

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].

Citizenship Applications

1. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) continues to have their application for citizenship refused. [29964/16]

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 there is no current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. Previous applications have been refused for reasons provided to the person concerned, the most recent in a letter issued on 7 October 2013 advising of the decision.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. The fact that a person may have had an application refused does not preclude or disqualify them from submitting a fresh application in the future, however when considering making such a re-application, the person should give due regard to the reasons for the refusal which were contained in the submission attached to the refusal letter. Any further application will be considered taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Peace Commissioners

2. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding peace commissioners charging fees for their services; if she will clarify the matter and notify the appointed peace commissioners of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29978/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Peace

Commissioners are appointed by the Minister for Justice and Equality under Section 88 of the Courts of Justice Act, 1924. It is an honorary position and a Peace Commissioner receives no remuneration or compensation from public funds. Before appointment applicants are informed that they are not entitled to charge or receive for their own benefit, any fee for performing the duties attaching to their office.

Any complaint relating to Peace Commissioners in the performance of their duties should be brought to my attention.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

3. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance if he will support a recommendation to divest the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund as an outcome of the mid-term review of the ISIF investment strategy this autumn (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29899/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) that its shareholdings in companies outside Ireland are held in the global portfolio. The global portfolio has been restructured and is being sold over time to fund Irish investment commitments as they arise, in keeping with ISIF's mandate to invest on a commercial basis to support economic activity and employment in Ireland.

In terms of Fossil Fuel exposure, ISIF's equity holdings in the Energy sector are valued at €11 million (0.14% of ISIF's assets under management). ISIF is also invested in circa. €97 million of short term fixed income investments in energy corporations representing just over 1% of the ISIF's assets.

Such investments should be considered in the context of ISIF's Irish portfolio and its significant commitment to renewables. ISIF's investment strategy is aligned with government policy and the State's commitment to make the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable economy. The strategy states that ISIF's €800m energy allocation will include a significant element of renewables investment. To date such investment commitments include:

- €44 million for the €500 million Dublin Waste to Energy project.
- €35 million commitment to NTR's onshore wind fund.
- Investment in Bluebay SME credit fund which has made loans to Gaelectric and Mainstream, Irish headquartered renewable energy developers.
- Being a cornerstone investor in the Irish Infrastructure Fund (IIF) which holds a number of Irish onshore wind assets, forestry, and a designer/manufacturer of high power density high efficiency power supplies.

As part of its on-going commitment to operate to high international standards ISIF has recently published its Sustainability and Responsible Investment Policy which is available online at:

<http://www.isif.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SustainabilityandResponsibleInvestingPolicyJuly2016.pdf>.

The Policy emphasises climate change as part of the integration of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) into its investment decision making.

Many major funds internationally have made significant divestments from fossil fuels such as coal, while other such funds have adopted an approach of engagement with energy companies to establish their strategy and positioning for the transition to a low carbon economy. ISIF continually reviews its carbon exposure and the investment case for companies that may not be aligned with the long term transition to a low-carbon economy.

The National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2014, which established ISIF on a statutory basis provides that ISIF shall review its investment strategy after 18 months of operation and that in reviewing its investment strategy shall consult with the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, and that the Minister for Finance may consult with other Government Ministers, as appropriate. This review will be completed in Q4 2016 and the issues of decarbonisation and Ireland's long term transition towards a low carbon economy are being considered as part of this process.

Credit Union Regulation

4. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, in the absence of a dedicated treasurer in credit unions, branch accounts are prepared and finalised by operations, with no checks carried out by a director of the branch, and the board is required to sign off on the branch accounts without having had any input or without knowing if they are accurate or not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29931/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Report of the Commission on Credit Unions, published in 2012, made a number of recommendations, including in relation to governance requirements for credit unions. Recommendations made were agreed by all stakeholders including credit union representative bodies. These governance requirements set out the role and responsibilities of two key positions within the credit union - those of chair of the board and the manager of the credit union. Section 64 of the Credit Union Act 1997 (1997 Act) identifies the treasurer as the 'managing director' of the credit union and his/her responsibilities included executive responsibilities such as submitting financial statements to the board. In order to ensure that the role and responsibilities of board and management do not overlap and that board members have governance rather than executive responsibilities, the Commission recommended that the 1997 Act be amended to remove the role of treasurer and assign executive responsibilities to the management of the credit union. This recommendation is reflected in section 21 of the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 (2012 Act).

More generally, in terms of board composition and competence and capability, under the 1997 Act, board of directors of a credit union must be of sufficient number and expertise to adequately oversee the operations of the credit union while the nomination committee must review the composition of the board for the purpose of identifying any deficiencies in composition of the board. In addition, under the Fitness and Probity Regime for credit unions, a credit union must not permit a person to perform a Controlled Function (which includes all members of the board) unless it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the person is, amongst other things, competent and capable to perform their role.

