

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 14, inclusive, answered orally.

Social Welfare Benefits

15. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection to elaborate on plans to extend social protection benefits to local councillors who are currently not entitled to claim social protection benefits despite the fact that they pay Pay Related Social Insurance contributions. [18559/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Since January 2011, public office holders pay PRSI at the Class K rate of 4% on their income as an office holder, provided that income exceeds €5,200 a year.

All public office holders are liable to pay the contribution regardless of age. Payment of Class K PRSI does not establish any social insurance entitlements.

Prior to the introduction of the Class K charge, all public office holders were exempt from PRSI on their income as a public office holder. Then, as now, they could establish and protect their social insurance entitlements based on their non-office holder activities or through the payment of Voluntary Contributions.

The Class K PRSI charge for public office holders was introduced on the basis that public office holders were a group who unlike most self-employed and employees did not pay a 4% contribution and so has a lower marginal rate of income tax/USC and PRSI.

I am currently examining whether changes are required to the basis on which class K is charged for councillors. There are a number of possible approaches including removing the Class K charge from councillor or bringing them into cover under Class S in line with the self-employed generally.

There are pros and cons to each approach. In particular, any changes to the current Class K arrangements will need to take into account the social insurance and occupational pension position of office holders generally.

I will be consulting with relevant Ministers on this issue. I also intend meeting with the representative body for councillors to discuss the options available.

Youth Unemployment Measures

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to tackle youth unemployment in 2016 given that this group is experiencing approximately 15% unemployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16125/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government's primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is through policies to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity.

Reflecting the impact of government policy, and the overall improvement in the labour market, youth unemployment has fallen substantially to 15% in May 2016. This compares with a figure of almost 21% just one year ago, in May 2015, and with a peak level of over 31% in May 2012.

Although the labour market situation is improving considerably as the recovery continues, the Government recognises the importance of a continued focus on measures to facilitate the young unemployed back into work. This is the rationale behind the Government's Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy (published January 2016) and the Youth Guarantee plan (published January 2014).

The key objective of Ireland's policy response to the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee is to help newly unemployed young people find and secure sustainable jobs. In this regard there is monthly engagement by case officers with young people to assist them to prepare, review and, if appropriate, revise personal progression plans. Where young people do not find work relatively quickly, additional supports may be offered, both through reserved places on existing employment and training schemes and through youth-specific measures. Most such offers (over 70%) are in existing further education or training programmes. Others are in existing community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús. Overall, over 19,100 opportunities were taken up on the relevant programmes in 2015.

Pathways to Work 2016-2020 continues to prioritise these measures for the young unemployed and further commits to a number of additional measures. These include increasing the share of workplace-based interventions for youth unemployed; ensuring that monthly engagement, at a minimum, is consistently applied and maintained; restructuring the First Steps programme; and implementing the Defence Forces Skills for Life programme.

I am confident these measures, and continuing economic recovery, will support further reductions in youth unemployment to add to the substantial improvements that have already been seen over the last few years.

Social Welfare Schemes

17. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider further rolling out the gateway scheme in a non-compulsory capacity to offer placements to unemployed persons in schools, hospitals and other public buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18703/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Pathways to Work includes a wide range of programmes and services - such as the Gateway initiative - to help jobseekers back to employment. Gateway provides work placements in local authorities for a period of 22 months for those who are unemployed for more than two years. While the majority of par-

ticipants are selected on a random basis by my Department, the opportunity for voluntary or self-selection is also available for 20% of places.

When the initiative was set up in 2013, long-term unemployment remained unacceptably high. While the economy recovered, the need for additional activation measures was recognised to assist the personal and social development of the long-term unemployed by providing short-term quality work opportunities. Work schemes placements are not available in schools or hospitals. As the Deputy is aware, these public service bodies receive funding directly from their respective Departments. For example, work in areas such as caretaking, teaching or other classroom duties are funded directly by the Department of Education and Skills. I have no plans to extend the Gateway scheme outside of the local government sector.

With the ongoing welcome reductions in the live register, I believe that a review of work schemes, including Gateway, will be necessary to ensure that the number and nature of schemes and the conditions governing participation continue to be appropriate. I will be considering all of these issues over the coming months.

Employment Support Services

18. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on whether it is appropriate for his Department to insist persons who are unemployed are sent on training courses to an organisation (details supplied) that professes itself to operate with a Christian ethos; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18772/16]

20. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he funds in any way an organisation (details supplied); and if so, if he is monitoring the success it has in helping persons currently unemployed achieve employment. [18771/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 18 and 20 together.

Job Clubs assist “job-ready” jobseekers to secure paid employment in the open labour market. Job Clubs provide formal workshops, one-to-one engagements, CV preparation and a ‘drop-in’ facility where jobseekers can get advice and share experiences with other jobseekers.

Community Employment is an employment programme which helps long-term unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. The programme assists them to enhance and develop both their technical and personal skills which can then be used in the workplace.

Job Clubs and CE schemes are operated by a variety of organisations from the not for profit and voluntary sector including community organisations and trade unions and in the case raised by the Deputy a church based group. The Department contracts with these organisations for a specific purpose and monitors their delivery of services.

For Jobs Clubs, the achievement of key performance indicators, as set out in the contract, are monitored on a regular basis. The key performance indicators are:

- Throughput, which is the number of job seekers who avail of the service, both formal workshops and ‘one to one’ sessions
- A target of 40% of jobseekers placed into employment from formal workshops
- A target of 40% of jobseekers placed into employment from One-to-One engagement

In addition, each Job Club is subject to an annual review.

The organisation in question has operated a Job Club and CE scheme successfully for many years. It is meeting its targets and the Department is not aware of any complaints regarding the approach it takes to providing services.

Question No. 19 answered with Question No. 6.

Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 18.

Social Welfare Benefits

21. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to address the adequacy of social protection rates given that a recent report by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice which found that in 2016 social protection did not provide an adequate income for 183 of the 214 urban household cases examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18692/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I welcome the recent publication of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice’s (VPSJ) report on the 2016 update of the expenditure and income required for a minimum essential standard of living.

After a series of challenging years, improvements for people in receipt of social welfare payments began in Budget 2015 and continued in Budget 2016. These improvements are reflected in the VPSJ report in that households with pre-school children moved into income adequacy (as defined in the report) as a result of increases in child benefit and the introduction of free GP care for children under the age of six. In addition, the increase in the weekly rate of payment for pensioners aged 66 and over moved pensioners living alone in receipt of the State pension contributory into income adequacy while pensioner couples on welfare payments have, per the research, levels of income in excess of the minimum standard for many years.

The analysis in the VPSJ report is a valuable contribution to our future consideration of appropriate levels of income supports and services. I note the importance of better services such as free GP care for younger children outlined in the report.

Analysis in the Social Inclusion Monitor, 2014, published by my Department shows the crucial role that Ireland’s social protection system plays in alleviating poverty, cushioning people from the worst effects of unemployment and ensuring an adequate standard of living.

Using Eurostat data for 2014, social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate in Ireland from 37.2% to 15.6%, thereby lifting over a fifth of the population out of income poverty. Ireland is the best performing EU member state in reducing poverty through social transfers. The poverty reduction effect at 58.9% is the highest in Europe, almost twice the EU average.

The latest poverty data are for 2014 and do not fully reflect the impact of the recovery in economic growth and employment. The unemployment rate in 2014 was 11.3%, down from a peak of 15% in 2012. Since then, the unemployment rate has fallen further, to 7.8% in May 2016. As unemployment is strongly linked to poverty, we can expect to see further decreases in basic deprivation and consistent poverty.

The Pathways to Work Strategy 2016-2020 sets out comprehensive plans to increase labour market participation and make work pay. It continues to prioritise the activation of the long-

term and young unemployed people, with supports provided through the network of Intreo offices.

A range of welfare and income tax measures were introduced in Budget 2016 to further incentivise work and improve living standards. The social impact assessment of the Budget shows greater rewards for working, with over 80% of the unemployed substantially better-off in work.

Looking ahead, the new Programme for a Partnership Government contains a number of significant commitments to enhance the welfare system in the years ahead. This includes increasing rent supplement limits by up to 15% and I note the impact of housing costs included in the VPSJ report. I hope to announce changes to the rent supplement scheme operated by my Department very shortly.

I want to make progress on the welfare commitments contained in the Programme for Government in the forthcoming Budget and will seek to do this within the additional resources which will be available.

I also look forward to engagement and input from my colleagues in the Oireachtas in the matter. In addition, I will be holding a Pre-Budget forum on July 22 next to which I have invited forty welfare representative organisations. I will listen carefully to the views of the organisations attending which will include the VPSJ.

Rural Social Scheme

22. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to expand and improve the rural social scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18705/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy is aware, the purpose of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support aimed at low-income farmers and fishermen in receipt of certain social welfare payments who are underemployed in their primary occupation. Persons are engaged for 19½ hours per week to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. The scheme currently provides work opportunities for around 2,600 participants and 130 supervisory staff. My Department has engaged 35 local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta to deliver the scheme.

The operation of the rural social scheme is governed by a comprehensive set of rules which are reviewed on an on-going basis. These may be modified in response to changes in the operating environment and the introduction of, or changes to, other schemes or other conditions that impact on the scheme's operations. The funds allocated for the scheme in 2016 amount to €44.3m. This level of funding does not allow for recruitment above the numbers stated above.

With the ongoing welcome economic recovery, the eligibility criteria for RSS will be kept under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and that the numbers on the scheme continue to be appropriate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme

23. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will reverse the changes made to farm assist with respect to income disregards given that it has had a

serious negative affect on the income levels of already struggling farming families; if he will carry out an analysis to assess the impact that the changes have made on those families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18688/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2016 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of almost €85 million on the farm assist scheme.

Changes introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013 brought farm assist into closer alignment with the jobseeker's allowance scheme's treatment of self-employed people. Farm families with the lowest income were least impacted by these changes as the headline rates of farm assist were maintained.

Farm assist customers continue to receive more beneficial treatment than other self-employed persons as payments received under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS), Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) or Special Area of Conservation (SAC) schemes are assessed separately from other farm income. Farm Assist remains a flexible payment and any farmer experiencing lower levels of income or cash-flow issues, due for example to bad weather, can ask his local INTREO office to review the level of means applying to his claim.

The Programme for Government contains the commitment to undertake a "Review of the Farm Assist Scheme, recognising the challenges facing farmers on low incomes". I have asked my officials to review the farm assist scheme from a policy and an administrative point of view.

Any changes to the farm assist scheme will have to be considered in a budgetary context.

One-Parent Family Payment

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is satisfied that the one-parent family payment scheme is adequate to meet the needs of recipients, particularly given recent figures from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul indicating that 59% of one-parent families experience material deprivation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18685/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department estimates spending €500 million on the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme in 2016. The scheme supports over 41,000 recipients and almost 74,300 children.

The figure quoted by St. Vincent de Paul is based on SILC data for 2014 indicating a basic deprivation rate for lone parents of 58.7%. This was a decrease of 4.5% on 2013. Research shows that being at work reduces the at-risk-of-poverty rate for lone parents by three-quarters, highlighting that the best way to tackle poverty among lone parents is to assist them into employment. The One Parent Family Payment (OFP) scheme is designed to support this.

The OFP means test is more generous than that of the jobseeker's allowance, with an income disregard of €90 per week and the balance assessed at 50%. In addition OFP can be paid concurrently with the family income supplement (FIS). These supports encourage lone parents to take up employment thereby helping to tackle poverty rates among these customers.

In Budget 2016 OFP recipients gained a 75% Christmas bonus, a €5 increase in Child Ben-

efit and an increase of €2.50 per week in fuel allowance. Those in receipt of FIS also benefitted from the increases to the FIS thresholds. Lone parents on JST also gained as a result of the closer alignment of the JST means test with the more generous OFP means test.

The social impact assessment of Budget 2016 showed an increase in average household incomes for working lone parents of 2%. Non-earning lone parents also fared above average, gaining 1.8%.

Programme for Government Initiatives

25. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will implement the fit-to-work scheme contained in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18794/16]

43. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the timeframe for the introduction of the fit-to-work programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18799/16]

47. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans for the fit-to-work programme for persons with illnesses or a disability as mentioned in the programme for Government; the assessment process he will use to determine if persons are fit for work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18707/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 25, 43 and 47 together.

The recently agreed programme for a partnership government provides for a range of actions that are designed to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. One of these actions is a proposal for the Departments of Health and Social Protection to work together to pursue a "Fit for Work" programme to support more people with an illness or disability to get back to work through early intervention.

The "Fit for Work" proposal is based on the findings of a pan European study, which examined the impact of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) on an individual's ability to work. The Irish module of this study was progressed by a coalition of key stakeholders and was led by Arthritis Ireland. The Irish College of General Practitioners, ICTU, IBEC and the Health & Safety Authority also contributed to the study.

Early interventions and developing return-to-work practices in the case of people with musculoskeletal incapacities is consistent with my Department's approach to illness/disability income support, which aims to reduce the number of people progressing to chronic disability and long-term social welfare dependency. To this end, my Department issued, in 2015, a set of certification guidelines for GPs, which sets out defined periods of recovery for common medical conditions, including MSDs.

The certification guidelines build on the "Renaissance" project which is an initiative of my Department since 2003. This has shown that early intervention reduced the incidence of progression from acute simple low back pain to chronic disability in 64% of claimants.

No decisions have been made as to how a "Fit for Work Programme" might be delivered and any specific proposals for such a programme requires further development and scoping out. I would like to assure the Deputy that any such proposals will be in line with the wealth of evidence which shows that generally employment is good for one's mental and physical health

and wellbeing and that, conversely, unemployment is damaging.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Waiting Times

26. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on the fact that persons applying for carer's allowance are waiting 19 weeks before their application is examined; the measures he is taking to deal with this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18762/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Unfortunately, there are currently delays in the processing of new carer's allowance (CA) applications. The Department is working hard to improve the processing times for CA applications. Additional resources have been applied to assist with these increases and overtime is being applied where appropriate. The continuing increase in the number of applications being received is a key factor in the Department's ability to improve these times. The issue of resources for the processing of CA applications is kept under constant review to ensure the number of applications pending and the processing times are reduced significantly over the coming months. While additional staff have been assigned to help deal with the increased volumes, due to the complexity of the decision-making process for the scheme, it takes some time for new staff to be fully trained and develop expertise.

It would be my hope that with the additional staff fully trained and in place the delays should decrease in the coming months. It is also important to note that, frequently, additional delays are outside the control of the Department and are caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

State Pension (Contributory)

27. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he might be in a position in the context of the programme for Government or otherwise, to examine the extent to which women for one reason or another are deprived of contributory pensions having retired from the workplace while raising their families or due to the marriage ban and who have made a major contribution to society in the course of their working lives; if he will re-examine their cases with a view to crediting them with sufficient contributions to qualify for the State or retirement pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18757/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The State pension contributory (SPC) is an old-age benefit, payable from age 66. Eligibility is not dependent upon the recipient retiring from employment, and there is no retirement pension.

The SPC is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement. Since 1961, when contributory

pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating pension entitlement. Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes. In this context, even if someone has only 10 years (520 weeks) of paid reckonable contributions between their 16th and 66th birthdays, they may qualify for a State pension (contributory), although the rate payable would vary depending on their circumstances.

The home-makers scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age (or caring for incapacitated people over that age) to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes, subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of their pension. The scheme does not involve the award of credits. The 2007 Green Paper on Pensions estimated an annual cost of backdating the Home-maker's scheme, at that time, as €150 million (if to 1973) or €160 million (if to 1953). However it described those estimates as "extremely tentative" and the passage of time means that the potential cost now could be significantly higher.

It is worth noting that the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund in 2012 confirmed that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the distributive nature of the Fund. For example, those with a yearly average of only 20 contributions (38% of the maximum) may qualify for 85% of the maximum rate. The Review also examined the changes in the contribution rules and the associated rates of payment which were to be introduced in September 2012. The Review found that those with lower earnings and those with shorter contribution histories still obtain the best value from their contributions.

The Deputy should also note that the 'marriage bar' describes a rule that existed in most of the public service and some private sector employments, where women were required to leave their employment upon marriage. This practice was abolished in 1973 when Ireland joined the EEC. As employees in the public service generally paid a reduced rate of PRSI, which provided no cover for the State pension (contributory), the marriage bar would not generally have impacted on State pension entitlement, as they would not have qualified for that payment had they remained in public sector employment. Instead, by impacting upon their continuing public service employment, the marriage bar's pension implications, where they exist, more generally relate to a person's eventual entitlement to a Public Service pension. Any questions regarding this issue are a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

Work is underway to replace the 'yearly average' system with a 'total contributions approach'. Under this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a working life will be more closely reflected in the rate of pension payment received. It is expected that the total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) for new pensioners from 2020, although that date is subject to change, as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical components to be put in place prior its implementation. The position of women who were home-makers will be considered very carefully in developing this reform.

Any significant measures that would increase the cost of the State pension would have to be considered in the context of Budget discussions.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Services Programme

28. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to accept new proposals to the community services programme; the criteria that would be used to select new proposals; if he has a preference for particular types of programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18798/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The community services programme (CSP) is designed to address gaps in the delivery of key local services, to tackle disadvantage and to ensure that community facilities are utilised. It provides valuable resourcing for service delivery undertaken by not-for-profit companies and co-operatives in communities around the country. Service providers must operate community or social enterprises that deliver tangible services and are capable of generating non-public revenues from their operations by way of charging fees, sales and/or fundraising. The programme is not intended to represent full funding for any operation.

At the end of 2015, 398 companies were directly supported by the CSP and received a contribution towards the wage costs of just over 1,700 employees. Funding of over €45m has been provided for the programme in 2016 which will maintain the current level of activity. Given the level of resources available and the number of companies currently supported, the Department has been unable to make an open call for new proposals to the programme for a number of years. However, from time to time and as resources allow, the Department does process new applications received from organisations that have expressed an interest in and are considered eligible under the programme. Any not-for-profit company wishing to be considered for the programme can send an expression of interest to the Department by email to *cspinfo@welfare.ie*.

Live Register Data

29. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide a breakdown of live register figures for persons living the Castleisland area in respect of his Department's Office in Tralee, as both towns and hinterlands are currently grouped in together; and if he agrees that by doing this local efforts to reduce the live register figures can be better targeted and measured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18686/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The provision of live register statistics is primarily the responsibility of the Central Statistics Office. It is not possible for the Department of Social Protection to accurately segregate Castleisland based customers from other customers served from our Tralee office for statistical purposes.

Services for the unemployed in Kerry are provided from a network of 7 offices in the county. These are Tralee, Killarney, Listowel, Cahirciveen, Kenmare, Dingle and Killorglin.

The people of Castleisland are served from our offices in Tralee, where they make their claims and sign on every 3 months. The department has an office at Tonnaghy House, Killarney Road, Castleisland from which activation services, community welfare services and meetings with inspectors are provided to Castleisland based customers.

Pension Provisions

30. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his priorities

regarding pension payments for the remaining six months of 2016; if he is reviewing pension entitlements for women who worked in the home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18695/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The State pension contributory is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement. Since 1961, when contributory pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating pension entitlement. Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes. In this context, even if someone has only 10 years (520 weeks) of paid reckonable contributions between their 16th and 66th birthdays, they may qualify for a State pension (contributory), although the rate payable would vary depending on their circumstances.

The home-makers scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age (or caring for incapacitated people over that age) to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes, subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of their pension. The scheme does not involve the award of credits. The 2007 Green Paper on Pensions estimated an annual cost of backdating the Home-maker's scheme, at that time, as €150 million (if to 1973) or €160 million (if to 1953). However it described those estimates as "extremely tentative" and the passage of time means that the potential cost now could be significantly higher.

It is worth noting that the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund in 2012 confirmed that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the distributive nature of the Fund. For example, those with a yearly average of only 20 contributions (38% of the maximum) may qualify for 85% of the maximum rate. The Review also examined the changes in the contribution rules and the associated rates of payment which were to be introduced in September 2012. The Review found that those with lower earnings and those with shorter contribution histories still obtain the best value from their contributions, amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

Work is underway to replace the 'yearly average' system with a 'total contributions approach'. Under this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a working life will be more closely reflected in the rate of pension payment received. It is expected that the total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) for new pensioners from 2020, although that date is subject to change, as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical components to be put in place prior its implementation. The position of women who were home-makers will be considered very carefully in developing this reform.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to "increase the State Pension and the Living Alone Allowance above the rate of inflation". Improvements to welfare weekly rates of payment, and any other significant measures that would increase the cost of the State pension, will be considered in the context of the next Budget.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

31. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is concerned that the administration, consultancy and actuarial services to the Central Remedial Clinic plan were all provided by the same organisation (details supplied) and that this organisation also owned the trustee of the plan, given the abrupt wind-up of a plan that the actuary had said in 2014 was on track to meet the minimum funding standard by 21 December 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18699/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy will appreciate that it is not appropriate for me to comment on matters relating to an individual pension scheme. In the first instance it is the responsibility of the trustees of a pension scheme to ensure compliance with the funding standard and other obligations set out in the Pensions Act 1990, as amended. The Pensions Authority is the regulatory body charged with the supervision of pension schemes and has the necessary powers under statute to investigate the conduct of a pension scheme should it become aware that the trustees of a scheme are not in compliance with the provisions of the Pensions Act. As the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC) is funded by the Health Service Executive under Section 38 of the Health Act 2004, the specific issues raised in relation to the administration, consultancy and actuarial services to the Central Remedial Clinic Pension Plan may be more appropriate for my colleague, the Minister for Health.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

32. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will reverse the lower social protection payment discrimination against young adults under 25 years of age given that those under 25 years of age often have exactly the same expenses for food, rent and other needs as those over 25 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18805/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In line with other EU and OECD jurisdictions where such measures feature in their social welfare systems, reduced rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009. These were further extended in subsequent budgets and now apply to jobseeker's allowance recipients under 26 years of age.

This is a targeted, non-discriminatory, measure aimed at protecting young people from welfare dependency by incentivising them to avail of education and training opportunities. If a jobseeker in receipt of the reduced jobseeker's allowance rate participates on an education or training programme they will receive a higher weekly payment of €160.

To guard against the development of welfare dependency I believe it is necessary to provide young jobseekers with a strong financial incentive to engage in education or training or to take up employment. If they do not improve their skills, it will be much more difficult for them to avail of job opportunities as the economy recovers and they are at risk of becoming long term unemployed from a young age.

Any change to the reduced rates of JA for people under 26 is a matter for Government to consider in a budgetary context.

Exceptional Needs Payments

33. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will introduce a payment to cover the additional costs for families in emergency accommodation such as travel and food; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18774/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under SWA, the Department of Social Protection can make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income.

An urgent needs payment (UNP) is a once-off payment made to persons who would not normally qualify for SWA but who have an urgent need which they cannot meet from their own resources or an alternative is not available at that time.

The Government has provided €30.3 million for the exceptional and urgent needs schemes in 2016. Where the need is of a recurring nature, a weekly or monthly supplement under the SWA scheme may be awarded, for example, to assist with the costs of additional travel arising for families in emergency accommodation.

I am satisfied with the range of discretionary supports available under the SWA schemes, and do not plan to introduce a specific payment for the additional costs for families in emergency accommodation. Families in these circumstances who are experiencing difficulties meeting additional costs should contact the Department's Community Welfare Service who may be able to offer assistance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment

34. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status issue of determination orders which were not catered for in the jobseeker's transition legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18693/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department previously indicated its intention to review the current maintenance and liable relative procedures since the introduction of the one-parent family payment reforms. Officials in my Department are actively working on the detailed review required to progress this issue. This is a complex area that is not limited to the potential extension of these provisions to the jobseeker's transitional payment and as a result the review will take time to complete. Any resultant changes would also require legislation.

