department under the National Cycle Network (NCN) Funding Programme 2014 -2016. These proposals were assessed by an expert assessment team as part of a competi-

tive process. The outcome was that three projects from Kerry, Galway and Waterford shared in funding of €6.3 million, details of which can be viewed on my Department's Smarter Travel website [www.smartertravel.ie](http://www.smartertravel.ie). under the subheading National Cycle Network.

Details of the associated NCN assessment process and results have been uploaded onto my Department's website ([www.dttas.ie](http://www.dttas.ie)) following a Freedom of Information request (Ref. FOI20140063).

A further 11 projects, submitted under the NCN Funding Programme, shared in €10 million funding from the Government Stimulus Package for Infrastructural Development (details attached). The funding for the Stimulus Package used the same scoring system as the NCN but, given the nature of the stimulus package, required projects to be shovel-ready and able to be finished within 12 months. For that reason Blessington did not meet the criteria and was not awarded funding. I acknowledge that a small number of authorities awarded funding under this package have experienced difficulties in delivering completed projects with the 12 month timeframe. My officials are dealing with each on a case by case basis.

The further investment in transport package announced last July also directed funding towards greenway infrastructure with Westmeath County Council being awarded €3 million to complete the Athlone to Mullingar Greenway to a high specification.

The Blessington Greenway proposal submitted under the NCN programme was among a small number of projects which were viewed as high value propositions and which were awarded a high rating by the expert assessment panel. However, for reasons of costing, deliverability, viability or legal issues a number of high scoring projects could not be considered for funding under that tranche.

Currently all Department funding for the delivery of greenways is fully committed up to 2016, however, my Department will continue to explore other possible funding streams to assist local authorities in the delivery of greenways for their county.

I would urge Wicklow Co Council to advance the Blessington Greenway proposal to the greatest degree possible from own resources, possibly having all design and statutory requirements in place in advance of the next funding so as to be well positioned to compete.

### **Urban Renewal Schemes**

207. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of proposals unveiled in the capital investment plan 2016-21 to develop and regenerate Waterford city's north quays and to support tourism in the region, the timeframe for their delivery; the estimated Exchequer funding foreseen for them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44293/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I do not have the details requested by the Deputy as these proposals are not included in the Capital Programme of the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport.

I understand, however, that in the context of finalising the capital plan entitled "Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021", there were discussions on proposals to develop and regenerate Waterford City North Quays. I understand that the capital plan contains an undertaking that support will be provided under that Exchequer Programme for the proposed development.

## **Rail Network Expansion**

208. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the DART interconnector project and the commitment to deliver it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44294/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I announced on 22 September that the DART Underground project will not proceed as currently designed but will be redesigned to provide a lower cost technical solution. The position in relation to this project remains as set out in my announcement at that time, the full text of which is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/press-releases/2015/statement-minister-donohoe-dart-underground>.

## **Public Transport**

209. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a health and safety matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44386/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The ownership and/or planning arrangements relating to the building and works referred to in the correspondence forwarded by the Deputy are not known to my Department. In relation to the bus stop in question (on the kerbside opposite Connolly Station), I recognise that this bus stop can be very busy with a considerable number of passengers waiting at peak points throughout the day and that the available kerb space is limited. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of bus stops and bus shelters so I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply in relation to the issues raised in relation to this particular bus stop.

The Deputy should advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within ten working days.

## **Value for Money Reviews**

210. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if any of the recommendations outlined in the 2015 value for money and policy review of the Arts Council have been implemented to date; if not, the timeline for such implementation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44364/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am committed to ensuring that findings of the report referred to by the Deputy are used to improve access to and support for the arts in Ireland. My Department will build on the already positive engagement with the Arts Council to ensure that the recommendations are delivered.

This will be done in close consultation with the Arts Council using the normal governance arrangements, including regular liaison meetings and the annual service level agreement, while respecting the statutory independence of the Council in making its funding decisions. Indeed, the Arts Council has already taken on board some of the key recommendations of the report in its recently published strategy "Making Great Art Work", which sets out its plans for leading the development of the arts in Ireland over the next decade. Further information on the strategy is available on the website of the Council at [www.artscouncil.ie](http://www.artscouncil.ie).

*Questions - Written Answers*

This 10 year strategy will be followed by a series of 3-year implementation plans in which the Arts Council has committed to incorporating many of the detailed recommendations of the value for money review.