The governance requirements emphasise the importance of, and provide a framework to implement in practice, a separation between the two distinct sets of roles in a credit union, i.e. the executive or operational roles, and the non-executive or governance roles. This separation allows the respective roles to be clearly defined and for their responsibilities to be distinct. The executive or operational roles are performed by the manager, the management team, staff and voluntary assistants. The non-executive or governance roles are performed by the board of

directors.

The governance requirements also require a credit union to have a board oversight committee, an internal audit function, a risk management officer and a compliance officer.

Under section 63A(4) of the 1997 Act functions of the manager of a credit union include:

- updating the board of directors on the financial position of the credit union, including submitting to the board of directors on a monthly basis unaudited financial statements that set out the financial position of the credit union; and
- preparing or causing to be prepared such financial reports and returns as may be required by the auditor of the credit union.

Under section 55(1) of the 1997 Act, one of the function of the board of directors is to review and consider any update of financial statements provided to the board by the manager under section 63A(4)(c).

Section 111 of the 1997 Act further provides for the preparation of annual accounts in a credit union and requires that the income and expenditure account, balance sheet or statement cannot be published until it has been audited by an auditor, signed by a member of the supervisory committee and a member of the board acting on behalf of the board of directors.

I am advised by the Central Bank that where matters arise in relation to a credit union's accounts the board should ensure that it obtains the necessary clarification to inform it in carrying out its functions in relation to the accounts of the credit union. In the event that such matters are not addressed to the satisfaction of the board, the board must determine whether it is appropriate for a member of the board to sign the annual accounts on its behalf.

I am satisfied that there is an appropriate framework in place to adequately oversee and manage the preparation and publication of accounts in a credit union.

Third Level Education

5. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the lack of third level graduates in software development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29915/16]

10. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to attract students to third level education courses in software development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29914/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 5 and 10 together.

The Deputy will be aware that in March 2014, my Department and the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation, launched an ICT Skills Action Plan 2014 - 2018. The Plan was developed in close collaboration with industry. The plan sets out a collaborative, system-wide response, across Departments, agencies and the education and enterprise sectors aimed at building the domestic supply of graduates from the education system and ensuring Ireland maintains a strong ICT talent pool and promoting Ireland internationally as a centre for high-level ICT skills. Implementation of the Plan is underway, with oversight of a high level steering group comprising DES, DJEI and representatives from industry and the education sector.

A number of significant developments have taken place since the ICT Action Plan was published in 2014. In 2015, my Department published the Digital Strategy for Schools and commenced work on the development of the Regional Skills Fora. The Department has also commenced funding for the Associate Profession ICT and new Apprenticeship models are now being developed. The National Skills Strategy 2025 was published in January 2016, which includes a range of relevant actions.

In this context, the Action Plan for Education includes an action related to the review of the existing ICT Action Plan and publication of a new Plan. This review has already commenced and it is expected to be completed by Q4 2016.

Updated data on progress in increasing the supply of ICT graduates levels 8 to 10 and updated projections for the period to 2018 are set out in the following table. The updated figures show that the actual number of graduates on mainstream programmes at levels 8 to 10 was higher than previously projected for 2014. The First Destinations Report for the 2014 graduate cohort also shows that a higher proportion of graduates entered the labour market as opposed to pursuing further studies compared to the 2013 cohort.

These new projections include data for graduate output from publicly funded programmes (publicly funded HEI mainstream programmes at levels 8 to 10 and all Springboard+ programmes) and output from private colleges.

ICT Action Plan target update

Source	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
L 8/9/10 mainstream net graduate supply	2,699	2,669	2,984	3,035	3,435
L8 ICT Conversion Graduate Supply (1-year full-time)	523	633	852	888	888
L8 ICT Conversion Graduate Supply (2-year part-time)	0	0	0	0	499
Total L8/9 Springboard part-time graduate supply	574	674	436	203	203
Private Colleges (excluding Springboard) L8/9/10 graduate output	225	225	225	225	225
Total Irish-based Level 8+ graduate supply	4,021	4,201	4,497	4,351	5,250
Projected Level 8+ Job Openings	5,849	6,512	6,891	7,114	7,284
74% Target	4,328	4,819	5,099	5,264	5,390
Total NFQ Level 8 - 10 graduates supply as % of job openings	70%	66%	66%	62%	73%

Third Level Funding

6. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the unsustainable model for third level education funding through an increase of capital

spending by €10 million in order for Ireland to retain a highly educated workforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29940/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In recognition of funding pressures in the higher education sector, an Expert Group chaired by Peter Cassells was established in summer 2014 to examine funding arrangements for higher education. The Report of the Expert Group, published in July, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of approaches and recommendations for consideration. As committed to in the Programme for Government, I have referred the report to the Education Committee as part of the process for formulating a plan for the future of the sector. This will ensure that all views can be heard and considered.