The issue of maintenance payments is first and foremost a private matter for the persons concerned, and if they cannot resolve the problem, for the Courts through family law provisions.

The liability to maintain family provisions, contained in social welfare legislation, are separate to family law legislation. In every case where a one parent family payment is awarded, the Department seeks to trace the other parent (liable relative) to ascertain whether he/she is in a financial position to contribute towards the cost of this payment. This does not alter an individual's obligation to pay maintenance pursuant to a Court Order.

Currently, once the one-parent family payment recipient's youngest child reaches age 7, and their entitlement to the one-parent family payment ceases, the liability assessed under the liable relative provisions no longer applies. My Department advises the liable relative accordingly.

It is important to note that this does not affect any other maintenance arrangements that may be in place.

Social Welfare Benefits

35. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to introduce the working family payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18761/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Programme for Government contains commitments to improve the take-home pay of families on low-incomes. One of the most significant is the proposed ‘Working Family Payment’ targeted at low-income families. Over the course of the next six months, we will develop proposals for the new payment.

In doing so, we will be guided by two principles. First, that it should ensure that work pays and that no family is better off on welfare than at work, and second, though equally important, that it has a positive effect on child poverty.

Making Work Pay cannot just be about welfare payments and top-ups. It also has to tackle low pay. The Programme for Government also commits to supporting an increase in the minimum wage.

The Government will also strengthen the role of the Low Pay Commission to examine the gender pay gap and strengthen regulations on precarious work.

Labour Activation Measures

36. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the contracts awarded to United Kingdom companies for labour market activation schemes, such as JobsPlus and other private schemes not delivered within the auspices of the State, given the UK’s new relationship with the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18792/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Ireland’s Public Employment Service (PES) is managed by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and delivered directly by its own Intreo service as well as by contracted private companies under the JobPath service; the Local Employment Service (LES) and Job Clubs. The JobPath element of the service is a new approach to employment activation designed to support long-term unemployed people and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. I’m assuming that the Deputy’s question refers to the JobPath contracts.

My department has contracted 2 companies – Turas Nua Limited and Seetec Limited – to deliver JobPath services. Turas Nua is a joint venture between FRS Recruitment (based in Roscrea) and Working Links (a UK based provider of employment services). Turas Nua is registered in eland. Seetec is also a UK based company with a subsidiary company registered in eland. The JobPath contracts are subject to Irish law. The services provided by the companies are delivered in Ireland. Both companies have established a network of offices throughout the country and have recruited staff locally. There is nothing to suggest that a review of the contracts is warranted at this time in light of the outcome of the UK’s referendum on its membership of the European Union.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 11.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

38. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection why he is continuing to issue correspondence urging recipients under the jobseeker's benefit scheme to use financial institutions instead of using the post office to collect payments. [18700/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Programme for Government clearly states the Government's commitment to actively encouraging payments at Post Offices. While responsibility for An Post and the Post Office Network rests with my colleagues the Minister for Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources and the Minister for Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and Gaeltacht, I wish to highlight the size of my department's business with An Post which was over 38 million transactions across the network in 2015 at a cost of €54m to my department. I recently had a constructive meeting with the Irish Postmasters Union and will be meeting with Bobby Kerr next week.

My Department recently wrote to a cohort of jobseeker customers, who are classified as casual jobseekers, offering the option of payment to an account. These customers are in-work and claim a jobseekers payment for 2 to 3 days per week or work week on/week-off. They were paid by cheque each week due to the changing nature of their work/claiming patterns and the short turn-around time to issue and collect payments. This group of customers were not paid via post offices under the department's existing cash payments contract with An Post. The vast majority have responded and opted for payment to a bank account. No further letters are being issued to this group.

My Department has developed its payment capacity in respect of changing work and claiming patterns and is offering payments direct to accounts in financial institutions for casual Jobseeker customers. This is in line with departmental policy where the focus is on ensuring that in-work customers are paid by the most convenient method possible.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my department is not undertaking any measures which seek to actively influence customer choice in the manner of payment away from cash payments at the Post Office. In light of the Programme for Government commitment, staff in my Department will be formally advised that, when dealing with payment options, customers can choose between payment at the Post Office or by EFT, where possible.

Community Services Programme

39. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has increased the contribution to the community services programme in line with the increase in the national minimum wage; if the programmes have as of yet received this funding; if he can provide assurances that the contribution to the community service programmes will be increased in line with any future increases in the national minimum wage as set out in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18694/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The community services programme (CSP) provides financial support to community companies that provide revenue generating services of a social inclusion nature. Many of these companies are also funded from other sources and generate revenue from the public use of their facilities and services. The contribution from the CSP is towards the wage costs of the companies and is on the basis that

the services are not fully self-financing or the cost of provision would be prohibitive on users. My Department does not set the wage rate but requires the payment of appropriate wage rates, consistent with local norms.

In 2015, 398 companies received a contribution towards the wage costs of just over 1,700 employees. The funding is managed and administered on behalf of the Department by Pobal. A process has been put in place to assist and support existing funded companies who are not in a position to cover the increase in the minimum wage for 2016.

Pobal and the Department are currently examining these submissions and will be communicating with the companies in the coming weeks.

Bereavement Grant

40. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will restore the bereavement grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18759/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The overall concern in recent Budgets has been to protect primary social welfare rates. Abolishing the bereavement grant provided an annual saving of €22 million. This allowed the Department to protect other more fundamental social welfare payments such as the State pension.

There are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. These include a weekly-paid widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pensions, which are based on contributions or a means test, and a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension continue in payment for six weeks following a death. In Budget 2016, the Government increased the payment after death period to 12 weeks for carer's allowance. Guardian payments are available where someone cares for an orphaned child. A special funeral grant of €850 is paid where a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department of Social Protection may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure including help with funeral and burial expenses which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet from their weekly income. However, there is no automatic entitlement to such a payment. An ENP is a means tested payment payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme, taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances.

Any decision to restore the bereavement grant would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the ongoing delay in determining eligibility for some means-tested payments and appeals; if there has been a reduction in resources or a redeployment of staff given the reduced numbers of recipients under the jobseeker's allowance and jobseeker's benefit scheme; if he will examine the situation with a view to improving this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[18756/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department is working hard to improve the processing times for applications and the quality of decisions given. I can assure the Deputy that reducing waiting times on applications is a key priority.

As part of its programme of service delivery modernisation, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have been implemented by the Department in recent years. Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised.

In addition, staffing needs are regularly reviewed, having regard to workloads and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources. Where additional staffing is deployed to a scheme, such as has happened for carer's allowance, there is a time-lag involved while those staff are trained and build up expertise.

In general terms, processing times vary across schemes, depending on the differing qualification criteria. Schemes that require a high level of documentary evidence from the customer, particularly in the case of disability and caring schemes, can take longer to process. Similarly, means-tested payments also require more detailed investigation and interaction with the applicant, thereby lengthening the decision making process.

The improved decision making is reflected in the numbers of appeals received, which are down from a peak of 35,500 in 2012 to 25,000 in 2015. Processing times for appeals have also improved and seen a reduction of over 50% in the time taken to hear oral appeals; down from 52 weeks in 2011 to less than 24 weeks currently. The timeframe for summary decision has also fallen, from 25 weeks in 2011 to 17 weeks currently.

Finally, I want to assure the Deputy that the prompt and accurate processing of applications remains a key priority for me and my Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment

42. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reverse the changes made in 2015 to the one-parent family payment scheme which have considerably increased the financial burden on one-parent families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18684/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department will be spending an estimated €500 million on the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme in 2016. The scheme currently supports over 41,000 recipients and almost 74,300 children.

The reforms to the one-parent family payment scheme were introduced to address long-term social welfare income support dependency. The reforms provide enhanced access to the Department's Intreo service to lone parents once their youngest child turns 7 years of age. Access to the Department's range of education and employment support services is essential to facilitate lone parents to progress into sustainable employment and financial independence.

Budget 2016 contained a number of measures to support lone parents, including working lone parents. For example a lone parent on the jobseeker's transitional payment working 15 hours at the national minimum wage saw an increase in their overall income of just over €28

per week from approximately €306 in 2015 to €334 in 2016. This is as a result of the increase in the national minimum wage, the more generous means test on the jobseeker's transitional payment and the increase in fuel allowance. They also received an extra €5 per month per child as a result of the increase in child benefit.

It is important to highlight that the social impact assessment of Budget 2016 showed that budgetary policy would increase average household incomes for working lone parents by 2%. Non-earning lone parents also fared above average, gaining 1.8%.

Research shows that being at work reduces the at-risk-of-poverty rate for lone parents by three-quarters - compared to those who do not work. This highlights that the best way to tackle poverty among lone parents is to assist them into employment. Access to activation supports is therefore vital to achieve this objective and it is therefore imperative that my Department continues to engage with lone parents to assist them into employment.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 25.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

44. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection to provide the details of recent developments at the Blanchardstown Centre for the Unemployed community employment scheme including the efforts he has and will make to ensure it continues. [18701/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): On 26 May 2016, the Sponsor board of Blanchardstown Centre for the Unemployed formally advised the Department that it intended to discontinue its Community Employment (CE) Scheme.

On foot of this decision by the Sponsor Board, the Department has extended the scheme until 14/10/2016, by agreement with the Sponsor, to facilitate an orderly wind down of the Scheme.

It is the Department's intention that the Sponsor will retain all participants, who are eligible to remain on the Scheme, up until the Scheme closure date and that those participants who are eligible to remain on CE beyond 14/10/2015 will be facilitated to do so, with a transfer to other schemes in the Dublin 15 area where possible.

The Department will also examine the feasibility of transferring CE Supervisory staff to other Schemes within the Dublin 15 area.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme

45. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will raise the maximum rent supplement level to the levels recommended by the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness. [18773/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have announced earlier this week that revised increased rent limits under the rent supplement scheme will be introduced with effect from this Friday, 1 July 2016. I can assure the Deputy that supports in relation to housing and the provision of financial supports, including the rent supplement scheme currently

supporting some 55,000 recipients at a cost of €267 million in 2016, are a key priority as evidenced by the early implementation of this Government commitment.

In line with priority recommendations made in the report of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness, the review sets the rent limits in line with market rents which have been benchmarked at the 35th percentile of agreed rents as registered with the Residential Tenancies Board. Substantial levels of increases are being provided throughout the country, in both urban and rural areas, reflecting the local rental market conditions. Detail of the revised limits is available on the Department's website at www.welfare.ie.

The new limits, combined with the flexible approach provided by the Department's Community Welfare Service and the Tenancy Protection Service, operated by Threshold, will provide for increased security for persons seeking support under the rent supplement scheme. To date, over 8,700 persons at imminent risk of homelessness have been supported through increased payments under this flexible approach.

I would urge that any person experiencing increased rents or facing the threat of the loss of their tenancy under rent supplement to contact the Department's Community Welfare Service or the Threshold Tenancy Protection service without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 11.

Question No. 47 answered with Question No. 25.

Child Poverty

48. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to end child poverty as committed to by the Government under the national social target for poverty reduction now that the target has been revised by the Government from lifting 70,000 children out of poverty to 97,000 children by 2020. [18758/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Tackling poverty continues to be a priority for Government. The updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing poverty. The goals include a focus on early childhood development, youth exclusion, access to the labour market, migrant integration, social housing and affordable energy.

The national social target, set in 2010, is to reduce consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 and to 2% or less by 2020. The target is to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020. Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target is to lift a minimum of 200,000 people out of 'combined poverty' (i.e. at-risk-of-poverty and/or basic deprivation) by 2020.

These targets are now more challenging than when they were set, because poverty rates rose substantially during the recession from 2009 to 2013. However, the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) shows that for the first time since the crisis poverty levels stabilised in 2014. Consistent poverty decreased marginally to 8% while consistent poverty among children was 11.2%.

The full impact of the recovery is not yet reflected in these 2014 figures. Ireland has re-

turned to strong economic and employment growth. The unemployment rate in May 2016 was 7.8%, down from a peak of 15% in 2012. As unemployment is strongly linked to poverty, we can expect further decreases in poverty as the figures for 2015 and 2016 become available. It is envisaged that 2015 data will be released in November next.

Social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality. In 2014, social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate in Ireland from 37.2% to 15.6%, thereby lifting over a fifth of the population out of income poverty. Ireland is the best performing EU member state in reducing poverty through social transfers.

Continued economic recovery, together with government action to sustain and develop the social welfare system, will support further reductions in poverty over the coming years.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

49. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to address the high cost of insurance for companies delivering community employment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18797/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department has become aware in recent times of an increase in insurance premiums for community employment (CE) schemes. The main reasons cited for this is an increase in claims frequency over recent years by such schemes. In the first instance, the Department recommends that schemes seek alternative quotes to ensure they get value for money. In this context, schemes are asked to be especially mindful of their obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

Insurance premium costs are reimbursed from the CE materials budget for the scheme. While the Department is not in a position to allocate additional monies to the materials budget in 2016, if there is a scheme experiencing particular difficulties, the sponsor should contact their local DSP office and the matter will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Rates

50. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will restore social protection payments to pre-austerity levels adjusted for inflation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18804/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department's allocation for 2016, at over €19.625 billion, is almost €1.9 billion higher or 10.4% than expenditure in 2008. The cost of increasing all working age weekly payments to their 2009 equivalent rates is of the order of €0.9 billion.

After a series of challenging years, improvements for people in receipt of social welfare payments began in Budget 2015 and continued in Budget 2016. This included increases in the weekly rates of payment for pensioners and in the living alone allowance. In addition, new initiatives aimed at helping families were introduced, such as the back to work family dividend, and a paternity benefit scheme which will commence payment later this year.

Looking ahead, the new Programme for a Partnership Government contains a number of significant commitments to enhance the welfare system in the years ahead. This includes in-

creasing rent supplement limits as well as above-inflation increases for pensioners and in the living alone allowance. The Programme also supports rate increases for people with disabilities and carers. I was pleased to announce on Tuesday a range of increased limits for the Rent Supplement Scheme and these come into effect tomorrow, 1st July, 2016.

I also plan to extend social insurance benefits for the self-employed and to improve the treatment benefit scheme.

I want to make progress on these commitments in the forthcoming Budget and will seek to do this within the additional resources which will be available. I also look forward to engagement and input from my colleagues in the Oireachtas in the matter.

In addition, I will be holding a Pre-Budget forum on July 22 next to which I have invited forty welfare representative organisations. I will listen carefully to the views of the organisations attending.

Carer's Allowance Payments

51. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will abolish means testing for the carer's allowance, increase the respite care grant and replace the mobility allowance that ceased in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18802/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Carer's Allowance is a means-tested payment for carers who look after certain people in need of full-time care and attention on a full time basis. The means test for carers allowance has been significantly eased over the years, and is now one of the most generous means tests in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. Since April 2008, the income disregard has been €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn in the region of €35,400 and qualify for the maximum rate of carers allowance as well as the associated free travel and where resident with the recipient of care, household benefits.

Removing the means test would involve changing the nature of the Carer's Allowance scheme from a targeted income maintenance support for those most in need to a universal care support, in effect a payment for the provision of care rather than an income support payment for people on low incomes. The only eligibility criteria remaining would be that the care recipient required full-time care and that the carer was providing that care on a full time basis. Therefore, it is considered best that the Carer's Allowance means test should remain to ensure the most effective use of resources.

The Carer's Support Grant (CSG) (formerly known as the respite care grant) is a non-means tested, non-taxable annual payment paid to carers providing full-time care and attention to a care recipient. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that earlier this month, the grant, increased to €1,700 in Budget 2016, issued automatically, to carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance or Prescribed Relative's Allowance. The CSG is also payable, in certain circumstances, to other carers who may still apply through my Department's stand-alone RCG section. It is expected that in excess of 90,000 grants will be paid in 2016 at an estimated cost of €157.6 million.

Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Schemes in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes. In addition the Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory

provisions should be progressed by my colleague the Minister for Health.

Monthly payments continue to be made by the Health Service Executive to the 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time the scheme closed in 2013. Work is ongoing on the policy proposals to be brought to Government for the drafting of primary legislation for a new scheme. The Programme for a Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Work Placement Programmes

52. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Social Protection to consider the possibility of introducing more flexibility to the Tús work placement initiative scheme, including considering extending the period of time a person can avail of the scheme on case-by-case basis, with particular consideration given to a person's age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18689/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Tús was set up to provide short-term, work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. It is designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the labour market. In addition, as a community work placement scheme, Tús provides valuable services to local communities.

The twelve month duration of a Tús work placement was set to reflect a number of inter-related requirements. These include the need to ensure that the limited numbers of placements available are open to the maximum number of people on the live register, that weaknesses identified in other work programmes resulting from longer duration placements are not replicated and the need to ensure that the scheme fits with the objectives set out in the Government's activation policies including Pathways to Work. The existing placement period on Tús ensures that as many unemployed people as possible are able to benefit from the scheme and it is considered to be optimal in meeting the scheme's objectives.

With the welcome reductions in the live register, the eligibility criteria for work programmes, including Tús will continue to be monitored.

I want to thank the Deputy for offering his views on this issue yesterday evening at our meeting. As stated at that meeting all of the issues raised will be kept under review to ensure that the schemes remains fit for purpose and that the eligibility conditions continue to be appropriate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Reform

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps he will take to reform and improve pension governance, given several high profile pension scandals, including the abrupt winding up of the Central Remedial Clinic plan. [18698/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue of reform in the pension industry and improvements to pension governance is certainly a priority of my Department and will remain so going forward.

The Pensions Authority, under the Pensions Act 1990, is the regulator for occupational pension schemes in Ireland. The Authority provides a wide range of information and guidance to help and support trustees to comply with their regulatory obligations as set out under legislation. The Authority, in consultation with my Department, is continually assessing governance issues and making improvements in order to protect the members of pension schemes.

For example, the Authority has introduced trustee training obligations where trustees must receive training in governance matters to improve the quality of trusteeship. It further introduced a Pensions Data Register where since 2011 some one million data submissions have been processed through the system. The Authority has published a comprehensive series of model documents for trustees and administrators.

The Authority has outlined plans for improved pension scheme governance in their Statement of Strategy 2016-2020 where it intends to further target areas such as governance and obligations of stakeholders by providing codes of conduct and models of best practice.

On the wider EU level Ireland has implemented the first EU Directive 2003/41/EC on the Activities and Supervision of Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORPS). The IORPS Directive established the basic EU requirements for occupational pension funds and their supervision, including rules obliging schemes to invest their assets prudently. Ireland has also been centrally involved in discussions on the revision of the IORPS Directive - IORPS II. The IORPS II Directive is anticipated to be approved by member states shortly and Ireland will have a two year timescale to transpose the Directive into Irish law. It is anticipated that the proposed revisions, which Ireland supports, will provide for, and improve, minimum standards in the areas of scheme governance requirements, e.g., new structures for risk management and evaluation, internal audit, internal control and remuneration. It may also include new requirements regarding 'fit and proper' management standards in schemes and the safekeeping of assets. It is anticipated that final provisions will result in improvements in the areas of transparency, trustee competencies and scheme governance.

Specific issues in relation to the Central Remedial Clinic Plan may be more appropriate for my colleague, the Minister for Health, given that the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC) is funded by the Health Service Executive under Section 38 of the Health Act 2004.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Leave

54. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review policies regarding maternity leave in unique circumstances (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18939/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There is no provision under current legislation for additional Maternity Leave in either of the circumstances outlined in the details supplied. As the Deputy will be aware, a Family Leave Bill, the aim of which will be the consolidation into one piece of legislation the current provisions regarding maternity, adoptive, parental and carer's leave, is being drafted. The Bill when published will provide an opportunity to consider further improvements in the operation of these types of leave.

Schengen Agreement

55. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the possible impact on Ireland's opt-out from the Schengen Agreement when Britain completes its departure from the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19013/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Schengen 'acquis' is derived from the 1990 Schengen Convention to implement the 1985 Schengen Agreement. It allows for the abolition of internal border controls between the participating countries. It also includes provisions on a common policy on the temporary entry of persons, the harmonisation of external border controls, and cross-border police and judicial co-operation.

The relevant Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 recognised the fact that Ireland and the United Kingdom were not parties to the original Schengen Agreement and made provision to allow those Member States to accept some or all of its provisions.

Council Decision 2002/192/EC adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 28 February 2002, provided a basis for the partial implementation of the Schengen acquis in Ireland and remains in force.

Ireland has not applied to participate in those aspects of the Schengen acquis that provide for the abolition of internal border checks.

Ireland's participation in and right to 'opt-out' from the Schengen acquis is explicitly guaranteed by the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon.

Article 5 to Protocol (No 19) to the Lisbon Treaty provides that Ireland is deemed to be in any measures which build on those parts of the Schengen acquis in which it already participates unless, within three months of the publication of the proposal or initiative, it notifies the Council that it does not wish to take part in the measure.

It is Government policy to maintain the Common Travel Area with the UK and there is no proposal by any party to change Ireland's opt-out of the Schengen border arrangements.

Naturalisation Applications

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures to be followed to facilitate extended residency and preparation for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18887/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that we have no record of a De Facto Partner Permission application for the person concerned. For details on how to make an application for De Facto Partner Permission, please consult the INIS website at <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/De%20Facto%20Relationships>.

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

Naturalisation Applications

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Number 60 of 16 June 2016, the extent to which a case (details supplied) can be progressed towards naturalisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18891/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

Naturalisation Applications

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the determination of application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18892/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has made an application for a certificate of naturalisation. The processing of the application is ongoing with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence are satisfied. The records show that the person's permission to reside expired on 6 March 2016. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times and failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

Naturalisation Applications

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the determination of naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18893/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing, with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence are satisfied and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most cases are now generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Residency Permits

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to indicate the correct procedure to be followed to regularise the situation in the case of a person (details supplied); the procedures to be followed in such circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18894/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that following on from representations made by the Deputy that the person in question was granted permission to reside in the State. A letter to this effect issued on 12 April 2016. This letter specifically states that the person should register this permission with their local Immigration Registration Officer promptly and that failure to do so will be considered to constitute a failure to comply with the laws of the State and may constitute in itself a ground for revoking the permission to be in the State. It would appear that this person was outside the State when the INIS letter issued and was not in a position to register promptly.

The person in question should now write to Unit 2 Residence Division detailing the circumstances which prevented prompt registration, enclosing a full copy of their current passport. My officials in that Unit will then respond to them accordingly.

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

Residency Permits

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18895/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department (INIS) that it would appear that the person, using the name given by the Deputy, has never registered with the Garda National Immigration Bureau as required by law. If it is the case that the individual in question has remained in the State for the time period as stated, it would therefore seem that this person has remained here without permission. This is in breach of Section 5 (1) of the Immigration Act 2004 which provides that no non-Irish national may be in the State other than in accordance with the terms of any permission given to them by or on behalf of the Minister. Furthermore, Section 5(2) of the Act provides that a non Irish-national who is in the State in contravention of subsection (1) is for all purposes unlawfully present in the State.

It would seem that this person failed to meet the requirements of Section 9 of the Act of 2004 which sets out the obligations of non nationals in respect of registration and in particular to the requirements of Section 9(2)(b) of the Act of 2004.

A person who is found to be in breach of the requirements of the Immigration Act 2004 may have committed an offence. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable under section 13 of the Act of 2004 to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.

This person should now present themselves to their local Garda Station.

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

Residency Permits

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18896/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it would appear that the person, using the name given by the Deputy, has never registered with

the Garda National Immigration Bureau as required by law. If it is the case that the individual in question has remained in the State for the time period as stated, it would therefore seem that this person has remained here without permission. This is in breach of Section 5 (1) of the Immigration Act 2004 which provides that no non-Irish national may be in the State other than in accordance with the terms of any permission given to them by or on behalf of the Minister. Furthermore, Section 5(2) of the Act provides that a non Irish-national who is in the State in contravention of subsection (1) is for all purposes unlawfully present in the State.