We will require reasonable consensus to enable us to move forward with a realistic and achievable strategy for funding the system into the future. I shall work with the Education Committee as it analyses all of the options put forward by the Expert Group and hears the voice of all stakeholders.

While Cassells deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education we also have to consider the immediate challenges and these are the subject of discussions currently in the context of Budget 2017.

Apprenticeship Programmes

7. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will assist in reducing unemployment and sustaining existing employment by allocating ring fenced funding for the development of new apprenticeships and training programmes to promote new skills and for in-work training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29952/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Within the further education and training sector there is a range of flexible high quality education and training on offer to meet the skill needs of individuals who are unemployed. To provide for the skill needs of those who are in employment a number of initiatives are also in place to provide in-work training and sustain and support existing employment.

Funded from the National Training Fund by my Department, Skillnets Limited funds and facilitates training provision through over 60 networks of private sector companies under the Training Networks Programme in a range of sectors and regions across the country. These networks identify their own common training needs, typically on a regional or sectoral basis. They also source their own training providers and develop their own learning solutions. This ensures projects remain enterprise-led and aligned with their needs. Last year, employer participation in Skillnets training grew by 15% resulting in almost 12,000 businesses collaborating with Skillnets to deliver training provision to almost 40,000 employees.

In Budget 2017, an increase of €2 million has been provided under the National Training Funding for Skillnets.

The Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. 25 proposals have been prioritised by the Council for development. The Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, the first of the new programmes developed, launched in September. Further new apprenticeships are due to launch in the coming months in various sectors including medical devices, polymer processing and financial services. The last number of years have also seen a marked increase in new registrations in the 27 existing apprenticeships. As a

result an additional €20 million is being made available from within the National Training Fund to provide for increased apprenticeship activity in 2017. This is being funded through savings arising from reduced demand for training for unemployed people in line with the strong growth in employment.

A new career traineeship initiative, instigated by SOLAS in collaboration with the Education and Training Boards and Enterprise to develop a more effective model of work-based learning, primarily at NFQ levels 4 and 5, is currently being piloted within the Hospitality and Engineering sectors. Based on the model further programmes are being developed. A target has been set to achieve 5,000 traineeship registrations by 2019.

SOLAS is working on the development of a policy framework for employee development within further education and training with reference to the actions and targets as set out in the National Skills Strategy to 2025. Progress is well advanced and it is planned that the framework will be complete by the end of the year.

Special Educational Needs

8. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions in the EPSEN Act relating to his Department which are yet to be commenced and implemented in full; the estimated cost of implementing the EPSEN Act in full for his Department; and if he will provide a breakdown of the areas in which these costs would be incurred. [29984/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A number of sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 have been commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education and those promoting an inclusive approach to the education of children.

The following sections of EPSEN were commenced in 2005:

Section 1 – Interpretation

Section 2 - providing for the inclusive education of children with Special Educational Needs

Section 14 – placing certain duties on schools

Sections 19 to 37 - placing the Council on a statutory footing.

Section 39 - placing certain duties on Health Boards

Sections 40 to 53 - amending the Education Act

Schedule 1 – providing for meetings and membership of the Council

Schedule 2 providing for the Chief Executive Officer of the Council.

The remaining sections of the Act have yet to be commenced. Legal advice provided to my Department indicates that the EPSEN Act, as it is currently constituted, may not be implemented on a phased, or age cohort, basis.

The Sections of the EPSEN Act which have not been implemented are those which would have conferred a statutory entitlement to –

- an educational assessment for all children with special educational needs.

- consequent development of a statutory individual educational plan (IEP).
- the delivery of detailed educational services on foot of this plan.
- an independent appeals process.

Estimates would also have to be made as to the number of pupils who might qualify for the statutory service provisions envisaged by the EPSEN Act.

The NCSE published a Plan for the Implementation of the EPSEN Act in 2006. This report concluded that additional investment over a period of years of up to €235m per annum, across the education and health sectors, would be required to fully implement the EPSEN Act.

My Department's opinion is that the level of investment required could be significantly greater than that envisaged in the NCSE report.

Revised estimates of the amount of additional expenditure required to fully implement remaining sectors of the EPSEN Act have not recently been conducted. The level of additional expenditure required would have to take into account annual demographic growth and service developments in the area of special educational needs, pricing adjustments and salary cost differentials on an ongoing basis. Accordingly it is not possible to provide an accurate breakdown of the areas in which these costs would be incurred.