It would seem that this person failed to meet the requirements of Section 9 of the Act of 2004 which sets out the obligations of non nationals in respect of registration and in particular to the requirements of Section 9(2)(b) of the Act of 2004.

A person who is found to be in breach of the requirements of the Immigration Act 2004 may have committed an offence. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable under section 13 of the Act of 2004 to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.

This person should now present themselves to their local Garda Station.

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

Residency Permits

63. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determination of residency status and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18897/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a decision issued to the person concerned on 28 June, 2016 in respect of an application for a residence card which falls to be considered under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015.

I am also informed that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. In that regard, I am advised that is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Deportation Orders

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will use her discretion to re-examine and review the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18899/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 11th March, 2005 and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State. The person concerned has been evading his Deportation Order since 2005.

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

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

Closed Circuit Television Systems

65. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the details of schemes to assist local authorities in providing closed circuit television for areas where there is anti-social behaviour and incidences of crime on a constant basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18995/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to provide investment in CCTV systems along the road network and in urban centres.

I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders. With this in mind, I instigated a review of the effectiveness of the Community CCTV Scheme in conjunction with the Garda authorities. The outcome of this review will inform the development of proposals, having due regard to the arrangements under the previous scheme, to give effect to the Programme commitment.

Garda Expenditure

66. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a company (details supplied) tendered for the contract for towing services for Dublin region gardaí in March 2016; and if the 36 month contract granted to this company in March 2013 was thus renewed. [19020/16]

67. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the charges companies who hold contracts for towing and storage services for An Garda

Síochána charge; and if any of these fees revert to the State. [19021/16]

68. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures An Garda Síochána has in place in respect of recovering the cost of unpaid storage fees for cars that have been towed away. [19022/16]

69. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to request An Garda Commissioner to provide details of the safeguards An Garda Síochána has in place in respect of private information it holds in respect of persons whose vehicles have been towed and put into storage. [19023/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 to 69, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, I, as Minister, have no function in relation to contractual arrangements entered into by an Garda Síochána with third parties. I am informed by the Garda authorities that towing management contracts are advertised to the market by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) to provide an outsourced solution to assist An Garda Síochána in recovering, storing and the associated administrative work in managing seized vehicles.

I am further informed that there are six towing contracts in place in the Dublin Metropolitan Region. These contracts were awarded following the appropriate tender processes, including advertising in the EU Official Journals (OJEU). The most recent DMR tender was for Dublin West and it was put in place by the OGP following an OJEU tender process in 2015. The previous contract, which was held by Gannon City Recovery, was extended to 6 March 2016 to facilitate the OGP tender process. The new contract commenced on 7 March 2016 and expires on 6 March 2017. It can be extended on a yearly basis up to a maximum of four years. The contractor is Gannon City Recovery.

No maximum prices are set by the OGP/An Garda Síochána in relation to daily storage of vehicles that have been seized. This is a matter for the contractor concerned. The onus is on owners to reclaim their vehicles once they are cleared by An Garda Síochána, thus minimising any additional charges that they might incur.

With regard to the Deputy's query in relation to private information held by An Garda Síochána, the Deputy will be aware that An Garda Síochána is subject to the provisions of Data Protection legislation and has a comprehensive code of practice in place in this regard.

Garda Recruitment

70. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her estimate of the number of new gardaí that will need to be recruited over the next five years to bring the force to a strength of 15,000, taking into account the likely number of retirements or departures from the force. [19046/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

As the Deputy will be aware, when the financial crisis hit, the Government of the time introduced a moratorium on recruitment and the four year National Recovery Plan, published in 2010, envisaged a steady reduction in Garda numbers. Thankfully, in a recovering economy,

we were able to reopen the Garda College in September 2014, and a total of 851 Garda trainees have been recruited with a further 300 planned to be recruited during the remainder of this year. So far 463 of the new Garda trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties nationwide. Another 76 will attest on the 7 July with 150 more to attest in November.

The Programme for Government, “A Programme for a Partnership Government” commits to continuing the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000. Taking account of projected retirements of around 300 this year, the current rate of recruitment will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,000 mark this year. We must, I believe, endeavour to make more rapid progress than this to reach our target of 15,000 and I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to increasing the planned annual intake this year and in coming years.

In accelerating recruitment it is, of course, essential to ensure that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to train larger numbers without any diminution in the quality of its training programme, and to provide appropriate supervision and support to newly qualified Gardaí to ensure that victims, and the public generally, are well served by their policing service. My officials are also engaging with Garda management as a matter of priority in relation to the preparation of a recruitment plan for the next five years that will deliver increased numbers of Gardaí without any compromise on the quality of those recruited or the training programme. I expect to be in position to bring my proposals in this regard to Government before the Summer.

Customs and Excise Controls

71. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance why military personnel who disembarked from a plane of the United States of America (details supplied) on 26 June 2016 at Shannon Airport with military rucksacks and travelled to a Limerick city hotel did not go through customs prior to leaving the airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19017/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the necessary Customs formalities were complied with in the instance referred to by the Deputy.

Property Tax Exemptions

72. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the status of local property tax for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18821/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 does not provide for any exemption from LPT in the circumstances outlined by the Deputy.

However, Part 12 of the LPT Act provides for deferral and partial deferral (50%) options that can apply to liable property owners under certain conditions including, income level, hardship, personal insolvency arrangements and where a personal representative is in place on behalf of a deceased person. The deferred tax remains as a charge on the property and must be paid before a sale or transfer can be completed. Interest is charged on the deferred amount at a rate of 4% per annum and the duration of the relief normally coincides with the valuation period (1 May 2013 to 31 October 2019).

Revenue has advised me that it made direct contact with the person in question on foot of the Deputy’s Question to offer advice in regard to the general operation of LPT and in particular

to explain how the deferral system operates. The person opted to defer her liabilities on foot of her income level and the Revenue official assisted her in completing the necessary updates to her LPT account. The person was also provided with a direct telephone contact number in case she has any further queries or concerns.

Tax Rebates

73. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance when he will issue a tax rebate to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18914/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the tax repayment was delayed because the person concerned had not provided details of a bank account to which the repayment could be made. Those details have now been provided and the repayment will be made directly to the nominated bank account very shortly.

Insurance Industry

74. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance further to the ongoing review of insurance policy in his Department if he will set out the consideration he is affording to the massive premia hikes faced by the small and medium-sized enterprise sector; the actions he is taking to urgently address this problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18917/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am concerned that there should be a stable insurance sector and that the risks to policyholders and to the wider financial system are limited. An adequately-reserved, cost-competitive insurance sector is a vital component of economic activity and financial stability.

The current high cost of insurance is a concern for the Government. While the provision and pricing of insurance policies is a commercial matter for insurance companies, this does not preclude the Government from introducing measures which may, in the longer term, lead to a better claims environment. This is a complex matter to address and it involves a number of Government Departments, State Bodies and private sector organisations. I have established a task force in my Department to undertake a Review of Policy in the Insurance Sector.

The first phase of the work of the task force is a Review of the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation. This is being carried out jointly with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. My colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and I expect to receive this first report this week.

Separately, the broader work of the task force includes an examination of the factors underlying the recent increases in the cost of motor insurance but also including other aspects of insurance policy such as the availability of insurance at reasonable cost to particular businesses and sectors of the community which are reported to be having problems in this regard.

This work of the task force is being undertaken in consultation with the Central Bank of Ireland, other Government Departments, Agencies and interested bodies, including the insurance industry, as represented by Insurance Ireland. The aim of the review is to recommend measures to improve the functioning and regulation of the insurance sector in Ireland, identifying the issues that can be addressed on a more immediate basis and those that need more long-term policy implementation. This work will be completed over the coming months.

Budget Targets

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the revised fiscal space in net terms for each of the years from 2017 to 2021 arising from the British referendum outcome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18948/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The impact of the UK (United Kingdom) exit from the European Union (EU) is currently difficult to ascertain given the volatility of the current fiscal and political sphere. Until Article 50 Lisbon Treaty is invoked by the UK and negotiations on the terms of their interaction with the EU, and with Ireland, begin it remains to be seen precisely what the impact on the UK economy will be in the medium to long term. Much will depend on the new arrangements, including on trade, that are yet to be agreed between the UK and the EU.

The fiscal space of just under €1 billion for 2017 set out in the Summer Economic Statement (SES) is not expected to change materially as almost all the factors used to calculate it under the expenditure benchmark are included the European Commission's 2016 Spring Economic Forecast. Utilisation of this fiscal space in 2017 is consistent with compliance with the balanced budget rule based on the forecasts in the SES and this will be checked again in the forecasts to be prepared for the Budget in October.

For the ensuing years, 2018-2021, the impact is difficult to estimate given that the fiscal space estimations are based on Department of Finance projections for the GDP deflators, reference rates and convergence margins. Any negative impact on the UK economy in the medium term could have potential implications for the actual variables used to calculate the fiscal space in these years. The actual final calculation for each year using the expenditure benchmark methodology will use the factors set out in the European Commission's Spring Forecasts of the previous year.

My Department's next official forecasts will be provided in October in the context of the Budget. The prudent economic and fiscal policies implemented over recent years have placed the State in a stronger position to weather any prolonged economic shock that may be caused by this result.

Tax Clearance Certificates

76. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) can receive a statement confirming that the person has no tax liabilities for the purpose of the processing of a medical card application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18955/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that as a number of tax returns are outstanding from the person concerned, a tax clearance certificate will not be issued. The person concerned should contact his local Revenue District with a view to regularising matters following which an application for tax clearance can be considered.

Budget Measures

77. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the impact the recent decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union will have on funding allocations in budget 2017 with respect to incentivising domestic entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprise start-ups through taxation measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[18991/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As recognised by the Taoiseach on 27 June, the UK has not for now left the EU. The UK remains a full member until such time as it formally leaves, following the invoking of Article 50 and subsequent negotiations. These negotiations may not begin for some time. In the meantime, it is important that people are aware that until the UK leaves the EU, it remains a full member with its existing rights and obligations. There will be no early change to the free flow of people, goods and services between our islands.

In relation to the available fiscal space for 2017, the position is that the Summer Economic Statement (SES) 2016, set out a macroeconomic assessment of the impact of a UK decision to leave the European Union. It should be noted that the fiscal space of just under €1 billion for 2017, as set out in the SES, is not expected to change significantly. This is due to the fact that the factors used to calculate the fiscal space are largely finalised at this stage. My Department's next official forecasts will be in October in the context of the Budget. These will set out updated estimates of economic growth, the public finances and fiscal space.

In the context of the current ambitious package of reform measures relating to enhanced involvement of the Oireachtas in budget scrutiny, the Government is committed to engaging with the Oireachtas as a partner throughout the budgetary and Finance Bill processes. I look forward to seeing the results of that engagement. However, the Deputy will appreciate that, as has been longstanding practice, any tax measures that may be introduced cannot be expected to be announced before Budget Day.

Economic Statements

78. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will release an updated version of the summer statement, given Britain voting to leave the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18996/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Summer Economic Statement (SES), published last week, included a macroeconomic assessment of the impact of a UK decision to leave the European Union. This decision will have an adverse impact on the growth outlook. In this context, the more traditional exporting sectors are particularly exposed, especially to bilateral euro sterling exchange rate developments. My Department's initial estimate, based on the assessment in the SES, is that GDP growth could be about 0.5% lower than projected in 2017.

The fiscal space of just under €1 billion for 2017 set out in the Summer Economic Statement is not expected to change very much because the factors used to calculate it are largely fixed at this stage.

Looking to 2018 and beyond, the estimates of fiscal space depend on the impact on our macroeconomic and fiscal position. At this point, it is far too early to speculate on the potential impacts.

As noted in the Summer Economic Statement, the Department of Finance will prepare a full macroeconomic projection in advance of Budget 2017 in October, and this will include updated estimates of economic growth, the public finances and the fiscal space, taking account of developments up to that time, including the UK decision.

However, it is important to note that there is uncertainty around many aspects of the impact

of the UK decision, and particularly the economic and fiscal impact.

As you are aware, a whole-of-government contingency framework has been put in place in response to the UK vote, within which key policy issues, including economic developments, will continue to be tracked and the Budget 2017 forecasts will be a critical part of that process.

Finally, the prudent economic and fiscal policies implemented over recent years have placed Ireland in a stronger position to weather this shock. Our economy is growing strongly, employment has increased for 14 successive quarters, unemployment has fallen to 7.8%, the deficit this year is expected to be 0.9%, and the debt has fallen from a peak of 120% to an expected 88% at the end of this year. The Government is confident that our economy is resilient and that appropriate economic and fiscal policies are in place to deal with the challenges arising.

Economic Statements

79. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance for details on how water charges were treated in the summer statement financials over the five year period 2017 to 2021 with regard to revenue projections, expenditure projections, fiscal space projections and allocations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18997/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The figures in Table 3 on page 16 of the SES illustrated the impact of the use of the fiscal space estimated for the period 2017-2021 on the revised SPU fiscal position. The revised SPU fiscal position and indicative fiscal space is detailed in Annex 1 of the SES.

This fiscal space includes the full impact of Irish Water operating and capital expenditure estimates as based on the Irish Water Business plan.

No decision has been made as to the charging structure of Irish Water in the period 2017-2021 so in the context of the no policy-change basis of the revised SPU fiscal position no revisions were made to the revenue projections for Irish Water over the period 2017-2021.

Any future decisions on Irish Water's future charging model will be made in the context of the report of the Expert Commission on Domestic Public Water Services and will be incorporated in forecasts by this Department.

Stock Exchange

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the change in the value of each of the Irish bank shares the State owns from the opening of markets on 24 June 2016, when the impact of the British referendum result took effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19004/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Over the four trading days from Friday morning the 24th June to close of business on Wednesday 29th June, the share price of Bank of Ireland fell by 30% and Permanent TSB over 26% as the market reflected the impact of the UK Referendum result on the UK, Irish and European economies. Over the same period, leading UK banks have fallen by a range of 23%-28% while the European bank sector has fallen by 17%. Clearly these moves suggest investors believe bank profitability in the coming years will be materially impacted. Indeed analysts have already moved to downgrade their earnings projections for UK and Irish banks and companies in many other sectors too.

Given our substantial financial interest in the banking sector, these developments are disappointing and we are closely monitoring events as they evolve. As I indicated in recent PQ responses, the current volatility in the stock markets are such that I expected that any market event involving our shares in the banks was more likely in 2017 than this year. As such the State had no plans to dispose of any of its bank shares in the coming months and no sale proceeds are included in the 2016 budget, so there is no immediate impact on our finances. In fact next month AIB is still scheduled to redeem its Contingent Capital Note of €1.6bn plus accrued interest.

As part of their day-to-day role, officials in the Shareholding Management Unit will continue to monitor market conditions, review all strategic options relating to our banking investments and will consider from time to time whether the sale of shares would be beneficial for the State. Having said that I have no current plans to sell shares in any of the banks, notwithstanding the flexibility to do so within the Programme for Government.

Note: AIB's share price has fallen by circa 13% over the same period though the very small free float involved means this is not a reliable indicator of the change in the bank's underlying value.

Eurozone Issues

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the United Kingdom financial institutions who passport their services into Ireland under European Economic Area rules; the potential implications for these activities from the United Kingdom leaving the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19005/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The result of the Referendum means that the people of the UK have declared their wish to leave the EU. It is important to be clear: the UK has not for now left the EU. Until the Article 50 negotiations are concluded the UK remains a full Member, with all of its existing rights and obligations. The result marks the beginning of a new phase of negotiated withdrawal one that is expected to take place over at least two years and possibly longer. Separate negotiations on the new relationship between the UK and the EU will also take place, if that is what the UK seeks. The key priority for Government is to protect and promote Ireland's interests to the greatest extent possible. Based on the analysis carried out by all Departments, including the Department of Finance, a framework has been developed on a whole of Government basis to identify contingencies that may arise in the days, weeks and months that follow the outcome of the UK referendum.

In its latest Macro Financial Review (MFR) the Central Bank noted that the effects on the profitability and business models of Irish-based financial institutions, including banks and insurers, could be material and could vary across firms and sectors depending on the nature of the new relationship agreed between the UK and EU and their exposure to UK markets. The Central Bank has been engaging with firms across all parts of the financial sector, with a particular focus on the firms with the largest UK exposures, to ensure they are prepared for risks associated with the UK leaving the European Union.

In terms of the implications of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union on the passporting regime, it is unclear at this time and will depend on the negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU. The situation is complex as financial institutions in Ireland can passport services to the UK while financial institutions in the UK can passport services into Ireland. The range of possible new arrangements is wide and it is too early to speculate at this stage.

The Central Bank maintains lists of firms which have notified it of the intention to offer services in Ireland through a passporting arrangement. These lists are available at <http://registers.centralbank.ie/> and are maintained by industry sector (i.e. Credit Institutions, Insurance Undertakings etc.).

In that MFR it was noted that an exit from the EU could have implications for insurance firms located in Ireland conducting business in the UK market, while the possible removal of UK competitors may benefit other firms operating in Ireland. Premium volumes written by life and non-life firms on an “outward” and “inward” basis between Ireland and the UK in 2014 were €3.8 billion and €8.6 billion, respectively.

The Department of Finance and the Central Bank do engage regularly on material issues relevant to the financial services sector and will continue to do so as the process of withdrawal progresses.

Banking Operations

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the implications for Allied Irish Banks’ activities in the United Kingdom if that country is outside the European Economic Area; the proportion of Allied Irish Banks’ revenues which arise in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19006/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have received the following response from AIB in response to the Deputy’s question:

“Ahead of the United Kingdom’s referendum on whether to remain in or leave the European Union AIB engaged in a comprehensive programme of customer engagement on the risks of Brexit and the potential impact of Brexit on the economy and financial markets. This programme was designed to ensure that the bank’s customers were well prepared if the UK voted to leave the EU.

AIB notes that while the UK has now voted to leave the EU, the British government has yet to give effect to this decision. The precise details of how and when the voters’ decision is implemented in practice are not entirely clear, but there will be a minimum two-year negotiation period before any UK exit from the EU.

AIB’s UK activities accounted for c. 12% of the bank’s profit and revenue for 2015 (page 250 of AIB’s 2015 Annual Financial Report). In the meantime, it is business as usual for AIB’s customers in both the Republic of Ireland and the UK”.

Banking Sector

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the implications for Bank of Ireland’s activities in the United Kingdom, if that country is outside the European Economic Area; the proportion of Bank of Ireland’s revenues which arise in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19007/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can confirm for the Deputy that I have received the following response from Bank of Ireland:

For the benefit of the Deputy, I would also highlight Page 205 of the bank’s annual report which sets out data relating to the individual operating segments of the bank for year ended

2015.

As per this data, total operating income for Retail UK was €715m which equated to 22% of total group operating income. I should also point out however, that additional operating income relating to other group activities in the UK was also included under the Corporate and Treasury segment but this was not separately disclosed.

The Bank of Ireland Annual Report can be found at the following link: <https://investorrelations.bankofireland.com/wp-content/assets/BOI-Annual-Report-2015.pdf>

Banking Sector

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the implications for Permanent TSB's activities in the United Kingdom, if that country is outside the European Economic Area; the proportion of Permanent TSB's revenues which arise in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19008/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Permanent TSB ("PTSB") has informed me that it no longer transacts new business in the UK and has been deleveraging its non-core UK based mortgage business. It has made significant progress in this regard, having sold GBP £2.5bn of UK Mortgages in 2015 in conjunction with its UK mortgage servicing platform, Capital Home Loans Limited ("CHL"). PTSB owns a further GBP £2.5bn (as at 31 May 2016) of UK Mortgages which it also considers to be non-core and which it intends to deleverage. PTSB has funding arrangements in place to manage currency risk, with approximately 80% of the Group's GBP assets being directly funded in GBP.

Of PTSB's interest income for the last six months of 2015 approximately 10% was generated by the residual UK mortgage portfolio. Further detail on PTSB's UK portfolio is available in the Permanent TSB 2015 Annual Report.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland can accelerate its lending activities, focusing in particular on assisting small and medium-sized enterprises exporting to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19009/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) began lending in March 2015. Its goal is to increase the availability of funding to SMEs, at a lower cost and on more flexible terms, than has been available in recent times on the Irish Market. The SBCI channels its funds through lending partners known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has three bank and three non-bank on-lending partners.

To the end of December 2015, in its first nine months of operation, the SBCI has lent almost €172 million to c.4,600 SMEs, with broad coverage across various business sectors and regions. The SBCI publishes results biannually and will publish results for the first half of this year in July 2016.

The level of lending to SMEs is to a large degree driven by market demand, and the SBCI is engaged with a range of potential new on-lenders to broaden its distribution capability and market coverage. In doing so, the SBCI is seeking to deliver a wide variety of types of funding including those that support export orientated SMEs.

The SBCI will announce a new on-lender in the coming week, who will use SBCI funds to provide working capital finance products to the Irish SME market. Discussions are progressing well with additional on-lenders, and it is expected that further announcements may be made in the coming months.

It may also interest the Deputy to note that an interagency Export Finance Working Group with membership drawn from my Department, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, Enterprise Ireland, ISIF and the SBCI is currently progressing the development of a pilot financial product that would support the exporting activity of Irish SMEs.

In relation to the UK Referendum on membership of the EU, my officials met with multiple stakeholders, including the banks, to discuss preparatory actions for the outcome to the Referendum. I understand that banks have put in place resources to support their SME customers who could be affected including:

- Dedicated information resources on Brexit (i.e. teleconferences, websites, questions and answers documents);

- Daily market commentaries distributed to SMEs; and

- Additional treasury and support staff to answer customer queries.

Following the outcome of the UK Referendum on membership of the EU, I expect that the banking sector will:

- Continue their high levels of customer engagement, particularly in relation to treasury and foreign exchange matters;

- Engage directly with Enterprise Ireland in relation to supporting exporting SMEs; and

- Make available finance to viable business cases to support SMEs entering new export markets outside the UK.

Intensive contacts will continue between State bodies and the banks so as to respond to developments in the coming weeks and months. Indeed, the Heads of Business Banking in AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank have met with the Board of Enterprise Ireland to discuss the potential impact of Brexit on exporters and SMEs.

Tax Collection Forecasts

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the projected change in tax revenue in 2018 and 2019 arising from the British referendum result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19012/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As set out in the macroeconomic assessment of a UK decision to leave the European Union in the Summer Economic Statement 2016, there will be an adverse impact on the growth outlook. However, with regard to the tax revenue forecasts for 2018 and 2019, as the Deputy will appreciate, at this point, it is far too early to speculate on the potential impacts. My Department's next official forecasts will be in October in the context of the Budget. These will set out updated estimates of economic growth, the public finances and fiscal space.

Questions - Written Answers
IFSC Clearing House Group

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the International Financial Services Centre has the necessary physical infrastructure and other resources to benefit from any re-location of financial services funds from the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19014/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government's IFS 2020 strategy is a framework in which both public and private stakeholders will work to ensure the further growth and development of the international financial services (IFS) sector in Ireland. The IFS sector now employs about 38,000 people across over 400 companies with a 10,000 of those employed outside Dublin.

The strategy seeks to ensure that we protect the progress that has been made but to also to develop further as we recognise that we cannot stand still. In terms of vision for the Strategy we want Ireland to be recognised as a global location of choice for specialised international financial services, building on our strengths in talent, technology, innovation and excellent client service while focusing on capturing on new opportunities in a changing market and embracing the highest forms of governance.

The Government will continue to remain focused on the successful implementation of the IFS 2020 strategy and the development of a robust and sustainable financial services sector in Ireland. As we have always done, we will continue to market Ireland across the globe as the number one location for foreign direct investment.

In relation to the physical infrastructure, the capabilities and associated infrastructure to support international financial services activity now extends well beyond the original boundaries of the IFSC. For example, the funds industry employs people in over ten counties around Ireland. Other financial services companies and firms are also located throughout Dublin and in other centres around the country so there are a range of options for firms considering Ireland as a base.