While awaiting the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, the NCSE has published a number of policy advice papers which make recommendations aimed at developing a better or more effective alternative to the current resource allocation model, and which aims to move the system towards ultimate implementation of the EPSEN Act.

These reports include the NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools, published in 2013, and the Report of the Working Group on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for pupils with Special Educational Needs, published in 2014.

The alternative model was piloted in 47 schools during 2015/16 school year and the effectiveness of the pilot is currently being reviewed. This review will allow us to take into account the learning experiences of schools, principals, pupils and the views of parents over the course of the pilot.

It is therefore intended to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice. Under the Programme for a Partnership Government, I have also committed to consulting with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

Broadband Service Provision

9. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made on providing a telephone line for a school (details supplied) in order that it can receive the free broadband package under the schools broadband initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29902/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme, my Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary, post-primary and special schools. The overall policy of my De-

partment is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with technical solutions available in the market and within required financial parameters. My Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises.

A framework involving 14 providers was put in place in 2012 which has ensured improved solutions are available to primary schools. A recent drawdown off the framework saw approximately 90% of school connections retendered, with over 1,100 schools awarded connections of 30Mbit/s or greater.

In the case of the school referred to by the Deputy, the provider, who was awarded a contract under the framework, has been unable to provide the broadband service as anticipated due to issues outside of its control. My Department is currently working with this broadband provider to investigate alternative solutions to put the service in place.

In general terms, the need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the new Digital Strategy for Schools and my Department will collaborate with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to address this as a priority action. Work on the implementation of the Strategy is now underway.

Question No. 10 answered with Question No. 5.

Schools Building Contractors

11. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps which can be taken by sub-contractors working on school projects that have not been paid by the principal contractor for a period of greater than three months; the process his Department has in place to assist an unpaid school sub-contractor in such situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29919/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A building project is a complex arrangement of contractual relationships between the client, the main contractor, specialist sub-contractors, domestic sub-contractors, suppliers of materials, suppliers of plant etc. In general all sub-contractors employed on education sector building projects are employed directly by the Main Contractor or indirectly by the Main Contractor through other sub-contractors. It is a matter for all sub-contractors to agree terms and conditions and a schedule of payments with the Main Contractor as their direct employer.

As these contracts involve contractual matters between private companies as such my Department has no authority to intervene in these matters.

The Construction Contracts Act 2013 is intended to provide statutory arrangements for payments under construction contracts. The Act which was signed on the 13 April 2016 provides certain protections for companies and individuals, including sub-contractors, engaged in construction related activities who enter into construction contracts covered by the Act.

European Globalisation Fund

12. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which workers of a company (details supplied) can access the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29923/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The European Globalisa-

tion Adjustment Fund (EGF) assists Member States to provide active labour market supports for workers who are made redundant due to globalisation or a global economic and financial crisis. Eligible redundancy situations are those involving at least 500 redundancies in a specific company (including suppliers/downstream producers) in a 4 month period, or at least 500 redundancies in a specific sector in a 9 month period. Applications for co-financing from the EGF are made by individual Member States and redundancies occurring in sites in other Member States cannot be aggregated to meet the eligibility criteria.

However, in exceptional circumstances applications can be considered where these criteria are not entirely met. In such cases a Member State is required to substantiate that exceptional circumstances pertain and that the redundancies have a serious impact on employment and the local, regional or national economy. These exceptional circumstances cases cannot exceed 15% of the annual maximum amount of EGF funding.

The EGF Managing Authority in my Department is currently assessing the circumstances pertaining to the proposed redundancies in question to ascertain whether the making of an EGF application is a feasible option. This assessment will address the circumstances leading to the redundancies and the extent to which exceptional circumstances pertain.

Schools Building Projects

13. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of a new secondary school in Wexford town; if the patronage is decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29927/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For school planning purposes, my Department divides the country into 314 geographic areas known as school planning areas. These defined areas facilitate the orderly planning of school provision and accommodation needs. In identifying the requirement for additional school places in a school planning area, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic analyses to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. Following the 2015 demographic analyses, four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools were announced to open in 2017 and 2018 to cater for increased demographic needs in these areas.

The demographic analysis for the Wexford Town school planning area does not indicate a requirement for a new post-primary school for the area. My Department is satisfied that the existing five post-primary schools in the Wexford town school planning area can cater for the students who require a school place in the area.

The Wexford town school planning area is an area experiencing demographic growth and the demographic data for this school planning area and the adjacent school planning areas are being kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated child benefit data and updated enrolment data and also the impact of ongoing and planned capacity increases in these, and adjoining, school planning areas.