Currently about 3.5 million square feet of office space is under construction. It should also be noted that of this 3.5 million square feet, at least 1 million square foot is pre-let with legal contracts exchanged with a further 600k square feet formally reserved.

Annual office take up last year was c. 2.6 million square feet and expected take up in 2016 estimated at around 2million square feet.

Figures provided by the IDA forecast that there is approximately 5.2 million square feet of grade A office space due for delivery by end of 2018.

We will continue, through the IDA, to promote the attractiveness of Ireland as a location of choice for investment and talent. This is based on our unique competitive strengths and our position as an English-speaking country in Europe.

Naturally, there may be new opportunities arising for Ireland in certain sectors, many of which already form part of the IDA's marketing strategy. We will, for example, continue to implement our clear strategy for driving growth in the financial services sector and we will maximise any opportunities that might arise.

My Department and the Central Bank had considered the potential financial regulatory resource implications of a UK vote to leave the EU. At present, the Central Bank Commission is satisfied that it has the resources required to regulate the financial sector. I am confident based

on the Central Bank's ability to significantly expand its regulatory resources in the last seven years that it is capable of doing so again in order to properly supervise and regulate additional financial service activity that may relocate to Ireland.

Pensions Data

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of approved retirement funds in operation; the value of funds held in these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19015/16]

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the value of pension buy-out bonds in the Irish markets that may now qualify for approved retirement fund options; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19016/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 89 together.

Approved Retirement Funds (ARFs) are investment vehicles into which the proceeds of the pension savings of the self-employed, business owners and any individual with Defined Contribution pension arrangements may be invested at retirement, subject to conditions. Beneficial ownership of the assets in an ARF vests in the individual owner of the ARF and, among other conditions, the ARF must be managed by an independent Qualifying Fund Manager. The ARF option is an alternative to annuity purchase and essentially gives control over post-retirement income to those individuals who, generally, have borne the investment risk on their funds in the pension growth phase.

A Buy-out Bond, otherwise known as a Personal Retirement Bond, is a single premium pension policy into which an existing pension fund or the cash value of an accrued pension benefit can be transferred from a Defined Contribution (DC) or Defined Benefit (DB) occupational pension scheme. Buy-out Bonds are generally effected by the trustees of a scheme on behalf of a scheme member when the scheme member is leaving the employment of the scheme-sponsor or when the scheme is being wound-up, in lieu of providing the member with a preserved retirement benefit under the scheme. They are also availed of in circumstances where the scheme member's pension entitlements are being split under the terms of a pension adjustment order. Buy-out Bonds are usually provided and administered by life assurance companies.

There is no requirement on Qualifying Fund Managers or on life assurance companies to provide my Department or the Revenue Commissioners with detailed data of the kind requested in the questions in relation to ARFs or Buy-Out Bonds. I am, therefore, not in a position to supply the Deputy with information on the current numbers or values of such products.

I am assuming that the questions raised by the Deputy have been prompted by the change which I announced last week whereby the holders of Buy-out Bonds whose funds originate from DB schemes will from now on have access to the ARF option. Buy-out Bonds whose transfer values originate from DB schemes have not had access to the ARF option up to now and the only option available to the holder of a Bond in those circumstances has been to purchase a pension annuity with the remaining funds in the Bond (after taking the permissible tax-free retirement lump sum). Buy-out Bonds are DC pension products, however, and whether funded originally from DB or DC pension schemes, the holders of such Bonds bear the investment risk on their funds in the same way as holders of other DC pension savings who would have access to the ARF option as well as the annuity purchase option at retirement.

The ARF option is not available to the main benefits paid from DB pension schemes, gener-

ally, since it was never intended or considered a necessary requirement for such schemes which pay out a specified pension benefit. This position remains unchanged.

My decision to change the policy on ARF access for the holders of Buy-out Bonds whose funds originate from DB schemes has been particularly informed by the increasing frequency over recent years of the wind-up of DB pension schemes, with the members of such schemes having no choice in many cases but to accept a transfer to a Buy-out Bond and inevitable annuity purchase on retirement. The policy change will be of particular benefit to individuals in this situation. The Deputy should note that there is no Exchequer cost involved as a result of this change.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

90. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way a new action plan will affect a school from applying for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools status under proposals from his Department's action plans for disadvantage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18837/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the review of the DEIS programme is currently underway and it is my intention that a New Action Plan Educational Inclusion will be published by the end of this year. The current DEIS Action Plan, was published in 2005 and now provides support to 836 schools serving a total of 169,500 pupils. The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the identification process for the inclusion of schools in the programme, the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and agencies, in order to improve effectiveness. As part of the review, targeted measures in a number of key areas will be considered. They include: Supporting school leadership; Networks and clusters for DEIS teachers and schools; Teaching methodologies; Exploring ways in which the work of schools could be better integrated with other state supports within the community, and in consultation with Minister Zappone, making greater use of Home School Community Liaison.

I intend that innovative measures such as these, which are shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged children and students, can form pilot schemes under a new schools support programme.

The number of additional schools to be included in the new programme will be determined by a new identification process for this purpose, which is currently in development and all schools will be assessed. Schools will not be required to make an application for access to the programme. Subject to Government approval, it is intended to begin to implement actions arising from an updated plan in the 2017/18 school year.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

91. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when category 3 mechanical works will be approved for a school (details supplied) under the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18843/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 3 application for mechanical works under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) from the school to which he refers.

Valid SWS (2016-2017) applications from schools in respect of Categories 3 to 10 that were not reached under round one approvals announced on 28th April last, will, subject to the overall availability of funding, qualify to be assessed under future rounds of the Scheme. If this arises, the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website, will continue to apply when allocating funding to such projects.

The application from the school in question is available to be considered in this context.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

92. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) under the emergency works scheme or summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18846/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 6 application for roof works under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) from the school to which he refers. Valid SWS (2016-2017) applications from schools in respect of Categories 3 to 10 that were not reached under round one approvals announced on 28th April last, will, subject to the overall availability of funding, qualify to be assessed under future rounds of the Scheme. If this arises, the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015) which may be accessed on my Department's website, will continue to apply when allocating funding to such projects.

The SWS (2016-2017) application from the school, in question, is available to be considered in this context.

Teaching Contracts

93. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to create equal supplementary panel rights for fully qualified regulation three teachers with Teaching Council numbers (details supplied). [18851/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The supplementary panel application process for eligible fixed-term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers for the 2016/17 school year is set out in Circular 0058/2015 which is available on my Department's website.

Since 2006, the Teaching Council is the body with statutory responsibility and authority for regulation of the teaching profession, including the registration of teachers under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015. Under the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009, Regulation 3 (Montessori and other categories), graduates with certain Montessori qualifications (Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications) are allowed to be registered as teachers to teach in certain restricted settings in recognized schools. Lengthening and reconfiguring the programmes of initial teacher education is a key component of the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020. These changes were incorporated into the Teaching Council's Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education, which set the criteria for providers of initial teacher education.

The position is that, since the end of the 2012/13 school year, the Supplementary Special National Panel is being phased out and no new applications are being accepted. This decision

by my Department reflects the wider availability of primary teachers who are qualified to work in all settings, which was not the case when this panel was originally set up.

Since 2012, the Teaching Council has responsibility for determining policy, procedures and criteria for the induction and probation of newly qualified teachers. Droichead which is the enhanced model of induction for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) developed by the Council is being phased in at present and will be the only recognised route of induction for all new teachers from September 2018. In the meantime, NQTs in mainstream settings may complete probation through external evaluation conducted by my Department's inspectors. However, completion of the induction/probation process in special education settings can only be achieved through the Droichead process. Arrangements for the Supplementary Panel will be reviewed with the relevant education stakeholders later this year to determine what adjustment, if any, is required for the 2017/18 school year.

Special Educational Needs

94. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the criteria for special needs assistants, SNA, so that children with high functioning autism who may have difficulty with sensory and audio processing and difficulty with social skills can obtain SNA help in order to reach their full potential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18856/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special needs assistants (SNA) supports. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support.

The criteria for the provision of SNA support are set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie.

The Circular states that the purpose of the SNA scheme is to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs.

The scheme provides for the allocation of a quantum of SNA support to schools, taking into account the assessed care needs of individual children with disabilities, or severe medical needs. The scheme is not limited only to children who have been assessed as having specified categories of disability.

DES Circular 30/2014 provides that SNA support may be allocated, where necessary, to provide pupils with assistance with severe communication difficulties, including enabling curriculum access for pupils with physical disabilities or sensory needs and those with significant, and identified social and emotional difficulties. Schools may therefore make applications for SNA support to the NCSE for children who have assessed significant care needs which fulfil such criteria. Schools who wish to make applications for SNA support should apply to the NCSE.

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 www.ncse.ie.

I am asking the NCSE to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the SNA scheme in or-

der to provide better outcomes for students with special needs and to ensure that we are making the best additional investment for children with special educational needs.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

95. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a full time special needs assistant can be provided to a person (details supplied) for September 2016 onwards in view of their need for help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18857/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special needs assistants (SNA) supports. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support, which are set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014 and are available on my Department's website at www.education.ie.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2016/17 school year by 29th February 2016. The NCSE also continues to accept applications after that date, in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed.

I announced on the 14th June, 2016 that 860 additional Special Needs Assistants will be available for allocation to schools from September 2016, which is a 7% increase on the existing availability.

This will bring the total number of Special Needs Assistants to 12,900 at a total gross annual cost of €425 million. This increase reflects the growing participation of children with Special Needs in education and will support their full participation and progression within the educational system.

The NCSE advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2016/17 school year on 14th June, 2016. Details of the allocations which have been made to schools have now been published on www.ncse.ie.

Where a school wishes to make an application for SNA support in respect of a child who was not considered as part of this allocation process they may continue to make such applications to the NCSE.

Where a school wishes to appeal the SNA allocation which has been made to they may do so through the NCSE appeal process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie.

It should also be noted that SNA allocations are not made to individual children, but are made to schools to support the care needs of children with assessed special educational needs in the school.

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 the Deputy's question relates to the allocation of SNA support by the NCSE to an individual child, I have referred this question to the NCSE for their consideration and direct reply to the Deputy.

Questions - Written Answers
Schools Building Projects

96. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding available for the construction of a school sports assembly hall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18864/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's focus in recent years has been on prioritising the funding available for the provision of essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic need.

As the Deputy will be aware, due to the competing demands on my Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise the available funding in this manner, it is not possible at this point to provide an indicative timeframe for the provision of funding for PE halls generally.

Technological Universities

97. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to upgrade AIT Athlone to university status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18867/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, the new Programme for Government outlines that this new Government will continue to support the creation of Technological Universities.

This is in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which provides a framework for the development of the higher education sector to 2030. With regard to the institute of technology sector, the Strategy recommended significant reforms to position the sector to meet national strategic objectives. In particular, in order to qualify for technological university status, the Strategy recommended that Institutes of Technology would have to merge and to demonstrate significant progress against robust performance criteria before they can apply to be designated as a technological university.

The Government is keen not to replicate the mistakes made in other countries and to avoid a scenario whereby Institutes of Technology are allowed to become Technological Universities simply as a rebranding exercise, in the process damaging the strengths of the sector, and the national and international reputation of the Irish Higher Education system, built up over many years.

Regional Focus: There will also be a specific focus on the particular contribution the university will make to the needs of the region in which it is located. The development of technological universities has the potential to deliver greater opportunity to students in these regions, to staff working in the institutions, and to the broader local economy and society.

Consortiums who have applied: As part of the implementation of the Strategy, the Higher Education Authority in 2012 published a four-stage process and criteria for applicant groups of institutes of technology wishing to apply to become technological universities.

The designation process consists of four stages as follows:

- an expression of interest,
- the preparation of a plan to meet the criteria,
- an evaluation of the plan, and

- an application for designation.

There are currently four consortia engaged with the process to become designated as TUs. These are TU4Dublin (Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Tallaght, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown), Technological University for the South-East (TUSE – consisting of Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow), Munster Technological University (MTU – consisting of Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Tralee) and the Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA – consisting of Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology).

Position of Technological Universities Bill: The first Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 8 June 2016, and the Technological Universities Bill has been restored to the Dáil Order Paper at Committee Stage.

I recognise that there were a significant number of matters raised in respect of the Bill at both Committee and Report Stage. It is my intention to now consult with all of the relevant stakeholders, including Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), in relation to both the matters raised during the legislative process and the commitments contained in the Programme for Government.

Following the finalisation of this consultation process I will then advance the legislation having determined a position in relation to any matters raised as part of this consultation process.

School Accommodation

98. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to examine the former Mullingar Army site with a view to using same for institutional educational purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18871/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): An inspection of the Mullingar Army Barracks site was carried out by Professional and Technical staff of my Department's School Planning and Building Unit in 2012 with a view to determining its suitability for school accommodation. The site and existing accommodation at the Barracks were found to present technical difficulties such that the development of the site for school use did not represent value for money in the context of other available options.

Schools Building Projects Status

99. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to allow a school (details supplied) which has completed the stage 2(b) (detailed design) process to proceed to stage 3 tender action as this school was included in the school building projects as part of their five year plan 2012 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18908/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the building project for the school in question is at an advanced stage of architectural planning. All statutory approvals have been obtained and the Stage 2b submission was recently approved by my Department.

However, on 1st January 2016 there were 66 major projects under construction. Since the start of this year 14 more major projects have been progressed to construction and there are currently 36 projects authorised to progress through the tender process with a view to starting on

site in the coming months. That represents a total of 116 major projects either under construction or progressing to commence construction in 2016. The project for the school referred to was not at a sufficiently advanced stage to be considered for inclusion with those projects when they were authorized to proceed to tender earlier this year. The existing contractual commitments for 2016 now fully account for the funding allocation available in 2016.

My officials will continue to closely monitor expenditure on existing contractual commitments over the coming months and, as funding allows, other projects, including the project for the school in question will be considered for progression through the tender process with a view to starting on site as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

100. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Malahide and Portmarnock areas of County Dublin, as announced in November, 2015; if he has identified locations for these proposed schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18911/16]

104. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Swords area of County Dublin, as announced in November 2015; if he has identified a location for this proposed school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18957/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 104 together.

My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places will arise. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and information from my Department's own databases.

The outcome of the latest demographic exercises, based on the GIS, was the announcement in November 2015 of the establishment of 13 new schools to open nationwide in 2017 and 2018 to cater for increased demographic needs. One of the new post-primary schools will serve the Swords school planning area and one will serve the Malahide and Portmarnock school planning areas. Both new schools will open in 2017 and both are included in my Department's six year construction programme (2016-2021). Details on the progress of all projects on this programme will be published on my Department's website and this will be updated regularly.

In April this year, my Department issued an invitation to all school patron bodies and prospective patron bodies to apply for the patronage of the nine new post-primary schools, including the schools to serve the areas referred to by the Deputy. As part of the application process, prospective patrons must submit completed parental preferences, including whether parents wish their children to be educated through the medium of Irish or of English. The closing date for receipt of applications to my Department was Wednesday 8th June.

My Department is currently assessing the applications received from the prospective patrons and an assessment report will be prepared for the consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). The Group will then submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. I will announce the patronage of the schools following completion of the process and the patronage assessment report will be published on my Department's website.

My Department are liaising with Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of suitable locations for these schools.

Agreement in principle has been reached in respect of a site for the new post-primary school in Swords and my Department is currently progressing with its acquisition.

In relation to the new post-primary school to serve the Malahide and Portmarnock areas, the technical feasibility of an identified site option is currently being comprehensively assessed by officials from my Department in liaison with officials from the Local Authority.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally, I am, unfortunately, not in a position to provide further details at this time. I can, however, assure you that the site acquisitions for both of these schools are being advanced by my Department and that pending the delivery of the permanent school buildings, temporary accommodation will be provided.

Special Educational Needs Staff

101. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a teaching post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18912/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent agency with responsibility for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs attending Special schools. The NCSE operates within my Department's policy in allocating this support.

Staffing arrangements for special schools are in line with policy advice provided by the NCSE which did not recommend alteration to staffing ratios established under SERC Report in 1993.

Circular 0042/2011 provides information to schools regarding the staffing arrangements which apply in Special schools.

The Circular sets out that special schools are staffed based on their pupil profiles and the disability category of the pupils enrolled, as opposed to being based principally on school designation. Staffing levels therefore reflect the complexity of needs that exist within schools rather than being determined solely by a school's designation, in recognition that many Special schools enrol students from disability categories other than from those provided for by their school designations.

In determining the staffing allocation for schools, including the above school, the NCSE takes into account up-to-date enrolment and pupil profile information. School staffing schedules are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE. As such, the profile of Special school pupil populations are aligned with appropriate staffing allocations. Accordingly, the staffing allocation for the school referred to in the Deputy's question has been calculated to reflect the profile of pupils currently enrolled in the school, in accordance with each pupil's disability categorisation.

The NCSE are currently considering additional information in relation to the school's staffing allocation for 2016/17 and the school will be advised of the outcome of the NCSE's decision shortly.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

102. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason further to Parliamentary Question No. 197 of 21 June 2016, no emergency works scheme application had been submitted by a school (details supplied); when he will now provide funding to this school in view of the urgent and substantial works required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18931/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Planning and Building Unit of my Department has checked this matter again and it has confirmed to me that it has no record of receiving the application to which the Deputy refers.

The copy of the application provided with the details supplied is incomplete in that it is not signed or dated by the Chairperson of the Board of Management. It is also not properly signed off by the Consultant.

The school should submit a fully completed application form together with the mandatory photographic evidence to the Department's Devolved Grants/Rental Payments Section, Department of Education and Skills, Portlaoise Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly. When received the application will be fully considered in the context of the criteria governing the Department's Emergency Works Grant Scheme.

Schools Property

103. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a vacant school (details supplied); if he will put this property on the open market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18956/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board are currently in discussions with St. Aidan's Diocesan Trust, who are the owners of the school building to which he refers, regarding the building's future use.

Question No. 104 answered with Question No. 100.

National Council for Special Education

105. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is aware that special needs assistants in County Meath are losing contracted hours and jobs without any prior warning and with the information being gathered from the National Council for Special Education website (details supplied). [18966/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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.

The Deputy will be aware that on 14th June, 2016, I announced that 860 additional SNAs will be available for allocation to schools from September 2016.

12,900 SNA posts will now be available at a total gross annual cost of €425 million. This is

more SNAs than we have ever had previously and will ensure that all children who qualify for SNA support can continue to receive access to such support.

In total, the number of SNAs available has increased by almost 22% since 2011, at which point 10,575 posts were available.

The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to schools is set out in my Departments Circular, DES 30/2014, which states that a key feature of the NCSE allocation process is to provide an annual allocation of SNA support to eligible schools.

The NCSE issues notification to schools each year requesting they submit applications for SNA support to the NCSE for the coming school year. Having considered all of the applications received, the NCSE advises schools of their SNA allocation quantum for the coming school year, taking into account the number of valid applications received and the assessed care needs of the children concerned.

This year, the NCSE asked all schools to submit applications for SNA support by 29th February, 2016.

The NCSE advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the 2016/17 school year, on 14th June, 2016, based on the number of valid applications received. The NCSE also published details of the allocations for SNA support on their website *www.ncse.ie*.

In making applications for SNA support for the coming school year, schools will have been engaging with their local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) in relation to these applications. Where an adjustment or reduction in a schools SNA support is likely to take place, a SENO will normally indicate this to a school in advance. However, the formal notification to schools cannot be made until the allocation process is finalised for all schools.

The provision of allocations in June ensures that schools have sufficient time to plan for the provision of supports in advance of September 2016. It also gives schools certainty as to the resources which will be available to them for the coming school year.

Whereas the NCSE will continue to consider applications throughout the school year, in cases where schools have enrolled new pupils with care needs, where new assessments are received, or in cases of emergencies, the main allocation of SNA support is now made to schools on an annual allocation basis and most schools will by now have received their SNA allocations for September 2016.

It is important to note that the level of SNA support allocated to all schools can change from year to year, as students with care needs leave the school, as new students with care needs enrol, or as students develop more independent living skills as they get older and their care needs diminish over time. It is therefore appropriate that SNA allocations be reduced in schools which have declining numbers of pupils requiring SNA support, so that they can be reallocated to schools which have increased requirements.

Where there has been a reduction in SNA support in a school, supplementary assignment arrangements are in place for SNAs, details of which are set out in Departmental Circular 0041/2015.

Once an SNA with a minimum of one year's service (Service in a substitute capacity i.e. covering for maternity leave, sick leave, career breaks, job-sharing etc. does not count) is notified by his/her employer that s/he is to be made redundant then s/he shall be deemed to be a member of a supplementary assignment panel for SNAs.

The operation of this panel is described and outlined in Circular 0041/2015 and it is designed to be as flexible as possible which enables all eligible SNAs, who have the requisite Panel Form 1 completed by their former employer, to apply for any SNA position that is advertised by a school or an ETB with no sectoral, diocesan or geographical limitations imposed.

Every eligible SNA will remain on the panel for two years with a view to getting further employment. If they are not successful over that period of time in obtaining a further SNA position then they will be eligible for a Redundancy payment. Furthermore, an SNA may opt out of this supplementary assignment panel at any point in time triggering the processing of his/her redundancy payment in line with the terms set out in the SNA redundancy scheme (DES Circular 58/06) or any revision of same that is applicable at that time.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

106. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) is not in full DEIS status; the way this school would go about applying for full DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18970/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school the Deputy refers to applied for the DEIS Programme in 2005 but was assessed not to have a sufficient level of disadvantage for inclusion in the scheme at the time. As the Deputy is aware, the review of the DEIS programme is currently underway and it is my intention that a New Action Plan Educational Inclusion will be published by the end of this year.

The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the identification process for the inclusion of schools in the programme, the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and agencies, in order to improve effectiveness.

The number of additional schools to be included in the new programme will be determined by a new identification process for this purpose, which is currently in development and in which all schools will be assessed. Subject to Government approval, it is intended to begin to implement actions arising from an updated plan in the 2017/18 school year.

In the meantime, I do not propose to make any changes to the current programme, including the addition of further schools.

Special Educational Needs Staff

107. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide proper panel rights to special needs assistants. [18972/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed. These supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs continue to operate under the Lansdowne Road Agreement, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and IMPACT, have signed up to that agreement.

As set out in the LRC proposals, the supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs only apply to current SNAs who are notified that they are to be made redundant. Accordingly, the purpose of these arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant

by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school/ETB.

Once an SNA with a minimum of one year's service (service in a substitute capacity i.e. covering for maternity leave, sick leave, career breaks, job-sharing etc. does not count) is notified by his/her employer that s/he is to be made redundant then s/he shall be deemed to be a member of a supplementary assignment panel for SNAs.

The detailed supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs for the 2016/2017 school year are set out in Departmental Circular 0035/2016 which issued on 20 May 2016 and which is available on the Department's website at the following address: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0035_2016.pdf.

The operation of this panel is described and outlined in Circular 0035/2016 and it is designed to be as flexible as possible which enables all eligible SNAs, who have the requisite Panel Form 1 completed by their former employer, to apply for any SNA position that is advertised by a school or an ETB with no sectoral, diocesan or geographical limitations imposed. It does not work on a list basis. Every eligible SNA will remain on the panel for two years with a view to getting further employment. If they are not successful over that period of time in obtaining a further SNA position then they will be eligible for a redundancy payment. Furthermore, an SNA may opt out of this supplementary assignment panel at any point in time triggering the processing of his/her redundancy payment in line with the terms set out in the SNA redundancy scheme (DES Circular 58/06) or any revision of same that is applicable at that time.

It is important to note that when an employer has a vacancy to fill, they must undertake the recruitment process in accordance with the provisions outlined in Circular 0035/2016. Finally, my Department has set up a dedicated e-mail address to deal with all queries in relation to the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel and any queries in respect of the operation of the Panel can be directed to this dedicated e-mail address: snasupplementpanel@education.gov.ie.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

108. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has undertaken any contingency planning for the effects of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union; and the areas in which this contingency planning has been undertaken and any key proposals he has formed. [19025/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has a Contingency Framework in place which maps the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months. My Department participated fully in and contributed to the preparation of that Framework for the education sector. The Government has published a summary of the key actions that will be taken to address the contingencies arising from the UK's decision to leave the EU. Negotiations on the future EU UK relationship will now be required and officials from my Department will engage fully in these discussions at EU and bi-lateral level.

The peace dividend generated by the Good Friday Agreement has led to wide-ranging and sustained cross-border cultural, economic and political developments. The region has long been recognised internationally as having a special status and has attracted support from successive administrations in the United States, European Union and elsewhere. My Department has been working for many years with our colleagues in Northern Ireland in seeking to encourage cross-border participation in education and training including in relation to pupils crossing the border to attend school and students engaging in the further education system, as well as

those coming from the UK and Northern Ireland for the purposes of higher education.

Officials in my Department will continue to work with our colleagues in Northern Ireland in seeking to encourage cross-border participation in education and training including pupils crossing the border to attend school, access to special education needs services, further and higher education. They will also continue to work constructively to try to maintain the greatest possible links and co-operation between the EU and the UK in student and academic mobility and in research activities. We will be endeavouring to ensure the greatest continuity possible in these areas. In this context, officials from my Department will continue to emphasise our very particular relationship with Northern Ireland and the UK in the upcoming negotiations, a fact that is widely understood by our EU partners.

Overall, in relation to upcoming negotiations my Department will work constructively to maintain and support the existing links and cooperation in the education sphere.

Third Level Data

109. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of British and Northern Irish citizens who are registered as students in higher education institutes here; and the number of Irish students registered as third level students in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. [19026/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the academic year 2015/16 there were 1,007 full-time and part-time Northern Irish domiciled enrolments and 1,805 full-time and part-time British domiciled enrolments in all higher education institutions that are funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

The HEA does not collect data on students from the Republic of Ireland studying in Northern Ireland or Britain. However, I understand from the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland that in the academic year 2014/15 there were 2,345 full-time and part-time Republic of Ireland domiciled enrolments in higher education institutions in Northern Ireland. Data is not available on the number of students from the Republic of Ireland studying in Britain.

Obviously, this matter will need to be monitored in light of the UK referendum result last week. The Government has a Contingency Framework in place which maps the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months. My Department participated fully in and contributed to the preparation of that Framework for the education sector. The Government has published a summary of the key actions that will be taken to address the contingencies arising from the UK's decision to leave the EU. Negotiations on the future EU UK relationship will now be required and officials from my Department will engage fully in these discussions at EU and bi-lateral level.

Motor Tax

110. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the categorisation of vehicles in County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18994/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): While I have overall policy responsibility for motor tax policy, I have no role in relation to individual applications for motor tax. Responsibility for the administration of motor

tax rests with the relevant licensing authority (motor tax offices and, in the case of online motor tax, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport).

Licensing authorities have an obligation under Article 3 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) (Amendment) Regulations 1992 to ensure that the vehicle licence being applied for is the appropriate licence for the vehicle concerned.

Private Residential Tenancies Board

111. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a query by a person (details supplied) regarding the effectiveness of the Private Residential Tenancies Board, in regard to determination orders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18841/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented residential sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to facilitate the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants.

The RTB, as an independent statutory body, will adjudicate each dispute on its own facts and merits and may grant redress and give specific direction as appropriate on foot of a determination order. Receipt of a determination order is the official notification to parties of the final outcome of a dispute resolution case. The order sets out the terms to be complied with, including any payments owing and the length of time given to comply. In making determination orders, the RTB can make provision to allow for payment of awards in instalments to facilitate recovery of the award, based on the circumstances of the case. A party who fails to comply with one or more terms of a determination order is open to having legal proceedings taken against him or her in the Courts.

Under the Act, enforcement of RTB determination orders is a discretionary power and the Board exercises this power taking account of the circumstances pertaining to each case. While there is no legal obligation on the RTB to enforce, the Board takes the issue of non-compliance with determination orders very seriously. In 2015 alone it referred 312 cases to its legal advisors for enforcement proceedings. It is also open to parties to pursue enforcement independently through the Courts, including the seeking of a garnishee order. It should be noted that going to Court does not of itself ensure successful enforcement and more particularly, recoupment of an award. In many cases the best option, and one which the RTB facilitates, is for the parties to agree a schedule of payments.

Details on the number of dispute applications and enforcement requests received by the RTB are available in the RTB Annual Reports at <http://www.prtb.ie/about-rtb/who-we-are/annual-reports>.

Motor Tax Collection

112. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce regular direct debit payments for motor tax, given that paying several lump sums a year causes financial hardship for many people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18860/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have no plans currently to introduce a system of regular direct debit payments for motor tax.

Any such proposal would require to be underpinned by robust legislation to ensure that there is a system in place to recoup income lost to the taxpayer where there are insufficient funds in personal accounts to meet the payment or where a direct debit or standing order option is cancelled by the account holder once a disc is issued. It would also be necessary to introduce provisions to enable recovery of the disc where required. The resultant additional enforcement requirements would also be likely to increase the cost of operating the system.

Motor Tax Collection

113. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the rationale behind charging a higher level of motor tax for those who choose to pay quarterly; and if he has considered amending this as it is unfair on those who are not in a position to pay a large lump sum annually. [18861/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Motor tax is payable on an annual, half-yearly or quarterly basis. The rates applicable for the half-yearly and quarterly options are 55.5% and 28.25% of the annual charge, respectively. These relativities have remained generally consistent since the 1960s.

The differential takes account of the extra workload for staff in motor tax offices and the Driver and Vehicle Computer Services Division of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which operates the online motor tax system, as well as the resultant administrative costs and printing costs that arise, including the issuing of renewal notices. Each quarterly renewal of motor tax follows the same administrative procedures as the annual renewal process. Consequently, renewing on a quarterly basis generates four times the workload of an annual renewal for the equivalent period.

The loss of income that would arise from changing these arrangements would have a negative impact on the total collected via motor tax and would have to be borne elsewhere in the motor tax system or through the taxation system generally.

I have no plans currently to review the basis for paying motor tax on a half-yearly or quarterly basis.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the tenant purchase scheme will be amended (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18907/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Water Services (Amendment) Bill 2016, which completed second stage debate in the Dáil on 28 June 2016, seeks to implement water elements of the ‘Confidence and Supply Arrangement’ agreed with Fianna Fáil in the context of supporting a minority Government. The Arrangement document also affirms the parties’ position that those who have paid their water bills will be treated no less favourably than those who have not.

The Bill seeks to suspend domestic water charges for a period of 9 months so as to ensure

that Irish Water customers are not billed for water services in the period from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 or at any other time in relation to this period. The suspension is to allow for an extensive deliberative process to be carried out. An expert commission will be established shortly to consider the long term funding of public domestic water services and make recommendations thereon. These will be considered by an Oireachtas committee and, ultimately, the Oireachtas will then determine the enduring funding model for public water services into the future.

The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it and all dwellings connected to the public water or waste water systems will remain liable for domestic water charges up to the date the suspension of charges takes effect.

Section 3(A)(9) of the Water Services Act 2014 provides that a person who is a tenant of a dwelling let under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014 and who proposes to purchase the dwelling shall before completion of the sale provide the local authority concerned with a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming that any water charge in respect of the dwelling owed to Irish Water has been paid. The sale of the dwelling cannot proceed until a certificate discharge in respect of the dwelling has been received from Irish Water. I have no plans to amend the legislation in this regard.

Fire Stations Provision

115. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a new fire station (details supplied) including the stage it is at and when construction will begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18913/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

My Department recently announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. Under this programme, the list of priority projects to be progressed will be kept under review on an annual basis.

The project referred to in the Question is included in this programme under the list of priority projects to be progressed for 2018. My Department is liaising with relevant local authorities to progress proposed projects in this programme within the indicated timescales. The projects in the capital programme will be reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of the projects.

Water Charges

116. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the policy of Meath County Council of withholding housing from those on the housing waiting list who have not been able to pay their water charges. [18919/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under Section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, a household is ineligible for social housing support where the household is in arrears of rent, rent contributions, charges, fees or loan repayments, or any other moneys owing to a housing authority in the previous three years for an accumulated period of 12 weeks or more, and has not entered into a repayment arrangement with the housing authority.

In relation to water charges which are owed to Irish Water, the Water Services Acts 2007-2013 provide that Irish Water has statutory powers to request its customers and certain specified persons or bodies to provide it with information so that Irish Water can perform its functions under these Acts. These include the collection of data to develop its customer database. Irish Water is required to manage all personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. Irish Water has an on-going engagement with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner which has worked closely with Irish Water to agree the process for the capture, storage and usage of customer data. As such, Irish Water cannot share details in relation to non-payment of water charges with landlords, including any housing authority.

I understand that where an existing tenant of Meath County Council applies to transfer to another dwelling in accordance with that Council's transfer policy as set out in its allocation scheme, one of the requirements is that all service and other charges are paid and up to date. The tenant is required to submit confirmation of same when submitting the application. The assessment of such transfer applications is a matter for the local authority concerned in accordance with its allocation scheme.

Motor Tax

117. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will consider reviewing the motor taxation system with a view to looking at other models of payment such as incorporating payment into tax on fuel to enable road users to pay tax relative to their mileage and therefore level of use of their vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18936/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no plans at present to replace the current system of motor tax with additional taxation on motor fuel or with any other mechanism.

Gross motor tax receipts for 2015 were in the order of €1.124 billion. Maintenance of the tax base would require an increase in fuel excise rates of at least 20 cent per litre, with direct negative impacts on the rate of inflation and economic competitiveness.

Goods vehicles and other high usage and high mileage vehicles, such as public service vehicles and buses would have higher costs under a pay-as-you-drive system. There would also be other distributional effects, including on those with longer distances to commute.

A significant increase in fuel duty could lead to an increase in cross-border fuel purchasing, further depressing the tax base and requiring a compensatory adjustment, either in further increases in fuel prices or elsewhere in the tax system, to make up the shortfall. The potential for an increase in fuel laundering is also a risk.

The benefits of a fuel based motor tax system would have to be weighed against these considerations before the change proposed could be contemplated.

Waste Disposal Charges

118. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the agreement he reached with the waste collection companies on price freezes will also apply to new customers. [18946/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department intend to meet with the waste industry next week to discuss the details of the agreement referred to, including how new customers will be dealt with under the agreement. Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with trying to accommodate customers of whom the collector has no record, I am confident that a reasonable and fair solution will be found to address this issue.

Departmental Legal Costs

119. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the costs to the State to date and the likely final costs of a court case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18974/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, the settlement in this High Court case has only recently been agreed between the two parties. Accordingly, the legal fees have not yet been agreed and settled by the Chief State's Solicitors Office (CSSO).

Once the fees have been agreed and settled by the CSSO, I will bring this information to the attention of the Deputy.

Graduate Support Schemes

120. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to address concerns related to the local authority graduate programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19003/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Launched in 2015, the Local Authority Graduate Programme is designed to provide recently qualified graduates with the opportunity to acquire significant experience through working in a local authority and to benefit local authorities with the knowledge they have acquired in the course of their studies.

The selection process for the 2015 Programme was by competition, open to candidates from outside the local authority sector and those already working within the sector. Of the 119 graduates recruited, a total of 23 were existing local authority employees. At the end of the Programme existing employees of the local authority will return to their substantive role whilst those who have been recruited externally will be released. There is no provision for individuals on the Programme to extend the period of the Programme beyond the two-year period.

The Programme is developmental by nature, featuring a blend of both on-the-job and aca-

demic elements. The duration of the Programme has been designed to allow participants gain significant work experience while at the same time ensuring local authorities receive the benefit of the latest academic teaching within the areas for which the graduates are recruited. Additionally graduates are provided with accredited training in year two of their development programme with the professional body most relevant to the skills area in which they were recruited. Programme participants are paid €28,344 annually for the duration of the Programme.

Of the 119 graduates that commenced the development programme, in May 2015, a total of 23 graduates have obtained full-time employment elsewhere.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

121. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has undertaken any contingency planning for the effects of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union; and the areas in which this contingency planning has been undertaken and the key proposals he has. [19027/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The outcome of the recent United Kingdom EU referendum clearly has very significant implications for Ireland, as well as for Britain and for the European Union.

However, as the United Kingdom has not yet formally withdrawn from the Union, it currently remains a full EU Member, with all of its existing rights and obligations. Contingency planning in that context is challenging because many of the impacts on Ireland depend on the new arrangements that can be agreed between the United Kingdom and the EU.

In the meantime, the Government has adopted an initial Contingency Framework to map out the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months. This will be an iterative process as issues emerge and recede in the course of negotiations.

Priority issues identified in the Contingency Framework have varying levels of impact on the work of different Government Departments. In terms of the remit of my own Department, a key issue will be to seek to ensure that future EU-UK and Ireland-UK negotiations give priority attention to the Northern Ireland dimension. This includes issues relating to the border and EU funding.

While the Contingency Framework is being coordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach, a senior official in every Government Department, including my own, has already been identified to manage how key policy issues arising from the referendum vote in the UK to leave the EU will be addressed. This will ensure that the Government and its constituent Departments will be able to minimise potential operational risks likely to arise during the exit negotiations.

Agriculture Schemes

122. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the review of the farm assist and rural social scheme will commence as pledged in the programme for Government; if the income and child disregards will be re-instated considering the current volatility and crisis in farm incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18940/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of

secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2016 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of €85 million on the farm assist scheme.

Changes introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013 brought farm assist into closer alignment with the jobseeker's allowance scheme's treatment of self-employed people. Farm families with the lowest income were least impacted by these changes as the headline rates of farm assist were maintained.

The Programme for Government contains the commitment to undertake a "Review of the Farm Assist Scheme, recognising the challenges facing farmers on low incomes". I have asked my officials to review the farm assist scheme from a policy and an administrative point of view. This review has commenced and its recommendations may be considered in the context of Budget 2017, subject to the overall budgetary context.

The purpose of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support aimed at low-income farmers and fishermen in receipt of certain social welfare payments who are underemployed in their primary occupation. Persons are engaged for 19.5 hours per week to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. The scheme currently provides work opportunities for around 2,600 participants and 130 supervisory staff. The funds allocated for the scheme in 2016 amount to €44.3 million. This level of funding does not allow for recruitment above the numbers stated above.

With the ongoing welcome economic recovery, the eligibility criteria for the Rural Social Scheme will be kept under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and to ensure that the numbers on the scheme continue to be appropriate.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he expects to be in a position to expedite the process of appeals with particular reference to those pending in respect of carer's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18878/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The average appeal processing time for appeals determined by summary decision and following an oral hearing in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by all social welfare scheme types is as outlined in the tables.

The unprecedented increase in appeal receipts since 2009 placed considerable pressure on the appeals office and impacted adversely on processing times. The overall number of appeals received increased from an average of 15,000 per year up to 2009, to a peak of 35,500 in 2012, reducing annually thereafter to just below 25,000 in 2015.

Significant effort and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeals process in recent years:

- Additional appeals officers were appointed to the office
- An overhaul of the operating model was undertaken
- New technology to support appeals officers was introduced
- Work was undertaken with the Department to reduce delays in responding to requests from the appeals office for appeal submissions.

This resulted in a marked improvement in overall appeal processing times. The average time taken to determine an appeal requiring an oral hearing reduced from 52.5 weeks in 2011 to 25.5 weeks in 2015 and the average time taken to finalise an appeal decided by way of a summary decision dropped from 25.1 weeks in 2011 to 18.1 weeks in 2015. This downward trend in overall appeal processing times has continued to date in 2016 to 23.9 weeks for an oral hearing and 17.2 weeks for a summary decision.

This overall improvement is also reflected in processing times for carer's allowance appeals. The average time taken to determine a carer's allowance appeal requiring an oral hearing has reduced from 57.9 weeks in 2011 to 25.5 weeks in 2015 and to 22.4 weeks to date in 2016. The average time taken to finalise a carer's allowance appeal decided by way of a summary decision dropped from 31.3 weeks in 2011 to 20.6 weeks in 2015 and to 18.2 weeks to date in 2016.

The quasi-judicial nature of the appeals system means that there are inevitable time-lags involved. The system is designed to be flexible and fair and allows for review and submission of further information up to and including the oral hearing. The time taken is proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal, which require a high level of judgement and often involve complex legal questions. A number of elements within the process are time-consuming including the need to ensure due process, natural justice and compliance with the statutory obligation to obtain the Department's appeal submission. If an oral hearing is requested by the appellant or is required to resolve conflicts, the processing time is prolonged

The Chief Appeals Officer assures me that appeals processing times are continuously monitored and that, although significant progress has been made in reducing appeal processing times in recent years, continued improvement in this area remains a priority.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeal processing times by scheme 01/01/2015 – 31/12/2015

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Blind Pension	21.1	30.7
Carers Allowance	20.6	25.9
Carers Benefit	19.7	21.8
Child Benefit	24.8	34.7
Disability Allowance	15.8	21.4
Illness Benefit	26.3	33.1
Partial Capacity Benefit	25.7	43.4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	21.7	28.7
Deserted Wives Benefit	19.7	26.2
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	16.2
Farm Assist	21.0	28.6
Bereavement Grant	65.7	26.0
Death Benefit (Pension)	-	22.6
Family Income Supplement	19.4	27.7
Invalidity Pension	26.2	28.4
Liabale Relatives	22.8	31.2
Maternity Benefit	22.6	17.5
One Parent Family Payment	22.9	33.9

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
State Pension (Contributory)	26.0	46.0
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.4	30.8
State Pension (Transition)	80.1	53.4
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.3	35.0
Disablement Pension	23.7	35.3
Incapacity Supplement	41.2	51.5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	18.2	27.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.7	31.0
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	15.8	26.0
Jobseeker's Allowance	15.2	21.9
JA/JB Fraud Control	-	46.1
BTW Family Dividend	14.1	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	12.9	21.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	21.0	30.3
Jobseeker's Benefit	14.3	21.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	15.0	-
Treatment Benefit	17.9	-
Respite Care Grant	21.2	23.6
Insurability of Employment	47.6	69.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	13.1	23.5
Survivor's Pension (Con)	24.1	46.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.7	38.3
Widows Parent Grant	18.4	-
All Appeals	18.1	25.5

Appeal processing times by scheme 01/01/2016 – 31/05/2016

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Blind Pension	19.7	29.9
Carers Allowance	18.2	22.4
Carers Benefit	17.2	23.4
Child Benefit	22.7	55.6
Disability Allowance	15.2	20.5
Illness Benefit	30.0	31.9
Partial Capacity Benefit	29.0	29.4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	23.5	29.0
Deserted Wives Benefit	-	40.5

Questions - Written Answers

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Farm Assist	16.3	23.7
Bereavement Grant	14.7	-
Liabile Relatives	7.9	-
Family Income Supplement	16.3	26.0
Invalidity Pension	28.4	32.1
Maternity Benefit	17.5	28.1
One Parent Family Payment	21.3	25.9
State Pension (Contributory)	27.8	37.5
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	21.4	32.8
State Pension (Transition)	67.7	40.5
Occupational Injury Benefit	22.4	17.1
Disablement Pension	19.6	26.5
Incapacity Supplement	-	55.6
Guardian's Payment (Con)	16.9	24.9
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	20.2	29.2
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	14.1	25.6
Jobseeker's Allowance	14.3	19.2
BTW Family Dividend	21.3	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	19.6	12.7
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	33.6	41.7
Jobseeker's Benefit	13.7	17.5
Treatment Benefit	22.2	-
Respite Care Grant	16.3	21.8
Insurability of Employment	35.2	97.1
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16.0	26.3
Survivor's Pension (Con)	15.4	25.3
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	18.9	31.5
Widows Parent Grant	21.4	-
All Appeals	17.2	23.9

State Pension (Contributory)

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he expects to be in a position to review entitlements of the spouses of self-employed who may have worked in a partnership in the course of their lifetime but who find themselves unable to qualify for State pension (contributory) on the grounds that a partnership did not exist; if he will examine the number of applications in this category that were refused in the past six years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18879/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The common practice is that a person will apply to Scope section in the Department of Social Protection for a determination concerning their PRSI status in advance of applying for a State pension. Scope section will determine if a person genuinely worked in a partnership and is able to demonstrate that that was the case. Where retrospective commercial partnership status is approved, persons are in a position to apply for a State pension (contributory), subject to satisfying the qualification criteria.

If a person is not satisfied with the decision of the deciding officer in Scope section the person may appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

It is not possible to provide statistics on the number of applications for the State pension (contributory) where eligibility was determined on the basis of a partnership between spouses. However, the number of applications for recognition of a commercial partnership in the last six years (2011-2016) is set out in the table.

This shows that the vast majority of applicants had their legal status as a commercial partnership confirmed. Over the six years, only 70 people had their claim for commercial partnership status rejected, an average of less than 12 per year.

I am satisfied that the system in place, including the appeals mechanism, provides a thorough and fair review process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Year Received	PartnershipStatus Approved	PartnershipStatus Rejected
2011	213	14
2012	158	17
2013	197	11
2014	150	9
2015	135	14
2016 (Jan-May)	50	5

State Pension (Contributory)

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he proposes to examine or review the basis for qualification for State pension (contributory) in the case of women who resigned from the workplace to raise their families or who were victims of the marriage ban; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18880/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The State pension (contributory) SPC is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement. Since 1961, when contributory pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating pension entitlement. Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes. In this context, even if someone has only 10 years (520 weeks) of paid reckonable contributions between their sixteenth and sixty-sixth birthdays, they may qualify for a State pension (contributory), although the rate payable would vary depending on their circumstances.

The home-makers scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age (or caring for incapacitated people over that age) to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes, subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of their pension.

The Deputy should also note that the 'marriage bar' describes a rule that existed in most of the public service and some private sector employments, where women were required to leave their employment upon marriage. This practice was abolished in 1973 when Ireland joined the EEC. As employees in the public service generally paid a reduced rate of PRSI, which provided no cover for the State pension (contributory), the marriage bar would not generally have impacted on State pension entitlement, as they would not have qualified for that payment had they remained in public sector employment. Instead, by impacting upon their continuing public service employment, the marriage bar's pension implications, where they exist, more generally relate to a person's eventual entitlement to a Public Service pension. Questions on this are a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Where people who were unattached to the labour market during most of their adult lives may not qualify for a contributory pension in their own right as they have paid few or no contributions, or cannot qualify for a full rate as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such pensioners in old age. Therefore, if their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

Work is underway to replace the 'yearly average' system with a 'total contributions approach', under which, the number of contributions recorded over a working life will be more closely reflected in the rate of pension payment received. It is expected that the total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) for new pensioners from 2020, although that date is subject to change, as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical components to be put in place prior its implementation. The position of women who were home-makers will be considered very carefully in developing this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which the number of persons in receipt of jobseeker's allowance has fluctuated in the course of the past six years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18881/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the tabular statement. I note that over the five-year period in question, the number of Jobseeker's Benefit recipients has decreased by two thirds from 109,209 at end-May 2011 to 37,347 at end-May 2016.

Jobseeker's Allowance Recipients at 31 May in each of the years 2011 to 2016

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Recipients	280,833	289,615	293,981	288,268	256,473	243,574
Percentage Variance Year on Year		+3.1%	+1.5%	-1.9%	-11.0%	-5.0%
Percentage Variance 2016 V 2011	-13.3%	-13.3%	-13.3%	-13.3%	-13.3%	-13.3%

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which addictions, such as alcoholism and drug addiction, are deemed to be conditions capable of qualifying for disability allowance or invalidity pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18882/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Qualification for Invalidity Pension (IP) or Disability Allowance (DA) is not conditional on having a particular medical condition. The determining factors are the extent to which a particular illness or disability impairs or restricts a person's capacity to work.