Gaeltacht Policy

14. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures which will be taken to ensure that the Gaeltacht education policy is published and funded in the near future with regard to the Gaeltacht curriculum referenced in his Department's strategy statement for 2016-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29946/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, which was published in September, I committed to publishing a Gaeltacht Education Strategy before the end of the year. To this end I am currently finalising the Policy for Gaeltacht Education, which will outline the measures that will be taken to successfully implement the commitment, outlined in Action 33 of the Action Plan, to strengthen Irish language learning in Gaeltacht areas. I hope to publish the Gaeltacht Education Policy by the end of this year and to commence implementation of the Policy on a phased basis in 2017, as resources permit.

School Transport Provision

15. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that school bus transport is provided to pupils who wish to attend specific schools in their area (details supplied). [29950/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

During the 2015/16 school year in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in approximately 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

As the Deputy is aware, under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

In general children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis subject to a number of terms and conditions that are detailed in the scheme. The availability of concessionary transport may vary from year to year and is not available on public scheduled services.

While it is the prerogative of parents to send their children to the school of their choice, eligibility for school transport is to the nearest education centre/school.

The terms of the Scheme are applied equitably on national basis.

Schools Site Acquisitions

16. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to any exercise by his Department to assess the future educational building needs in Dublin city area, at primary, secondary and third level, in the context of the consolidation of the DIT on the Grangegorman campus and the future disposal of the DIT properties in Kevin Street, Aungier Street, Cathal Brugha Street, Mountjoy Square, Chatham Row and Bolton Street; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29957/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For school planning purposes, my Department divides the country into 314 geographic areas known as school planning areas. These defined areas facilitate the orderly planning of school provision and accommodation needs. A number of these school planning areas cover Dublin City. In Dublin City, as elsewhere, my Department is using a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure and requirements for additional school places. The demographic data used is kept under ongoing review to take account of updated child benefit data, updated enrolment data, and also the impact of ongoing and planned capacity increases in these, and adjoining, school planning areas.

With regard to school site acquisitions, decisions in relation to the specific locations for new school accommodation in the Dublin City area are determined in the context of the overall portfolio of sites acquired, the feasibility of development of individual sites, and the timelines for acquisition, planning permission and development. Due to commercial sensitivities, it is not possible to provide details of specific site acquisitions under consideration by the Department.

With regard to DIT, my Department works closely with the Grangegorman Development Agency and DIT in relation to all aspects of the campus development at Grangegorman, including issues related to the proposed disposal of DIT properties.

Departmental Funding

17. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial assistance available from his Department to a person (details supplied) who wishes to complete the experienced operator programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29958/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is no financial assistance available from my Department to cover the cost of completion of the Experienced Operator Programme.

Support may be available from the Training Support Grant which is administered by the Department of Social Protection and is designed to fund quick access to short term training or related interventions for individual jobseekers who have identified work opportunities. Contact should be made with the local Intreo office for further information on support that may be available to the individual in question.

Education Policy

18. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made on the development of an entrepreneurial education strategy for primary and post-primary schools, as per Objective 4.6: Create a stronger focus on Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation, No. 111, in the Action Plan for Education 2016 - 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29962/16]

19. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his proposals for the development of new entrepreneurship education guidelines for schools as per Objective 4.6: Create a stronger focus on Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation, No. 112, in the Action Plan for Education 2016 - 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29963/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 18 and 19 together.

Work is currently underway on the development of an Entrepreneurial Education Policy Statement. It is the intention that the Policy Statement will cover the whole of the education and training system including primary and post primary schools.

The new Entrepreneurship Education Guidelines for Schools will be informed by the Policy Statement.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

20. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be assessed for inclusion in the DEIS programme, which is currently under review, as all research carried out in its catchment area emphasises the need for school's inclusion in the programme, given that the second level schools in the area that it feeds into are currently included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29968/16]

21. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be immediately assessed for inclusion in the DEIS programme, which is currently under review, in view of the fact that all research carried out in its catchment area emphasises the need for its inclusion in the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29975/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 20 and 21 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, a review of the DEIS programme is currently underway and, as I have recently announced, a New Action Plan Educational Inclusion will be published before the end of this year. The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, particularly the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies, in order to improve effectiveness.

As I have already announced, among the measures to be included in the plan are a series of pilot schemes aimed at introducing measures which have been shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged children and students. The plan is expected to include targeted measures in the areas of:

- Supporting school leadership. We are lucky in Ireland to have exceptionally strong school principals in disadvantaged schools – even small improvements in supports for and retention and performance of school leaders in these schools can have a dramatic impact on outcomes

- Networks and clusters for DEIS teachers and schools – including greater supported self-evaluation. Stronger networks of peer groups for teachers can help develop new methods and improve outcomes

- Teaching methodologies. There is evidence that, for example, changing the way literacy is taught to children who struggle can achieve major improvements in results

- Explore ways in which the work of schools could be better integrated with other state supports within the community

The results of pilot programmes will be carefully monitored before any decisions around mainstreaming are considered.