To qualify for IP in addition to satisfying the PRSI contribution conditions, you must have been incapable of work for at least 12 months and be likely to be incapable of work for at least another 12 months, or be permanently incapable of work.

In order to satisfy the conditions for receipt of disability allowance (DA) a person must be suffering from an injury, disease, congenital deformity or physical or mental illness or defect which has continued or may reasonably be expected to continue for a period of at least a year and as a result of the condition the person is substantially restricted in undertaking work which would otherwise be suitable having regard to the person's age, experience and qualifications. There are additional conditions that must be satisfied in relation to means and habitual residence.

In all cases a deciding officer of my Department makes a decision based on all the available evidence including supporting medical evidence supplied by the applicant and taking into account the opinion of the Department's Medical Assessor.

One-Parent Family Payment

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he monitors the situation in regard to lone parents with a view to ascertaining the availability to them of adequate resources to meet their commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18883/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department monitors on an ongoing basis all social welfare income support schemes including the one-parent family payment scheme (OFP).

The majority of customers affected by the reforms to the OFP scheme transitioned to the

jobseeker's transitional payment (JST). My Department, at the request of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, intend to carry out a review of the JST scheme and this is due to be completed during 2017.

It is important to note that my Department provides a number of income supports to lone parents. These include the OFP scheme until the youngest child is 7, the JST payment where the youngest child is aged 7-13 years, Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) where the youngest child is 14 or over and the Family Income Supplement (FIS). FIS can also be paid concurrently with OFP. Both the OFP and JST means tests are more generous than that of JA, thereby supporting lone parents to take up employment, which is their best route out of poverty.

Lone parents on a jobseeker's payment also gain access to the full range of Intreo supports available to assist them into training, education and employment. Those on JST receive a more intensive support via a one to one meeting with a case officer followed by an engagement of up to 7 years while the customer is on JST. Those on JA receive the standard activation process for jobseekers commencing with a group engagement meeting.

These income and activation supports combined ensure that there are effective resources available to lone parents.

Budget 2016 saw OFP recipients gain a 75% Christmas bonus, a €5 increase in Child Benefit and an increase of €2.50 per week in fuel allowance. Those in receipt of FIS also benefited from the increases to the FIS thresholds. Lone parents on jobseeker's transitional payment (JST) also gained as a result of the closer alignment of the JST means test with the more generous OFP means test.

My Department published a social impact assessment of the main social welfare and tax measures of Budget 2015 and 2016. The assessment found that the cumulative impact of these budgets on lone parent households fared above that of the average household. The assessment indicated that average income in households where the lone parent is employed will rise by 2.8 per cent, while that of unemployed lone parents will rise by 2.4 per cent.

Departmental Expenditure

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he sees a requirement for adjustments in the Social Protection budget to cater for any changes in the economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18884/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the recent referendum in the UK regarding their European Union membership.

The 2016 Revised Estimates provides an allocation of €19.625 billion to my Department. The Summer Economic Statement, published last week, sets out that the estimated indicative fiscal space for 2017 is around €1 billion. As confirmed by the Taoiseach at the National Economic Dialogue on Monday, there will be no changes to the fiscal space available to the Government this year and for Budget 2017.

Youth Unemployment Measures

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which the various schemes available to his Department are making positive and beneficial impact on the numbers of young persons who are unemployed, and his future expectations in this

regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18885/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government's primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is to create the right environment for a strong economic recovery through effective policies. In doing so it is hoped to promote competitiveness and productivity.

Reflecting the impact of government policy, and the overall improvement in the labour market, youth unemployment has fallen substantially to 15% in May 2016. This compares with a figure of almost 21% just one year ago, in May 2015, and with a peak level of over 31% in May 2012.

Although the labour market situation is improving considerably as the recovery continues, the Government recognises the importance of a continued focus on measures to facilitate the young unemployed back into work. This is the rationale behind the Government's Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy (published January 2016) and the Youth Guarantee plan (published January 2014).

The key objective of Ireland's policy response to the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee is to help newly unemployed young people find and secure sustainable jobs. In this regard there is monthly engagement by case officers with young people to assist them to prepare, review and, if appropriate, revise personal progression plans. Where young people do not find work relatively quickly, additional supports may be offered, both through reserved places on existing employment and training schemes and through youth-specific measures. Most such offers (over 70%) are in existing further education or training programmes. Others are in existing community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús. Overall, over 19,100 opportunities were taken up on the relevant programmes in 2015 (see Table 1 to this reply).

Pathways to Work 2016-2020 continues to prioritise these measures for the young unemployed and further commits to a number of additional measures. These include increasing the share of workplace-based interventions for youth unemployed; ensuring that monthly engagement, at a minimum, is consistently applied and maintained; restructuring the First Steps programme; and implementing the Defence Forces Skills for Life programme.

I am confident these measures, and continuing economic recovery, will support further reductions in youth unemployment to add to the substantial improvements that have already been seen over the last few years.

Table 1. Programme take-up on Youth Guarantee-related programmes

End of year 2015 information

Programme	2015 information to date	Note
Youthreach	1684	
Community Training Centres	1528	
JobBridge	2,296	
Tús	1,379	
JobsPlus (including JobPlus Youth)	676	
Momentum	1,066	
BTEA (excl Momentum)	2,900	

Programme	2015 information to date	Note
BTWEA	146	
VTOS	n/a	Enrolment begins in September
Former FÁS/SOLAS*	6,629	Based on Specific Skills Training, Traineeship, Bridging & Local Training Initiative starters..
County Enterprise Board Youth Entrepreneurship Training and Mentoring supports.		This programme has been superseded by Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur 2014/5 competition
Micro Finance Ireland micro-loans for young people.	n/a	Age-specific breakdowns not yet available.
International Work Experience and Training	8	
Gateway	144	
Community Employment	715	
Total	19163	Excluding where figures are not available

Social Welfare Payments Administration

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which the procedures for examination of all applications for Social Protection payments can be standardised and streamlined to eliminate any possible delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18886/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): One of the main priorities for the Department is to build on achievements already made to integrate services into a new service delivery model and streamline the applications process for all schemes.

Staff in my Department administer over 70 different schemes and services. The Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed as expeditiously as possible. Processing times vary across schemes, depending on the differing qualification criteria. Schemes that require a high level of documentary evidence from the customer, particularly in the case of illness-related schemes, can take longer to process. Similarly, means-tested payments can also require more detailed investigation and interaction with the applicant, thereby lengthening the decision making process.

It is the policy of the Department to standardise and simplify its application forms as much as possible. The design of the medical elements of application forms is undertaken in consultation with the Department's Chief Medical Adviser and Deputy Chief Medical Adviser.

As part of the Department's service delivery modernisation programme, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have been implemented in recent years. Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised.

The new Intreo service integrates employment services and the traditional income support model, providing for a streamlined and personalised service to Jobseekers. Intreo centres have

also introduced an integrated decision-making team to further streamline the processes formerly undertaken by former Local Office staff, Social Welfare Inspectors and the Community Welfare Service.

I wish to assure the Deputy that prompt processing of claims remains a priority for my Department. Each scheme area is monitored on an on-going basis and processing procedures are reviewed to ensure that claims are paid to customers as quickly as possible.

Rent Supplement Scheme

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when he will arrange an increase to full rent support in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18888/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The client concerned has been requested to provide the Department with up to date documentation regarding changes to their rate of rent payable. On receipt of same the claim will be re-assessed with regard to entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which a person (details supplied) can expect a seamless transfer through existing or other relevant payment given their acceptance in a third level institution and that they have been in receipt of disability allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18889/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person in question is currently in receipt of disability allowance (DA). We are awaiting details regarding his acceptance in a third level institution. DA will remain in payment as long as the person in question fulfils the criteria for the scheme. When the information regarding his further education has been received, he will be advised further of his options.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the correct level of rent support applicable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18890/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The rate of Rent Supplement for the client concerned was increased as an exceptional measure due to extenuating family circumstances in September 2015. The client concerned is in receipt of their maximum entitlement to Rent Supplement based on their weekly means and family composition.

The client has been requested to provide the Department with an up to date lease agreement confirming any changes to her rate of rent payable. On receipt of same the claim can be re-assessed with regard to entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Appeals

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when the long standing dispute between a person (details supplied) and his Department can be brought to a conclusion in respect of the person's application for exceptional needs payments, the refusal of which is causing hardship; if arrangements will be made for a social worker to make contact with the person in the event of prolongation of the dispute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18898/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Parliamentary Question No. 202 [14192/16] refers payment of carer's allowance to the person concerned was terminated in January 2016, when means were not disclosed during the course of a review of entitlement. The person concerned has appealed this decision and her case is currently with the social welfare appeals office hearing. Entitlement to rent supplement is based on household means and cannot be determined in this case until all relevant requested documentation is submitted in support of this application. Payment of rent supplement is currently suspended.

The person concerned applied for an exceptional needs payment (ENP) in Mid-June 2016. During the application process, documentation was requested from the person concerned to demonstrate how she had funded foreign travel which she had undertaken previously. This documentation was not provided and the person concerned was issued with a refusal in writing to the ENP application. The person concerned was advised of her right to seek a review of this decision and she is currently engaged in that process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

136. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the minimum amount of public liability insurance cover that community employment schemes are required to have; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18924/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The minimum limit of indemnity for public liability insurance for a community employment scheme is currently set at €6.5 million. This amount of cover is industry-standard for the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

Social Welfare Overpayments

137. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way an overpayment occurred in the case of a person (details supplied); if he will pay in full the amount due to them relative to their carer's allowance claim and deduct €20 per week to cover the debt repayment plan given the financial pressures of the case. [18929/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My department is obliged to recover all debt owed to it as quickly as possible and within the relevant legislation and guidelines governing the recovery of debt. The person concerned has an outstanding debt due to my department and proposals on its recovery have been made to her.

The debt arose during the period from 28 April 2014 to 14 October 2014 while the person concerned was in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance and was caused by her claiming payment

in respect of an increase for a qualified adult to which she was not entitled.

The person concerned was offered the opportunity to comment on the recovery proposals.

The person concerned responded on 22 June 2016 with her comments. Having taken these comments into account, my Department has decided to deduct €20.00 per week from her carer's allowance weekly payment from 7 July 2016. Furthermore, the Department proposes to withhold some of the arrears due against the debt. Accordingly, the sum of €1,000 is being withheld and the balance of arrears due will issue to the person in question shortly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

138. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will reach a decision on an appeal by a person (details supplied) under the farm assist scheme. [18993/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 5th January 2016. I am advised that the person concerned has submitted additional evidence and that the Appeals Officer has referred the case back to the Department of Social Protection for review. As soon as the review is complete, the Appeals Officer will complete his/her consideration of the appeal.

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.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Applications

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application form in respect of a claim for child benefit has been received from a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19029/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I can confirm that an application for child benefit has been received from the person concerned. This claim has now been awarded and all arrears due for the period January 2014 to June 2016 will issue by cheque to her home address in the coming days. Payment for July will be available for collection at the nominated Post Office from Tuesday the 5th of July.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Military Aircraft Landings

140. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade why a plane of the United States of America (details supplied) was given permission to land at Shannon Airport in County Clare on 26 June 2016, given that the plane is a multi-role warplane; if he is aware that the military personnel who disembarked were special forces of the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19018/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In response to a request from the US Embassy, my Department granted clearance for a landing by the aircraft to which the Deputy refers. Permission was granted on the basis that the aircraft was unarmed and carried no arms, ammunition or explosives, would not engage in intelligence gathering and that the flight in question would not form 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 comply with these conditions which do not include a requirement in relation to the numbers and designation of passengers.

Military Aircraft Landings

141. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he gave permission on 25 June 2016 for a United States of America military plane (details supplied) to land at Shannon Airport in County Clare, given that these aircraft are used to provide cargo and passenger transportation, as well as forward deployment logistics support and special missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19019/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In response to requests from the US Embassy, my Department granted permission for landings by the aircraft to which the Deputy refers. Permission was granted on the basis that the aircraft were unarmed and carried no arms, ammunition or explosives, would not engage in intelligence gathering and that the flights in question would not form part of military exercises or operations.

EU Funding

142. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the European Union funding specifically for North-South projects; the amount of co-funding provided by the Irish State to these projects, in each of the years from 2011 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19010/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): During the period 2011 to 2015 North/South projects received EU funding under the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes. Both Programmes are managed by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB), a North/South Body co-sponsored by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform in Ireland and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland.

The objective of the PEACE III Programme was to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland. 215 projects were funded under the Programme, which had a total budget of €333 million.

The objective of the INTERREG IVA Programme was to support strategic cross-border co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable region. 88 projects were funded under the Programme, which covered the border region of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Western Scotland and had a total budget of €256 million.

Both Programmes received co-funding from a range of Accountable Departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, while Scotland also co-fund the INTERREG Programme. In the case of PEACE, total Irish match funding was €54 million, while in the case of INTERREG, total Irish match funding was €18 million.

The match funding provided by Ireland for the years 2011-2015 is detailed in the tables.

PEACE III	ERDF (Total)	Match Funding (IRL)
2011	€36,885,396.23	€9,022,677.34
2012	€29,284,464.73	€7,163,371.26
2013	€35,770,256.47	€8,749,880.01
2014	€39,064,436.20	€9,555,670.62
2015	€34,001,639.96	€7,961,110.97
TOTAL	€175,006,193.59	€42,452,710.20

INTERREG IVA	ERDF (Total)	Match Funding (IRL)
2011	€18,688,913.12	€1,986,987.28
2012	€25,421,915.57	€2,204,605.34
2013	€32,096,411.69	€2,541,160.62
2014	€40,626,782.00	€3,252,142.68
2015	€35,479,642.24	€2,758,523.44
TOTAL	€152,313,664.62	€12,743,419.36

I am pleased that the Irish Government was able to secure the approval of the European Council for €150 million of EU funding towards a new cross-border PEACE Programme for the period 2014-2020, and that the UK Government subsequently decided to allocate an additional €50 million from its European Regional Development Fund allocation to the Programme, bringing the total amount of EU funding to €200 million. Along with match funding from the two Member States, the programme will have a total value of €269 million. The focus of the PEACE IV programme will be on social inclusion and combatting poverty, with investment proposed in a number of areas, including shared education, children and young people, shared spaces and services, and building positive relations at a local level.

The new INTERREG Programme for the same period has a total value, including Member State contributions, of €283 million. The Programme has four key priority areas for investment, namely research and innovation, the environment, sustainable transport, and health.

Drainage Schemes Status

143. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of planned works at Ragoonagh Strand, Ballybunion, County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18926/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The River Feale Catchment Drainage Scheme (CDS) was constructed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) during the 1950s, and OPW continues to have a statutory responsibility for maintenance of the scheme.

The River Feale at Ragoonagh is strongly influenced by the tide and is contained within the river cross-section by an earthen Flood Defence Embankment Scheme. Following extreme and repeated storm surges experienced on the River Feale Estuary in 2014, several dwellings at Ragoonagh were inundated by tidal flooding. These properties were constructed since the completion of the Feale CDS. Consequently, the OPW undertook to improve the flood defences at this location by extending an existing OPW Earthen Flood Defence Embankment by approximately

500 metres and tying it into adjacent higher ground. This was necessary to provide protection to these vulnerable dwellings which experienced flooding in 2014.

Following several meetings and protracted negotiations, OPW obtained consent from a local landowner to enter his property to carry out the necessary works. In recognition of this consent, OPW agreed to extend the flood defence by a further 250 metres to provide protection against tidal inundation of this person's farmland. This work has been completed. In common with many other flood defence assets in Co. Kerry, this embankment was damaged by Storm Imogen in February 2016. OPW intends to carry out necessary repair work and is currently in communication with the National Parks & Wildlife Service on the matter. NPWS consent is necessary as the site lies within a designated Special Area of Conservation and proposed National Heritage Area.

I understand that the landowner concerned has sought a further extension of the flood defence embankment which would provide protection to a section of land that is only vulnerable to tidal inundation in very extreme events. OPW would not be justified in further extending the embankment.

Office of Public Works Properties

144. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to provide a full list of current vacant properties owned by the Office of Public Works in the Dundalk region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19030/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the former Social Welfare Office at Barrack Street, Dundalk is not in use at present as it is being sold to Louth County Council. This transaction is nearing completion.

Rights of Way Provision

145. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to consider legislating to allow for local authorities to lease rights of way from landowners who wish to facilitate the establishment of walking trails traversing their land which would indemnify the landholders from claims of liability for personal injury; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18830/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring): Through Comhairle na Tuaithe, which was established in 2004 to address among other matters the issue of access to the countryside, a set of access parameters to the countryside as a basis for conflict prevention has been developed.

As part of the ongoing process, an expert group was convened to consider a number of legal issues and, as part of its work, examined existing legislation such as the Occupiers Liability Act 1995. The group explored the necessity for and the implications of legislating with regard to a number of issues, including in relation to granting a right of access to private lands by recreational users.

The group reported in May 2007 and the then Minister formed the view that the most appropriate way forward was to continue on the basis of a permissive access regime with the agreement of landholders via initiatives such as the Walks Scheme and the Pilot Mountain Access

Projects. These initiatives continue to be successfully implemented on the ground by a team of Rural Recreation Officers, employed by Local Development Companies.

The consensus approach adopted is underpinned by the principle of mutual respect between landowners and recreation users, with the acceptance of the rights of landowners on the one hand and the need of recreation users to have reasonable access to the countryside on the other. The permissive access model currently used as part of the implementation of the National Countryside Recreation Strategy for the development of greenways and walkways in Ireland has led to the successful delivery of over 880 walking, cycling, and equestrian trails, which are all listed on the Irish Trails Register.

Ireland's Way Marked trails and the majority of other walking routes are permissive access routes that have been developed with the landowners' agreement; they are not public rights of way. In general, there are very few public rights of way in Ireland which are not maintained public roads. Public rights of way acquired otherwise than by statute, arise as a result of dedication and acceptance. Given the success of the permissive model to date, I am of the view that access to private lands for recreational users should continue to be on a permissive basis only.

Fisheries Protection

146. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the KerryLIFE programme and its impact on farmers (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18992/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I understand that the KerryLIFE Project Team has asked farmers to provide certain details to my Department, in order for it to administer aspects of the programme, both effectively and efficiently.

I am advised that the process being followed involves the project team carrying out a farm walk with each individual farmer. During the farm walk, the project team talks through the farm plan measures with the farmer. Following the farm walk and agreement to the measures proposed, the farmer is then asked to sign the farm plan.

Seirbhísí Farantóireachta

147. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén uair a lorgófar tairiscintí le haghaidh na seirbhíse farantóireachta chuig Toraigh; an mbeidh sé mar choinníoll sa chonradh gur ón oileán a bheidh an chéad seirbhís fhóirdheonaithe den lá agus gur chuig an oileán a bheidh an ceann deireanach; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [18925/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tiocfaidh críoch leis an gconradh reatha do sheirbhís farantóireachta Toraigh ar 31 Márta 2018. Tá an próiseas chun tairiscintí a lorg do chonradh úr don oileán tosaithe ag mo Roinn le tamall agus tá léirithe spéise don tseirbhís faighte. Sna seachtainí beaga romhainn amach, beidh mo Roinn ag eisiúint Iarratas ar Thairiscint chucu siúd a léirigh spéis. Tá comhdhéanamh an Iarratais ar Thairiscint sin á mheas ag mo Roinn faoi láthair, próiseas atá á chur i gcrích ag tógáil san áireamh, i measc nithe eile, tuairimí atá nochta ag pobal an oileáin.

Wildlife Regulations

148. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has concerns about the large number of herring gulls in coastal towns in north County Dublin and her plans to deal with them in a non-lethal manner. [18999/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): All wild birds, including seagulls, are protected under the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 and the EU Birds Directive. However, there is a facility, under section 42 of the Wildlife Acts, for a person to obtain a permit, to take certain actions, including the scaring, capturing or killing of birds where they are causing serious damage to buildings and other structures, food (including human food products), agricultural crops, forestry plantations, other fauna, etc.

Applications for such permits are considered on a case by case basis by my Department.

The population of herring gulls has greatly declined in Ireland (by about 90%) over the past 40 years, probably due to improvements in managing landfill sites as well as other factors. Nonetheless there are substantial numbers in some coastal towns and cities, including north Dublin city and county. Herring gulls can be a nuisance because of noise, mainly in July and early August, and may steal food from people eating outdoors. In the latter case, the easy availability of food sources from litter or feeding by people may be contributing factors to the bird behaviour of concern.

Householders may take steps, outside the breeding season, to make roofs unsuitable for nesting and thereby reduce the presence of gulls.

Rural Development Programme

149. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if and when she finalised and signed off on the procedures manual for the rural development programme. [19050/16]

150. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if and when she approved the operating rules for the rural development programme. [19051/16]

151. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she will sign contracts with the Local Community Development Committees. [19052/16]

152. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she will formulate and sign the service level agreements for the rural development programmes. [19053/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 to 152, inclusive together.

Funding agreements for the implementation of the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme issued to eighteen local action groups in the week beginning 20th June, with a view to launching the LEADER programme in these areas from early July 2016.

I expect to issue further agreements to the other ten proposed local action groups in the coming weeks as the strategy selection process is fully concluded in each area.

The operating rules governing the programme have been finalised and circulated to all of the proposed local action groups. Some additional appendices will be added to the operating rules prior to the launch of the programme in early July 2016.

The Service Level Agreement between each Local Community Development Committee, and its implementing and financial partners, is a matter for agreement at local level. Having said that, my Department has contributed to the drafting of a template agreement and will continue to work with all entities to conclude a workable format.

A number of the local action groups have also been collaborating to develop harmonised procedures manuals and processes, and this work is progressing well.

Hospital Appointments Status

153. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18820/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18822/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

155. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18823/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

156. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [18824/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

157. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18827/16]

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

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

hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

158. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18828/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

159. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18829/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18831/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

161. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18835/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18836/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18838/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

164. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a commitment to expedite the recruitment of a full-time consultant medical oncologist with a special interest in sarcoma in St. Vincent's Hospital; if he will renew the contract of the locum consultant medical oncologist who has a special interest in sarcoma until the post is filled on a permanent basis; if he will agree to meet the sarcoma action group of concerned cancer patients and their families who are seeking an urgent meeting with him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18839/16]

195. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken to extend the current contract of a person (details supplied); if he will ensure that a permanent position is offered to this person based on their expertise in treating sarcoma cancer; if he is aware of the concern of patients at the loss of this person and their desire to have this consultant made permanent and their position approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18928/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 195 together.

Services for patients with sarcoma are provided in St Vincent's University Hospital and in Cork University Hospital. Both hospitals are designated cancer centres and have an extensive range of multi-disciplinary services and expert clinical advice available to them.

St Vincent's University Hospital has provided highly specialised and individualised treatment to sarcoma sufferers for a number of years. St. Vincent's has access to all of the relevant

specialties including surgery, medical oncology, radiation oncology, radiology and pathology and is the largest provider of surgical procedures for soft tissue sarcomas in the country.

A National Clinical Lead in Soft Tissue Sarcomas is in place to oversee the services for patients with sarcomas. Irish patients with sarcoma have their cases presented and discussed at one of the two sarcoma multi-disciplinary teams. Members of these teams also have links with European specialists in sarcoma.

A Consultant Medical Oncologist was employed by St Vincent's hospital on a locum contract to provide cover for another Consultant Medical Oncologists who had taken on the role as Chair of Irish Clinical Oncology Research Group. This Consultant has now returned to his post at the hospital and the reason for employing the locum has ceased.