Also under consideration is the development of a new assessment framework using central-

ly held CSO and DES data for the identification of schools for inclusion in a new programme to tackle educational disadvantage. The number of schools to be included in the programme will be determined by this proposed new identification process which will assess all schools in the country, including the two schools in question.

The Review process has included extensive stakeholder consultation, in particular engagement with relevant education partners.

The work undertaken by the Technical and Advisory Group is ongoing and its outcome will form part of the Action Plan, when published.

It is envisaged that actions arising from a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion plan will be implemented in the 2017 /2018 school year.

Further details on the Review Process and the groups involved are available at www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

22. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a list of the schools that will accommodate the ten additional ASD classes for south Kildare; the number of classes to be located in each of these schools; the timeline for completion of these projects; the capacity in each of these ten classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29976/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

In respect of children with ASD who cannot be accommodated in mainstream education, they may be enrolled in special classes or special schools where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided. Special classes are for students who have a recommendation for a special class placement in their professional reports.

The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs, including Autism. It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in communities where the need for such classes has been identified.

Special classes within mainstream schools are intended for children who, by virtue of their level of Special Educational Needs, cannot reasonably be educated in a mainstream class setting, but who can still attend their local school in a special class with a lower pupil–teacher ratio of 6:1 at primary level and 6:1.5 at post primary level, and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 children.

Progress in developing this network has been significant and in addition to the special school

placements there are currently 1,153 special classes throughout the country at primary and post primary level of which 889 are for children with Autism.

Of these, there are 59 ASD classes in County Kildare for 2016/17 school year, comprising 6 Early Intervention Classes for children who are not yet school going age, 41 primary school classes and 12 classes at post primary level in mainstream schools. 2 of these classes are new classes, 1 at primary level and 1 at post primary level.

The NCSE, in consultation with the relevant education partners, must take into account the present and future potential need, location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas. In this regard the NCSE has advised that they are continuing to engage with schools in the area referred to by the Deputy in opening special classes to where there is an identified need for special class provision.

The NCSE recently launched guidelines for Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Post Primary schools which provide information on setting up and organising special classes. These guidelines are available to download from www.ncse.ie.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in County Kildare, are available on www.ncse.ie in county order, and with new classes identified.

School Transport Availability

23. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding school bus tickets for pupils (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30002/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

During the 2015/16 school year in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in approximately 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Bus Éireann has advised there are seats available for the children referred to by the Deputy and in this regard Bus Éireann will liaise directly with the family.

Fire Safety

24. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the report by the fire report group commissioned for an estate (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29917/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Part B of the Building Regulations sets out the statutory standards of fire safety that apply when a new building is constructed in order to ensure the safety of persons in and about the building. Compliance with the building regulations is first and foremost the responsibility of the owners, designers and builders of the building concerned.

Nevertheless, in the interests of supporting owners and residents living in developments

where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise, my Department announced, in September, 2015, that a review was to be undertaken by an independent fire safety expert to develop a framework for general application in such situations. The independent fire safety expert has now completed this task and a report on the matter has been received in my Department. The report remains under consideration pending clarification on a number of issues at which point it is intended that the arrangements necessary for publication will be made.

Housing Policy

25. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will address the urgent need to develop a strategy that will provide single persons and couples who face inadequate rent supplement and HAP limits with accessible and affordable social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29942/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government has committed €1.2 billion in funding for housing to my Department under Budget 2017, to allow for continued implementation of Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, under which 47,000 new social homes will be delivered by 2021. Future targets and funding will be allocated to all local authorities beyond 2017 based on the results of the Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2016 which are expected to be available later this year. The summary is now well advanced and will provide updated data on the level of social housing need across all local authorities, broken down in to a wide range of categories including household composition. Using this data will ensure that new social housing targets are set and funding provided in line with housing need in each local authority area.

Some 13,800 households are currently being supported by the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme across the 19 local authority areas where the scheme is operational, including eligible homeless households under the HAP Pilot scheme managed by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) for all four local authorities in the Dublin region. Some 9,500 separate landlords and agents are providing accommodation to those households supported by HAP.

The Programme for a Partnership Government committed to extending the capacity of local authorities to make discretionary payments, while providing a framework for the review of both Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) rent limits taking account of geographic variations in market rents. The Government delivered on this commitment with the introduction of revised HAP and Rent Supplement rent limits with effect from 1 July 2016. Furthermore, additional flexibility above the existing HAP rent limits was made available to all HAP local authorities from the same date. Local authorities have been advised by my Department to utilise the 20% discretion where required to meet the needs of any household types, including single or couples without children, to access accommodation in the local rental market. Since the introduction of the increased HAP rent limits in July 2016, more than 2,500 pre-existing HAP households have received an increase in their level of support.

At Quarter 2 of this year, 38% of the households who are having their housing need met by HAP were made up of single persons or couples without children. Furthermore, as indicated above, the HAP scheme permits sharing arrangements, subject to a local authority's agreement, which provides eligible single person and couple households with greater access to sourcing affordable housing.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the scheme, including the effectiveness of rent limits for each household type, under review. In general, I am very satisfied with how the HAP scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under *Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness*.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

26. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his strategy to take advantage of the large number of vacant homes nationwide in order to alleviate the homelessness crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29943/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Action 5.1 of the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – *Rebuilding Ireland* undertakes to develop a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy by 2017. To this end, the Housing Agency, which has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the Strategy, has established a working group to inform the Strategy, with senior representatives from my Department, local authorities and from the Housing Agency itself. Its first meeting was held on 30 September.

My Department and the Housing Agency are liaising with local authorities and with the Central Statistics Office in order to obtain a better understanding of the numbers, characteristics and reasons why homes are vacant. A number of local authorities have commenced, or are planning to commence, pilot programmes to identify vacant homes and bring them back into use; these pilot programmes will inform the Strategy. In addition, the Strategy will be informed by international best practice and experience, and research is also being undertaken in this area.

Furthermore, a new Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has recently been announced to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to bring vacant houses into social housing use as new homes for families on local authority waiting lists. The new Scheme will operate initially in Waterford and Carlow and my Department will work closely with other local authorities to roll it out around the country over the course of the next six months.

I have secured €140m for the successful implementation of this Scheme over the next five years. This Scheme has significant potential and I am hopeful that it can bring at least 3,500 vacant houses back into productive use between now and 2021.

In addition, under a new “Buy and Renew” initiative, my Department will support local authorities and approved housing bodies to purchase private housing units in need of remediation, renew them and make them available for social housing use. An initial capital provision of €25 million will be available for this initiative in 2017.

Tenancy Protection Scheme

27. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will support and make efforts towards extending the tenancy protection service to benefit homeless persons or persons at risk of homelessness on a nationwide level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29944/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As provided for in Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Threshold tenancy protection service, which currently operates in the Dublin region, the mid-East, Cork and Galway, will be extended on a national basis by the end of this year. Also, a national awareness campaign will be rolled out in early-2017 targeted at families and individuals worried about, or at risk of losing their homes.

In the interim, the Department of Social Protection continues to operate discretion on a case-by-case basis under its National Tenancy Sustainment Framework providing uplifts to the rate of rent supplement payable, where necessary, to protect tenants from the risk of homelessness. In the region of 9,000 such uplifts have been provided by that Department's Community Welfare Service to date.

Furthermore, the increased limits under Rent Supplement and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), introduced by this Government from 1 July 2017, will contribute towards supporting the tenancies of the existing approximately 65,000 recipients of Rent Supplement and HAP.

Motor Tax Collection

28. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of cars currently taxed which were registered in each year from 2000 to July 2008; the number of taxed non-vintage cars registered before 2000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29992/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The numbers of private vehicles (excluding vintage vehicles) taxed at 30 September 2016 and which were first licensed prior to July 2008 are set out as follows.

Year of first licensing	No. of vehicles taxed at 30 September 2016
2008	57,883
2007	174,926
2006	164,584
2005	152,734
2004	125,723
2003	101,303
2002	83,077
2001	61,156
2000	60,218
1999 and earlier	72,007
Total	1,053,611

Departmental Legal Cases

29. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when further advice was sought from the Office of the Chief State Solicitor regarding the 16th century old dock in Galway; the number of reminders issued since seeking this information; if it has been received yet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29993/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon

Coveney): My Department sought further clarification on aspects of this complex case from the State's legal services in June 2016. While no formal reminders have issued the case has been raised during scheduled meetings between officials. The clarifications sought have not yet been received.

EU Directives

30. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the outstanding EU directives his Department or agencies under its remit are responsible for implementing; if the implementation of any of them require specific legislative change; and if so, the details of same. [29897/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department is, at present, responsible for the transposition of two EU Directives set out in the following table. Implementation of the directives requires legislative change and the Department will ensure that the necessary law, regulation or administrative provisions or necessary changes to existing laws, regulations or administrative provisions will be made to give full effect to the directives. The Pensions Act 1990, as amended, together with regulations made under that Act, is the legislation pertaining to occupational and private pensions and therefore relevant to the transposition of these directives.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Directive No	Title
2014/50/EU	Minimum requirements for enhancing worker mobility between Member States by improving the acquisition and preservation of supplementary pension rights.
2013/14/EU	Amending Directive 2003/41/EC on the activities and supervision of institutions for occupational retirement provision, Directive 2009/65/EC on the coordination of laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS) and Directive 2011/61/EU on Alternative Investment Funds Managers in respect of over-reliance on credit ratings.