I am assured by the HSE that care for patients requiring treatment for sarcoma cancer will continue to receive high quality care at St Vincent's Hospital and that their management will be provided by one of the hospital's full-time oncologists.

Consideration is also being given to appointing a permanent Consultant Medical Oncologist with a special interest in the area of sarcoma to meet demand at St Vincent's University Hospital. Such an appointment would be advertised and the appointment process would be conducted in the normal way.

I am happy to meet with the Sarcoma Action Group and my office will be in touch with the group directly in that regard.

Hospital Appointments Status

165. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18840/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18842/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18844/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18845/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

169. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18847/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18848/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18849/16]

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

individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

172. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for surgery in Cork University Hospital for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18850/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18853/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

174. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18855/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

175. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment in Tralee General Hospital for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18859/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

176. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18863/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient

has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18865/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18866/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

179. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18868/16]

198. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18933/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 179 and 198 together.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

180. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18869/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

181. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18870/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

182. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18872/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

183. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18873/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

184. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18874/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18875/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

186. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18876/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

187. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18877/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

188. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18901/16]

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

individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

189. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18903/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18904/16]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

191. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18905/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18906/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

193. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18910/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Waiting Lists

194. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting lists for inpatient and day case treatment at Letterkenny University Hospital, per specialty and in tabular form, and who have been waiting for six, nine, 12, 15 months and more than 15 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18927/16]

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

Question No. 195 answered with Question No. 164.

Hospital Appointments Status

196. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18930/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

197. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18932/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Question No. 198 answered with Question No. 179.

Hospital Appointments Status

199. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18934/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

200. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18935/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Waiting Lists

201. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a procedure in the South Infirmity Hospital, Cork for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18937/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to

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

Medical Card Applications

202. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when he will complete a review of a medical card application for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18938/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 recently issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Accident and Emergency Departments Data

203. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of visits to each accident and emergency department in each hospital throughout the country; the number of such visits that happened during the hours of 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. in each of these hospitals; the number of staff in each of these accident and emergency departments analysed by category of consultants, doctors, nurses and other categories of staff; the number of admissions to the hospital that are made through the accident and emergency department in that hospital for 2015 or the most recent period for when information is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18944/16]

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

Prescriptions Charges

204. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 412 of 27 January 2015, 120 of 2 December 2015 and 334 of 2 February 2016, the status of the response by the Health Service Executive to this issue; to request an update from pharmacy interface project; and his plans with regard to resolving this anomaly. [18945/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department previously asked the HSE to explore administrative changes that would enable a single rather than multiple prescription charge to be deducted across multiple strengths of the same product, (e.g. warfarin), and the HSE has reached agreement with the Irish Pharmacy Union on a mechanism to deliver this functionality within the Pharmacy Interface Project.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly regarding the latest status of this project. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private

Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointments Status

205. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment at South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital, Cork, for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18958/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

206. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18959/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18960/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

208. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18962/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18963/16]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

210. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation

for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18964/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18965/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18967/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

213. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18968/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

214. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18969/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

215. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18971/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

216. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of providing a hospital bed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18979/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

217. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the status of a person (details supplied) on a waiting list. [18998/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Medical Card Applications

218. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the medical card scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19000/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 recently issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

HSE Funding

219. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the registered charities the Health Service Executive supports and the funding it has allocated to them in each of the years 2015 and 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19001/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Health Strategies

220. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the measures he proposes to put in place to offset the challenges which Irish health care patients who had planned to travel to the United Kingdom under the European Union cross-border directive will now face, given the recent European Union referendum there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19002/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The EU Directive 2011/24/EU on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare aims to ensure EU citizens may access safe and good quality healthcare services across EU borders. The Directive establishes a framework for cross border healthcare between EU/EEA states to facilitate patients to access care in another Member State in accordance with their entitlements in their own country. Under the Directive, known as the Cross Border Healthcare Directive (CBD), insured patients are entitled to have the costs of cross-border healthcare services reimbursed if the healthcare service in question is among the benefits to which they are entitled in their Member State of affiliation. As such, it allows Irish residents to avail of healthcare in other EU or EEA (excluding Switzerland) Member States that they would be entitled to within the public health system in Ireland, which is not contrary to Irish legislation.

The result of the recent EU Referendum in the UK means that the UK electorate have declared their wish to leave the EU. It is important to be clear that the UK has not yet left the EU.

Until it formally withdraws from the Union, it remains a full Member, with all of its existing rights and obligations.

I wish to assure the Deputy that there will be no immediate changes in the area of health as a consequence of the UK's decision to leave the EU. Cross-border services and health cooperation between the UK and Ireland will not be affected in the immediate term. Arrangements are in place, building on an already completed initial risk assessment plan, to consider any longer-term implications of the referendum result. Irish patients who had planned to travel to the UK under the CBD in the near future may continue to do as planned.

The terms of a British exit from the EU are unknown at this stage. It is expected to take a minimum of two years of negotiations between all EU member states, including Ireland, to agree a new arrangement between the UK and the EU, and the Department of Health will be fully involved in these negotiations. Ensuring that there is minimum disruption in the area of health and that essential services are maintained will be our key priority.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

221. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost of recruiting and employing an additional 100 full-time hospital consultants in 2017; and his estimate of ancillary costs involved. [19032/16]

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

Home Help Service Provision

222. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 of providing an additional one million Home Help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19033/16]

223. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 of providing an additional 2,000 home care packages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19034/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 and 223 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Disability Services Provision

224. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 of providing an additional 500,000 personal assistant hours for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19035/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will

empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

In the 2016 National Service Plan, the Health Service Executive's priority is to protect the level of services provided in 2015 and to provide 1.3 million hours of Personal Assistant services at a cost of approximately €30 million and 2.6 million hours of home support at a cost of €52 million, to over 2,000 adults with a disability.

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

Care of the Elderly Provision

225. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 of providing an additional 200 intensive home care packages for persons with dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19036/16]

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

Medical Card Expenditure

226. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 of providing a medical card for all children in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance. [19037/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for Government includes the provision of a medical card to all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance. This is a matter which I intend to consider in the context of the implementation of the Health commitments in the Programme for Government and having regard to the funding available to facilitate such measures. Detailed financial analysis will be required in order to establish as accurately as pos-

sible the expected costs to the Exchequer in each case.

Prescriptions Charges

227. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 of a €1 reduction in prescription charges. [19038/16]

228. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 of a €10 reduction in the drug threshold. [19039/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 and 228 together.

I intend to consider these matters in the context of the commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government to significantly reduce the cost of medicines, having regard to the funding available to facilitate such measures. Detailed costings will be required as part of this process, in order to establish as accurately as possible the expected costs to the Exchequer.

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 these matters have 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, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up these matters with them.

Hospital Appointments Status

229. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19047/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 HSE, 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 please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

230. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to secure a

pancreatic surgeon to replace the former surgeon who was involved in this vital area and if such an appointment is imminent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19048/16]

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

Departmental Funding

231. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if funding is available to farmers who wish to construct an underpass for cattle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18832/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The construction of underpasses is not available under the TAMS II suite of measures. I have no plans to introduce this measure at this time.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

232. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18833/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person concerned is an applicant under the TAMS II Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme. An application under the Scheme was received on 21 June 2016 and it is expected that processing of these applications will commence shortly.

GLAS Applications

233. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will issue a payment to a person (details supplied) under tranche 1 of the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18854/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under Tranche 1 of GLAS was received in my Department on the 13 May 2015 and the person named was approved into the GLAS 1 with effect from 1 October 2015. There are a number of applications, including that of the person named, remaining which have not passed all of the Department's pre-payment validation checks for the 2015 part-year payment. The Department is continuing to investigate these issues including the correction of any IT or data issues with a view to all these remaining cases meeting the payment validation checks so that they will be paid the full amount of their 2015 part-year payment at the same time the 2015 GLAS balancing payment is due to issue.

Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

234. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) for a farm payment; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [18920/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application under the ‘new entrant’ category of the 2015 National Reserve. This application was not successful as the applicant was deemed to have exceeded the off farm income threshold of €40,000. The applicant was notified in writing of this decision and was offered the opportunity to submit an appeal. My Department received an appeal from the person named in relation to his National Reserve application. Following consideration of this appeal by my Department based on the information set out by the applicant, the original decision was upheld. The person named was notified of this decision in writing and was offered the opportunity to submit a further appeal to the independent Basic Payment Scheme appeals committee.

TAMS Applications

235. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in approving targeted agricultural modernisation scheme applications under tranche 2 for the low emission slurry spreading scheme; when it is expected these applications will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18921/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): 263 applications were received under the Low Emission Slurry Scheme for Tranche 2. Approximately 125 will be passed to the Local Offices for further processing early next week. The remainder of the eligible applications will follow shortly after.

Agriculture Industry

236. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the possible withdrawal of approval for glyphosate by the European Union; if he supported this in the European Union Council of Agriculture Ministers; if the decision taken by the EU was in line with the position adopted by Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18922/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The initial Commission proposals for the approval of glyphosate were discussed by Member State representatives at meetings of the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed on a number of occasions but a vote was not taken. Following a series of further EU Commission proposals and discussions with Member States that did not achieve a qualified majority, it remained open to the Commission to adopt its own proposal, therefore extending the current approval of glyphosate until the Committee for Risk Assessment of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has completed its work in assessing its effects.

Accordingly, the European Commission adopted on 29 June a maximum 18-month extension - from 1 July 2016 - to the license for glyphosate to allow ECHA to complete its assessment.

Ireland has supported the Commission proposals for the renewal of approval of glyphosate.

Organic Farming Scheme Eligibility

237. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

reason some organic farmers cannot receive payments under various categories under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18941/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All EU Member States are required in the administration of their Rural Development Programmes to protect against double payment under different schemes for similar farmer commitments. Organic farmers who are also in the GLAS scheme and have opted for the Farmland Bird, Low Input Permanent Pasture, Traditional Hay Meadow and Wild Bird Cover GLAS actions must adhere to the GLAS farming prescription for these actions irrespective of their farming system and therefore payment under both schemes cannot be justified.

Organic production is a requirement of the Organic Farming Scheme and as no agricultural production is permitted in GLAS on areas selected for The Environmental Management of Fallow Land, Planting a Grove of Native Trees and Riparian Margins GLAS actions, the question of organic payment therefore does not arise in these cases.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

238. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the information technology system that was put in place to deal with the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme; if he is fully satisfied it is operating to highly efficient standards; if there is a need for improvements in the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18942/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am satisfied that the IT functionality put in place to administer TAMS II is operating to highly efficient standards. The additional functionality to allow payment claims to be submitted online is being finalised within my Department and it is anticipated that it will be available next month. Payments will follow for approved payment claims.

Pigmeat Sector

239. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will establish a forum for the pig industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18943/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The development of a viable pigmeat sector is a priority for me given the crucial role which the industry plays. I am very conscious of the fact that prices have come under pressure over the last year and the difficulties that this is causing for producers.

Given the strategic importance which the sector plays in our agri economy, a Pig Industry Stakeholder Group, chaired by Dr Sean Brady was established in my Department and membership was drawn from across the sector, including farmers and processors. This Group's remit was to address these challenges facing the sector under themes such as biosecurity, animal welfare, quality assurance, antibiotic usage, animal health, salmonella control programme, marketing, feed, non-intensive sector and other production models. This was a very comprehensive exercise stretching over many months which also included a public consultation phase during which submissions were received and presented to the Committee by many different stakeholders. The Group completed its report in February and presented it to the High Level Implementation Committee overseeing the implementation of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. This reflected the fact that the preparation of this report is one of the key recommendations under the

Food Wise Strategy.

This timely report afforded all industry stakeholders including farmers, processors and Government Agencies a chance to take a collective view of how best to address the challenges facing the industry in order to support its development in accordance with the Food Wise 2025 vision. The focus now must turn to its implementation and my Department is working on a plan for its implementation in the context of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Given the comprehensive nature of the report, its support from stakeholders and its wide-ranging conclusions I believe that a focus on its implementation represents best use of available resources for all parties and most importantly will deliver the most meaningful outcome for the sector going forward.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Eligibility

240. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of the case of a person (details supplied) in respect of the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18950/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): AEOS is a voluntary scheme where applicants agree to abide by the Terms and Conditions on joining the Scheme. There are no circumstances where an applicant can receive payment for a contract where the Terms and Conditions are not adhered to. Any contractual issues between a herd-owner and their professional adviser are entirely a matter between those parties.

The person named commenced their AEOS contract on 1 November 2010. Payment issued for the 2010 and 2011 Scheme years in the amount of €5,833.28.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. The application of the person named was also selected for an on-farm inspection which took place on the 4 October 2012. During this inspection non-compliances with the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme were noted in relation to the Tree Planting and Species Rich Grassland actions which resulted in penalties being incurred. Due to the severity of the breaches of the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme the penalties incurred were far greater than the total payable amount of the AEOS contract. Therefore, the contract was terminated and the Department is recouping all monies paid under the Scheme.

It is open to the person named to contact the Department's Offices in Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford if they wish to discuss the recoupment options that may be considered in this case.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

241. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18952/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person concerned is an applicant under the TAMS II Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme. An application was received on 23 March 2016 and is now being processed. Once it has been determined that all the terms and conditions of the Scheme have been complied with a letter of approval to carry out the works will issue.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Eligibility

242. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will make a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) under the young farmers investment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18953/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person concerned is an applicant under the TAMS II Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme. An application was received on 24 March 2016 and is now being processed.

Forestry Grants

243. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has made a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) for a forest road grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18954/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The assessment of the application under the Forest Road Scheme by the person named is nearing completion and a decision will issue very shortly.

Seaweed Harvesting Licences

244. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of a query (details supplied); to outline the correct application process with regard to grant aid for a sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18981/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has responsibility for the licensing of seaweed cultivation. Applications for Aquaculture/Foreshore Licences for this purpose are considered by my Department under the provisions of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997, the Foreshore Act 1933 and applicable EU legislation.

Applications may be made utilising the application form which is available on my Department's website via the following link:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/fisheries/aquacultureforeshoremanagement/formsdownloads/>.

My Department is also responsible for licensing the harvesting of wild seaweed where the primary use of the harvested seaweed is for fisheries related purposes.

Licensing for harvesting of wild seaweed for all other purposes is the responsibility of the Department for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Information with regard to grant-aid for the sector is available from Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) at the following website address:<http://www.bim.ie/schemes/>.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

245. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 555 of 24 May 2016 when a targeted agricultural modernisation scheme II payment will be made to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [19028/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person concerned is an applicant under the TAMS II Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme. The application is now being processed. Once it has been determined that all the terms and conditions of the Scheme have been complied with a letter of approval to carry out the works will issue.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

246. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of an application by a person (details supplied), including when it will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19040/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person concerned is an applicant under the TAMS II Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme. The application was referred to the Local Office for further processing on 21 June 2016. Once it has been determined that all the terms and conditions of the Scheme have been complied with a letter of approval to carry out the work will issue.

Agrifood Sector

247. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the immediate contingency steps he will take to safeguard the interests of the Irish agrifood sector following the decision by United Kingdom voters to leave the European Union in the recent referendum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19041/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Last week's decision by the UK to leave the EU has the potential to give rise to significant challenges for the Irish agri-food sector. I am keenly aware of the concerns of those working in the sector about the UK exit decision, but I am also confident that my Department and our agencies are well prepared to deal with the challenges ahead.

It is important also to bear in mind that the extent of any risk ultimately depends on the trade and other arrangements negotiated between the EU and the UK. These negotiations may take up to two years, and perhaps longer, and over that period existing arrangements will continue to apply.

Nevertheless, my Department has engaged in detailed contingency planning for the possibility of this result, and has published a summary of the key actions we will now take to address the contingencies arising from the UK's decision.

The most immediate concerns for agri-food exporters centre on exchange rates. In that regard, the Central Bank of Ireland has pre-established contingency plans to deal with market volatility surrounding the referendum result. The Bank will engage with the Department of Finance and individual financial institutions regarding potential risks. Actions by ECB and other global actors will be monitored closely. In addition, I have asked Bord Bia to provide practical guidance to SMEs to assist them in dealing with marketing challenges arising in the short term.

Aside from currency fluctuations, the main areas in which potential impacts are foreseen are in relation to tariffs and trade, the EU budget, regulations and standards, and customs controls and certification, while complex issues also arise for the fisheries sector.

However, we must remember that our trading relationship with the UK is not altered in any way until the negotiation process that will dictate the terms and conditions of the UK's departure is completed. In the meantime, and as part of our overall contingency planning, I have established a dedicated unit in my Department to work on all of the issues that I have mentioned, and I will convene a consultative committee of stakeholders to ensure a full exchange of information as the negotiations proceed.

Beef Exports

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the immediate contingency steps he will take to safeguard Irish beef exports, including the live cattle trade, given the large volume that goes to this market following the decision by voters in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19042/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The decision of the UK last week to leave the EU is one that creates considerable challenges for the agri-food sector as a whole, including the beef sector. The UK is by far our largest trading partner. Last year we exported almost €5.1 billion worth of agricultural products. This included more than €1.1 billion in beef products and almost €970 million in dairy products. Ireland is also the UK's largest destination for its food exports - worth €3.8 billion last year.

This bilateral trade takes place on the basis of harmonised EU rules on animal and public health and labelling, without complex certification, quota limits or customs duties and tariffs. And it is underpinned by the vital support of the CAP budget, to which the UK is a significant net contributor.

Given these linkages, and as the UK is a net food importer, both countries have a strong interest in maintaining a close agri-food trading relationship. In addition, the resilience of the Irish agri-food sector, and of the beef sector in particular, is well recognised, and this, together with the strong commercial relationships built up over years of trading, will help us to negotiate our way through the challenges ahead.

It is important also to bear in mind that the precise implications of last week's decision depend on the trade and other arrangements ultimately negotiated between the EU and the UK. These negotiations may take up to two years, and perhaps longer, and over that period existing arrangements will continue to apply.

Nevertheless, my Department has engaged in detailed contingency planning for the possibility of this result, and has published a summary of the key actions we will now take to address the contingencies arising from the UK's decision.

The most immediate concerns for beef exporters centre on Euro Sterling exchange rates. It should be noted that the fall in the value of Sterling against the Euro since the UK referendum, while significant, is not unprecedented. Nevertheless a sustained period of currency volatility could be of concern. In that regard, the Central Bank of Ireland has pre-established contingency plans to deal with market volatility surrounding the referendum result. The Bank will engage with the Department of Finance and individual financial institutions regarding potential risks. Actions by ECB and other global actors will be monitored closely. In addition, I have asked Bord Bia to provide practical guidance to SMEs to assist them in dealing with marketing challenges arising in the short term.

The other areas in which potential impacts are foreseen are in relation to tariffs and trade,

the EU budget, regulations and standards, and customs controls and certification, while complex issues also arise for the fisheries sector.

However, we must remember that our trading relationship with the UK is not altered in any way until the negotiation process that will dictate the terms and conditions of the UK's departure is completed. In the meantime, and as part of our overall contingency planning, I have established a dedicated unit in my Department to work on all of the issues that I have mentioned, and I will convene a consultative committee of stakeholders to ensure a full exchange of information as the negotiations proceed.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

249. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the first meeting of the consultative committee of stakeholders will take place following the decision by voters in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in the recent referendum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19043/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the announcement of the UK referendum result, I announced my intention to convene a consultative committee of stakeholders to ensure a full exchange of information as the exit negotiations proceed. Arrangements for the first meeting are currently being finalised, and I expect this to take place next week.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

250. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out by county to date in 2016 the number of applications received to date under tranches 1, 2 and 3 of the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme II; the number of applications that have received part approvals thus far; the number of applications that have received full approvals thus far; the number of participants that have received payments to date; the number of payments that have not issued yet; when outstanding payments will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19044/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy concerned as soon as it is available.

TB Eradication Scheme

251. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he will take to protect the health and welfare of farm animals given the current deer population and associated tuberculosis levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19045/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's view is that insofar as TB is concerned the primary underlying problem in localised areas where TB levels are high is driven primarily by badgers and not by deer. International research has shown that deer as a species are not particularly effective as maintenance hosts for TB except when numbers are high. An exercise conducted in 2007-2008 in an area with known TB infection in deer, focussed on identifying the strains of TB in cattle, deer and badgers, found

a significantly higher prevalence of the disease in badgers than in either cattle or deer.

I would note that responsibility for the management of wild deer in the State under the Wildlife Acts rests with the Minister for of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the control of deer on private property is the responsibility of individual landowners. Landowners may apply to the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht for permission under section 42 of the Wildlife Acts to cull deer where this is necessary outside the annual open seasons.

In an effort to address concerns around the linkage between TB and deer, my Department in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service has conducted post-mortem sampling of deer carcasses for the presence of TB in the Calary area of Co. Wicklow where relatively high levels of TB in deer has been reported. The project also involves identifying the strains of TB for comparison with that found in cattle and badgers in that specific area. Mindful of the commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government to address individual TB blackspots, further consultations have recently taken place between officials of the two Departments to further this work and a range of options are currently being considered.

Additionally, it should be noted that hunters supplying wild game to Approved Game Handling Establishments (AGHEs) must be trained in animal health and hygiene relevant to wild game. By law, hunters must report suspicion of contagious disease (e.g. TB in deer) to the relevant competent authority, either my Department or the Local Authority Veterinary Service (LAVS). Based on existing evidence, from AGHEs and reports from trained hunters, TB levels in wild deer are, with the exception of Co. Wicklow very low nationally.

Telecommunications Services Provision

252. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his concerns that a company disconnected a person's (details supplied) telephone landline without prior notice and that the person must pay a €100 reconnection charge. [18909/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): The provision of electronic communications services, including landline services, occurs within a fully liberalised market, which is regulated by the independent market regulator, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

The regulatory framework obliges all providers of electronic communications networks and services to adopt and implement a code of practice for settling unresolved disputes with customers. The code must include a policy on disconnections. Any complaint that a service provider has not complied with its published disconnection policy in any particular case should be addressed to ComReg for investigation.

As ComReg is independent, I have no statutory authority to participate in its investigation of complaints or to access its decision in any particular case, which may include personal information.

It would be more appropriate for the customer referred to in the Deputy's question or for the Deputy to raise the matter directly with ComReg. The relevant contact details for ComReg, which are available on the ComReg site, are as follows:

Text - Send a text with the word COMREG to 51500

Web Chat - *Live support web chat* Email - *consumerline@comreg.ie*

National Broadband Plan Data

253. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the stage the mapping process is at for rural broadband for County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18973/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment is not forthcoming.

The High Speed Broadband Map 2020, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area, which is the subject of procurement. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The Department continues to monitor commercial operator deployment plans of high speed broadband in the BLUE area. In March /April of this year the Department issued a detailed questionnaire to those operators whose coverage is included in the BLUE area on the High Speed Broadband Map. Submissions received in response to the questionnaire are currently being analysed and I expect that a key component of this analysis will be concluded shortly. In the event that commercial plans do not materialise as anticipated in the BLUE area or where no alternative operator is present, the Department has reserved the right to include these premises as part of the State Intervention.

The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention.

The map provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county including County Westmeath.

The Map is a critical aspect of EU State Aid compliance and the mapping process remains open, in accordance with terms that have been published on the Department's website (www.broadband.gov.ie) so as to ensure that existing plans are realised and that any new developments can be managed.

The current county breakdown for the National Broadband Plan Intervention in Co Westmeath is set out in the table, with the percentage of premises to be covered by the Intervention and through commercial investment also listed.

County Name	Total Number of County Townlands*	Number of Premises Covered by National Broadband Plan Intervention	% Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	% Premises within Commercial Operators' Area
Westmeath	1346	17,814	40%	60%

Over 750,000 premises are the focus for the procurement process, which formally commenced in December 2015 with the publication of the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire ('PQQ') and Project Information Memorandum. Five responses were received from prospective bidders

to this stage of the competitive procurement process by the deadline of 31 March 2016.

The second stage in the procurement process will be a formal invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) to qualifying bidders. I expect that my Department will move to this stage over the coming weeks. The third stage of the procurement process involves the issue of final tender documentation which follows the dialogue process. Following the submission of final tenders by bidders, a winning bidder(s) will be selected for the contract which will comprise one or two lots as set out in the NBP Intervention Strategy. The Department will then enter into formal contract negotiations with the winning bidder(s). It is expected that contract(s) will be awarded by June 2017.

As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network rollout plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits also to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded. In this regard, Minister Humphreys is leading on the establishment of county or regional broadband taskforces, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, LEADER Groups and other relevant agencies to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

Greenways Funding

254. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the schemes he funded under smarter travel 2015 and 2016 in counties Longford and Westmeath; if he will consider funding both greenway projects in counties Longford and Westmeath under this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18852/16]

255. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to set out a national policy framework for greenway construction and management due to the number of State bodies involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18858/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 255 together.

Westmeath County Council was awarded €4m under the Stimulus package 2014 for the construction of the Mullingar to Athlone Greenway. A further €3.26m was allocated to this project during 2015 from a combination of Government's further investment in infrastructure and a redistribution of Smarter Travel funding.

Westmeath County Council was also awarded funding of €790,000 under the Stimulus package 2014 for construction of the Coolnahay to Westmeath/Longford County boundary greenway.

I understand that Westmeath County Council wish to see the Mullingar to Athlone Greenway extended by 2.2km along the disused railway line from Garrycastle to Whitegates given the significant connectivity this would bring to schools and sports amenities in the area.

While Longford County Council submitted an application under the 2014-2016 funding call for the Ballymahon to Abbeyshrule Greenway no funding was awarded at that time.

The possibility of assisting both authorities deliver the above mentioned projects is being considered by my Department along with a number of other project proposals that have planning permission in place, such as the sections of the Galway to Dublin Greenway in Counties Kildare and Meath and the proposal for a Greenway from Tullamore to Lough Boora.

The Programme for Government sets me and my Department the target of developing national guidelines for Greenway public consultation, planning and construction and my officials are examining means of expediting this work. I think there are lessons to be learned from the work undertaken to date and this should inform us as we develop the network into the future.

Public Transport Provision

256. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the National Transport Authority will conclude the process of separating the corridor of two distinct service patterns for commuters in counties Longford and Westmeath (details supplied) in the context of distances from Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18902/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

257. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there will be a sports capital programme opened in 2016; if not, if he anticipates such a programme in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18947/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): No decision has been made on the timing of any future rounds of the Sports Capital Programme.

Any interested group should register online now at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie as this portal will be the only way to apply under any future rounds of the Programme.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

258. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to make funding available to local authorities in 2016 under the 80:20 local improvement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18951/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) remains in place. This Scheme provides funding for private roads and laneways, the maintenance and improvement of which is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. While the LIS does not have a ring-fenced allocation in 2016, local authorities may use a proportion of State grant funding (15% of the Discretionary Grant) for LIS should they wish to do so. In addition Councils can also provide monies from their own resources towards LIS.

The Programme for a Partnership Government provides that, as the economy recovers, the

Government will promote increased funding for Local Improvement Schemes, on an annual basis. A major objective for the new Government will be to prioritise new investment in local and regional road maintenance and improvements, and LIS funding will be promoted in that context.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

259. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request CIE to arrange for a bus to stop at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18961/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing or providing public transport infrastructure including bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, bus stands and bus fleets.

Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

260. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans for the roll-out of the three bus rapid transit schemes in Dublin; and if they will go ahead. [18975/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects.

The NTA's *Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035* was approved by my predecessor, Minister Donohoe, in February 2016. It includes proposals for two specific bus rapid transit (BRT) schemes, Blanchardstown to UCD and Clongriffin to Tallaght. In addition, the Strategy indicates that the public transport needs on the Swords/Airport to City Centre corridor may require a higher level of public transport capacity than the existing provision, both in advance of the delivery of new Metro North which is scheduled for operation in 2026/2027 and also to serve areas south of the M50 subsequent to the implementation of new Metro North. The NTA indicates that this additional capacity may take the form of a BRT service or a BRT type service. Any final arrangement will be designed to be complementary to the new Metro North scheme.

Funding is being made available for initial planning and design work for the Blanchardstown to UCD and Clongriffin to Tallaght BRT schemes under the Government's Capital Plan '*Building on Recovery Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021*'. I understand from the NTA that they are currently finalising tender documents to progress the design and planning of the Blanchardstown to UCD scheme and the route option selection for the Clongriffin to Tallaght BRT scheme.

Public Transport Provision

261. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status

of the tenders for Dublin Bus orbital routes and when new transport providers will be operating on these routes. [18976/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

262. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has undertaken any contingency planning for the effects of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union; and the areas in which this contingency planning has been undertaken and the key proposals that have been formed. [18977/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department has been involved in contingency planning as part of the wider Government contingency planning in the lead up to the UK referendum. The Government has adopted an initial Contingency Framework which maps the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months.

On Friday last, the Government published a summary of the key actions that will be taken to address issues arising from the UK's decision. These include actions from agencies under my Department in relation to the potential impact on our tourism sector. Actions include consistent marketing communications in the UK, the development of strategies to address competitiveness challenges should they arise, and the intensification of efforts to diversify reliance on the UK market.

There are also other potential risks identified by my Department across other sectors under my Department's responsibility and these are being monitored closely. The Government Framework is an iterative process as issues emerge and recede in the course of negotiations and my Department is monitoring the evolving situation and will work with the Department of the Taoiseach, with other Government Departments and with our agencies in identifying and preparing contingency plans and actions and inputting these into the overall Government Framework.

The decision of the UK people to leave the European Union presents major challenges to all EU Member States but in particular to Ireland. The Government's focus will be to minimise any adverse impacts on our economy and on the free movement of people, goods and services on these islands. For my part, that will also be my main objective in respect of the transport, tourism and sports sectors.

Vehicle Testing

263. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department or a body under its aegis has undertaken, or plans to undertake, an investigation into the levels of health damaging pollutants emitted by diesel or petrol car models in the Irish market in the aftermath of an emissions testing scandal (details supplied); if he has undertaken a study measuring the differences in nitrogen oxide emissions measured in laboratory and under normal driving conditions as the Department of Transport in the United Kingdom has done; and

if so, the results of these investigations. [19031/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The emissions issue referred to by the Deputy includes consumer rights issues, primarily, and environmental protection issues rather than road safety. My colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has primary responsibility for consumer affairs, while my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has primary responsibility for environmental matters. As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have no policy or legislative responsibility in relation to investigating the levels of health damaging pollutants emitted into the environment.

With regard to measuring the differences in nitrogen oxide emissions detected in laboratory versus normal driving conditions, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), under the remit of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, is Ireland's National Type Approval Authority for motor vehicles. I understand that the NSAI do not currently conduct any such investigations.

My Department recognises that the issues around emissions require the involvement of a number of Government Departments and is engaged where its responsibilities can assist colleagues in addressing certain complex areas.

Insurance Costs

264. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the action she is taking to address the escalation in the cost base of small and medium-sized enterprises associated with soaring insurance costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18918/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Improving Ireland's competitiveness position is a key economic priority for Government. As set out in 'A Programme for a Partnership Government', our objective is to protect our national competitiveness from unsustainable cost growth and to deliver a job-fit business environment which ranks in the top tier globally.

The Costs of Doing Business Report published by the National Competitiveness Council on April 21st provides an assessment of Ireland's cost competitiveness performance vis-a-vis a range of competitor countries. The report, which has been noted by Government, concentrates on the costs that are largely domestically determined such as labour, property, transport, energy, water, waste, communications, credit /financial, and business service. It finds that Ireland's cost base has improved across a range of metrics over the last five years. This has made Irish firms more competitive internationally and made Ireland a more attractive location for firms to base their operations in. However, despite these improvements, Ireland remains a relatively high cost location for a range of key business inputs and there is upward cost pressure evident in the market for commercial insurance. The report is a timely reminder of the risks of complacency regarding our cost competitiveness. To protect the gains achieved to date, to sustain the recovery, and to ultimately spread the benefits of economic growth to all, we must continue to enhance all aspects of our cost competitiveness. The policy implications of the Costs of Doing Business report and the associated reforms required to address Ireland's cost base, will be included in the Council's annual Competitiveness Challenge report which will be brought to Government and published later this year.

Insurance costs are relevant to businesses of all sizes and in all sectors of the economy. In

general insurance costs account for a relatively low proportion of the overall enterprise cost base. While insurance costs represent a minor component of enterprise operating costs, premium increases can have an impact on costs, particularly for SMEs and micro enterprises. Under EU law, the ability of the Government to influence insurance pricing is limited. While the provision and the pricing of insurance policies is a commercial matter for insurance companies, competitive and transparent markets are vital.

While my Department has no role in the supervision or regulation of insurance, which is a policy and supervisory matter for the Department of Finance and the Central Bank respectively, last year, the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) considered the commercial insurance market in Ireland as part of its 2015 Costs of Doing Business in Ireland 2015 report. It subsequently set out a range of potential actions which could help facilitate enhanced cost competitiveness in the non-life commercial insurance market. These were set out in its Competitiveness Challenge 2015 report. The Council concluded that the absence of price data makes it very difficult to assess market conditions and competitiveness in the non-life insurance market. The Council subsequently recommended that responsibility for improving insurance cost competitiveness of commercial insurance must be clearly assigned and accorded sufficient priority by policymakers and there is a need to comprehensively benchmark insurance costs and the drivers of costs in Ireland with costs in our key competitors.

The Department of Finance is currently examining the factors which contribute to increasing costs of insurance. This work is part of an overall review of policy in the insurance sector which that Department is carrying out in consultation with the Central Bank and other Departments, Agencies and external stakeholders. My Department will continue to engage with the Department of Finance in their ongoing work.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

265. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the immediate contingency steps she will take following the recent decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18982/16]

266. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the immediate contingency steps IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will take following the recent decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18983/16]

267. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the immediate contingency steps she will take to safeguard Irish exports and associated jobs following the recent decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18984/16]

268. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the immediate contingency steps she will take with respect to trade policy and upcoming trade missions following the recent decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18985/16]

269. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the areas and sectors in which the greatest risks are likely to arise and which will need immediate focus when future negotiations begin following the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18986/16]

270. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the po-

tential impact on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations of the recent decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18987/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 265 to 270, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that the UK decision will not take effect for some time and that the precise implications of the referendum result will now depend on the period of negotiation ahead, involving the UK and our EU partners.

As indicated by the Taoiseach in his statement last Friday, the Government has adopted an initial Contingency Framework to map out the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months. My own Department has been, and will continue to be, fully engaged in the risk analysis and contingency planning work that is being undertaken at cross-Government level, led by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Following the announcement of the referendum result on Friday June 24th, as part of my contingency plans, I instituted a Coordination Group consisting of the Chief Executive Officers of both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland and relevant enterprise, single market, and trade officials, to oversee the management of our immediate response and the messaging to businesses both overseas and domestically. I will continue to chair this Group as part my Department's ongoing response as developments unfold.

I have asked the agencies to communicate directly with their clients, and, I am aware that in addition to writing to them, there have been multiple contacts since then, between IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland and their respective senior business clients.

I will continue to meet with the enterprise agencies to lead the co-ordination of our response to challenges as they emerge.

The UK remains a market opportunity for Irish business, and I am conscious that a decrease in the value and/or the volume of exports to the UK will affect industry, including SMEs and agrifood sector enterprises.

Enterprise Ireland has already set up a helpline and email address to provide assistance to its clients, and will implement a range of plans to assist Irish exporters. Key measures in this regard include:

- Provision of information and guidance on the practical implications of a UK exit;
- Market diversification support; expansion of EI 'International Sector Clustering Strategy';
- Intensification of UK market support to include advice on improving competitiveness, reducing supply chain costs, accessing funding, finance, foreign exchange as well as identification of key business opportunities;
- Management and financial supports including market access grants to client companies to evaluate new market opportunities.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland will fine-tune existing support tools (Lean Programmes, Market Diversification, Innovation and Management Development) to address new UK market conditions.

It is worth noting however, that as a result of determined efforts to assist companies to diversify into new markets, Enterprise Ireland clients have moved in recent years from some 45%

of goods & services exports going to the UK, to some 37% in 2015.

The impact on enterprise and trade in Border counties will also be monitored closely. In this context, the North East/North West Action Plan aims to deliver 28,000 extra jobs in the counties of Cavan, Monaghan, Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Louth by 2020.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs initiative is a concrete example of the targeted approach we are undertaking to boost regional employment. I intend to visit the regions and meet stakeholders to ensure that plans are being implemented in every region, including the Border region.

IDA Ireland will continue to market Ireland across the globe as the number one location for direct investment, confirming that we are open for business.

IDA Ireland has a strategic scenario planning team, which in the months leading up to the UK referendum on European membership, engaged with clients and prospective clients in relation to the potential impact of a decision by Britain to leave the European Union. This team continues to work on ensuring that the Agency's strategy is fit for purpose in light of the recent referendum results in the UK.

Following the announcement of the results on 24th June, the Chief Executive of IDA Ireland, Martin Shanahan, wrote to the Agency's 1,200 clients and reassured them that *"Ireland is and will remain a member of the European Union (and Eurozone), and retains full access to the European Union market"*. Mr. Shanahan re-affirmed IDA Ireland's strong commitment to working with the existing client base to assist and support them in their growth and expansion in Ireland. His letter also highlighted Ireland's continued strong offering in relation to talent, ease of doing business, a competitive and transparent taxation regime, English-speaking and, critically, Ireland's continued access to the EU market.

Mr. Shanahan has also engaged with international media to highlight that Ireland is very much open for business with full European Union market access.

Ireland will be working closely with the UK and other EU member States to ensure that any potential disruption to trade and investment is minimised.

We will continue to support the EU in creating open markets and will endeavour to ensure that our interests are to the fore in future negotiations with the UK. Ireland will continue to make the most effective use of the framework of bilateral trade agreements and multi-sectoral trade agreements that the EU already has in place under the World Trade Organisation, and to support the opening of new markets through the EU. Regarding the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership Agreement the EU Council of Trade Ministers at their meeting in May urged the Commission to advance the negotiations, whilst fully respecting its negotiating mandate and the EU interests. While many complex and difficult issues remain to be resolved, both the EU and the US negotiators remain optimistic that a comprehensive and ambitious agreement can be concluded. Ireland's enterprises are particularly well placed to take up opportunities to trade more easily with the US. This will build on our already rewarding economic relationship.

I have asked Enterprise Ireland to accelerate the finalisation of their plans for increasing the number of trade missions both within the EU, to include France, Germany and Scandinavia, and to intensify our programme of missions in non-EU markets.

I am also initiating a review of the overseas footprint of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, to ensure we are fully prepared to support business in finding new markets and investment.

In tandem, I will be leading a trade mission to the UK in early July, as the UK will remain a key market for Ireland and we need to retain our focus on its potential, even as we seek to

diversify to other markets.

Since taking up my appointment as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I have already met with my UK ministerial counterparts on trade and on the Single Market (Competitiveness) – Lord Price and Baroness Neville-Rolfe, respectively; and a senior delegation of Trade and Single Market officials from my Department will meet on Friday 1st July, in London with their UK counterparts to review developments.

I would assure the Deputy that the Government, my Department and the enterprise agencies are fully committed to supporting business in this period of heightened uncertainty; however, we do so against the background of a strong economy and a highly competitive enterprise sector.

Trade Agreements

271. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the ratification process she envisages for the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18988/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) is a new generation agreement that will remove over 99% of tariffs between the EU and Canada and will create sizeable new market access opportunities in services and investment. It will end limitations in access to public contracts, open-up services market, and offer predictable conditions for investors.

The main benefits for Ireland in this Agreement include the opening up of public procurement markets in the Canadian provinces giving Irish firms increased access to Canadian public sector purchasing. Ireland also gains unlimited tariff free access for most of our important food exports. In addition, Ireland successfully campaigned for a low beef import quota from Canada to the EU thereby safeguarding our important EU market in this area. Irish firms will also benefit from the recognition of product standards and certification, thus saving on ‘double testing’ on both sides of the Atlantic. This is of particular benefit to smaller companies for whom paying twice for the same test can be prohibitive. These are some of the benefits of the trade deal with Canada as well as providing new market opportunities in many sectors for Irish firms.

The proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) EU-US agreement is still being negotiated. Like the CETA, it is intended that the EU-US Agreement will cover not only tariffs, services and investment but also include regulatory coherence and cooperation. An EU-US agreement would be the world’s largest bilateral trade and investment deal, and a successful conclusion is expected to benefit Ireland more than any other EU Member State. An independent study commissioned by my Department, carried out by Copenhagen Economics, suggests a boost to GDP of 1.1%, growth in Irish exports of almost 4%, increases in investment of 1.5%, and an increase in real wages of 1.5%. It estimates somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 additional export related jobs could be created. The findings are backed up in an interim independent report contracted by the EU Commission, carried out by Ecorys Consultancy and published on 13th May 2016. The report estimates that an EU-US free trade agreement would boost Irish GDP by 1.4 per cent.

CETA was discussed at the last EU Council of Trade Ministers on 13th May 2016, which I attended. The Council had an exchange of views on the Agreement and the process towards signature and provisional application. I made Ireland’s approach clear, that based on our cur-

rent assessment of its provisions, that we viewed CETA as a mixed Agreement, in terms of EU and Member State competency. This position was also expressed by other Member States. There are differing views on the legal position on this and the European Commission may be of the view that CETA falls within the competence of the EU only. We will need to wait and see the formal proposal from the Commission and, importantly, the legal basis for this. It will be a matter for the European Council and the European Parliament to decide on the signature and provisional application of CETA. It is expected that the decision making process and ratification process of the EU-US FTA will be similar to the EU-Canada Agreement.

It is in Ireland's interest to see strong progress towards the implementation of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement and conclusion of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership as they will provide opportunities for Irish based firms to further diversify their export markets. The issue of growing market share in other markets is made even more important by the result of the recent UK referendum on its membership of the EU.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

272. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the impact the recent decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union will have on policy decisions pertaining to sustaining employment levels, national competitiveness levels and wage growth in the short and medium term; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18990/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): On June 24th the UK voted to leave the European Union. This decision has significant short-term and long term implications for Ireland. Economically, the uncertainty arising from the outcome of this decision in the short term, has resulted in a weakened exchange rate, stock market volatility and lower growth prospects for the UK economy. Due to our close and well established ties with the United Kingdom, the outcome of the referendum has particularly direct consequences for Irish growth and trade prospects.

The economic and political implications and timing of Brexit – and indeed the institutional arrangements between the UK and EU, and between Ireland and the UK are unclear at this juncture. Notwithstanding this considerable uncertainty, the immediate implications for Ireland of the UK leaving the EU are being addressed by Government. The Government has undertaken careful planning in recent months for the contingency of this result, and we will now take this work forward to ensure that we respond appropriately, and that Ireland's interests are represented fully in the negotiating process. On June 24th we published a contingency plan outlining our whole of Government response.

While there is a lack of clarity as to how the negotiation process will proceed, I will be working to ensure that there is certainty as early as possible on the terms of future trading relationships. The UK will remain an attractive market for many Irish companies, with a population of over 65 million people. I have met with and will continue to engage intensively with our enterprise development and promotional agencies and other stakeholders and representative bodies. They will be working with enterprises to support their adjustment to the new arrangements in due course. Similarly, the UK is the third largest investor in Ireland and I will endeavour to ensure the impact on those relationships is minimised. I, together with the enterprise agencies under my remit, will also ensure that businesses, investors and potential investors in Ireland are fully informed of Ireland's continued commitment to the EU and of developments as they unfold.

Ireland is ranked first in the eurozone in the 2016 IMD Global Competitiveness Index and it is important that we continue to sustain that position. As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I consider it vital to retain a sharp focus on maintaining our own competitiveness for trade and investment. In particular in relation to areas such as costs, it is important that we continue to provide a stable macroeconomic environment and public finances during the adjustment period. We need to continue to invest in the areas that will underpin future enterprise growth including in innovation and research, skills and address infrastructure bottlenecks. We need to sustain our core strengths for inward investment namely a strong pool of highly skilled, multilingual workers in the only English-speaking country within the Eurozone. We will continue to provide barrier-free access to an EU market of over 450 million consumers.

Enterprise 2025, Ireland's National Enterprise Policy, sets out our vision for Ireland to be the best place to succeed in business, delivering sustainable employment and higher standards of living for all. Enterprise 2025 highlighted the importance of sustaining the progress made on diversifying to non-UK markets and we will continue to support enterprises in that regard. We will continue to implement Enterprise 2025 through the Annual Action Plan for Jobs. We will work across government to progress any additional specific measures necessary to sustaining and growing jobs in the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs.

IDA Data

273. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of United Kingdom companies which are IDA Ireland assisted; the number of jobs these firms provide; the proportion of foreign direct investment this represents; if she will revise her timetable for the sale of Allied Irish Banks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19011/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Employment in IDA supported companies from the United Kingdom in 2015 stood at 6,827. This represents 4% of total IDA Ireland client employment of 187,056. Further details are set out in the table.

The timetable for the sale of Allied Irish Banks falls outside the remit of my Department and is a matter for the Minister for Finance.

IDA Ireland client companies from Great Britain

Country of Origin 2015	Number of Companies	Total Employment
United Kingdom	105	6,827

Early Childhood Care and Education

274. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the changes she has made to the schemes applied by her Department whereby from August 2016 a group (details supplied) will not be able to accept infants under two years of age. [18916/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has been in contact with Dublin City Childcare Committee and it is my understanding that the service in question is undergoing expansion for the provision of the second year of the ECCE programme. I understand that the Board of Management conducted a strategic review recently and following this a decision was made that this service would not be in a position to provide services for the under twos. I understand this was a business decision, and as such is a matter

for the Board, which is independent of my Department.

There are a number of changes to Programmes being implemented for the 2016/17 programme year, including the expansion of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme and changes to the Childcare Regulations concerning qualification requirements for those working in the sector.

The new Childcare Regulations require that all staff working with children in early years services should hold a qualification in early childhood care and education at a minimum of Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or equivalent. This is in accordance with international best practice.

In the past, Community Employment participants with no qualifications were used as part of core staff / child ratios. From 31 December, unless these CE participants are in year 3 of their programme and have received their level 5 qualification they cannot be considered as part of core staff ratios but can of course remain as an additional resource to the service. The level 5 requirement will come into effect on 30 June 2016 for newly-registering services and for existing services on 31 December 2016.

The contract for ECCE has always required that pre-school leaders in ECCE services hold a minimum Level 5 qualification, or equivalent. From 31 December 2016, all pre-school leaders delivering the ECCE programme must hold a minimum Level 6 qualification, or equivalent.

My Department has long-standing relationships with community/not-for-profit childcare providers, and recognises the important role that this sector has to play in childcare provision. As demand for childcare continues to grow with, for example, the ECCE scheme being set to increase from 67,000 children last year to approximately 127,000 in 2017, it is essential to support both community and private childcare provision to meet the higher standards.

In relation to the availability of childcare for children under two, my officials have been in contact with Dublin City Childcare Committee and they are available to assist parents to source alternative childcare provision within the area. The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme provides funding to childcare services to enable them to provide quality childcare, including to children under two, at reduced rates to disadvantaged and low income working parents. Parents qualify as disadvantaged or low income on the basis of means-tested entitlements. In the case of full day care, parents qualifying for the higher rate of subvention under the CCS Programme can have up to €95 per week deducted from the overall charge for childcare in the participating childcare facility. Traditionally, CCS was only available through community services, but to ensure wider access for families, in 2016 this Programme has been extended to include private providers for the first time, and my Department is working to ensure the availability of places under this Programme.