Family Income Supplement Applications

31. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a FIS application by a person (details supplied). [29910/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal relating to the Family Income Supplement application of the person concerned was initially disallowed by an Appeals Officer by way of a summary decision. The person concerned was notified of this decision on 20 July 2016. However, when further correspondence was received from the person concerned the file was recalled and returned to the Appeals Officer for consideration. The Appeals Officer has decided, in light of that correspondence, that the appeal decision should be reviewed and that an oral hearing

should be convened in order to facilitate that review. The person concerned has been advised of this proposed course of action and will be notified of the arrangements for the oral hearing as soon as these have been finalised.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Reports

32. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has received the report concerning bogus self-employment and the review of regulations relating to the scope of employment and self-employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29918/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A public consultation document: 'Use of Intermediary-type Structures and Self-employment Arrangements' was published on 28th January, 2016. The public consultation closed on 31st March, 2016.

The purpose of the consultation was to invite submissions from interested parties on possible measures to address the loss to the Exchequer that may arise under arrangements (i) where an individual, who would otherwise be an employee, establishes a company to provide his or her services, and (ii) where an individual, who is dependent on, and under the control of, a single employer in the same manner as an employee, is classified as a self-employed individual.

A working group comprising officials from the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners is currently examining the submissions and the policy considerations that arise in addressing these issues.

Bereavement Grant Applications

33. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if necessary forms to apply for assistance in respect of funeral expenses will be sent to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29929/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The application forms to apply for assistance with funeral expenses will be posted to the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

34. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in determination of an application for invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29948/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E or H contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

In 2012 the department received from the person concerned a claim for IP. That claim was refused at that time on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. The department has no record of any subsequent claim for IP from the person concerned. A claim form for IP issued to the person concerned on 11 October 2016.

The department received a claim for Disability Allowance for the person concerned on 4 October 2016. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

35. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection the consideration which has been given to the adverse effects changes to State contributory pensions entitlements are having on parents who took time off work to raise children and are now of retirement age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29951/16]

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.

One of the conditions of the State pension (contributory) is that a person needs a minimum of 520 weekly contributions (i.e. 10 years) paid since entering insurable employment. If a person does not have this minimum number of contributions paid, they will not generally have an entitlement to this particular pension, either at a full or reduced rate. Since 1961, when contributory pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating the rate of pension entitlement.

Entitlement is banded, with the maximum rate payable to those with a yearly average of 48-52 contributions, and the minimum rate payable to those with a yearly average in the range of 10-14 contributions per year. Even if someone has only 10 years (520 weeks) of paid reckonable contributions between their 16th and 66th birthdays, they would generally qualify for a State pension (contributory), although the rate payable would vary depending on their circumstances, and it will not always be their most advantageous payment to claim.

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 after that date 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.

Where people who were unattached to the labour market during most of their adult lives cannot 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 this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a working life will be more closely reflected in the rate of pension payment received. The position of women who were home-makers is being given specific and careful consideration in developing detailed proposals. 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 around 2020. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical components to be put in place prior its implementation. The position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons will be considered very carefully in developing this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

36. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29967/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal in relation to the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 5 October 2016, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

37. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons on JobPath in counties Roscommon and Galway since its introduction in July 2015 to 2016 to date in tabular form; the number of persons in counties Roscommon and Galway on community employment schemes over the same time period in tabular form; his views on the impact of JobPath on vital community focused community employment schemes which are now struggling to find eligible participants, which is having a knock-on detrimental effect on communities in rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30003/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant

from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. These supports include JobPath and Community Employment schemes (CE).

CE schemes provide part-time temporary work in the communities, as a stepping stone back to employment, for people in receipt of a range of social welfare payments including those on a long term jobseeker's payment. However, CE placements are not full time sustainable jobs.

The JobPath service is provided for jobseekers only. The period of engagement with JobPath for any individual is typically 52 weeks. During that time they receive intensive individual support to help them to overcome barriers to employment and are also provided with a range of training and development supports including online modules, career advice, CV preparation and interview skills. During the year if a person is placed into a job they will continue to receive support for at least three months and up to an additional twelve months while in employment. People who have completed their year long engagement with JobPath may, if eligible, apply to partake in a CE Scheme after they have been assessed by my Department's Case Officers.

The following table shows the number of people referred to JobPath per month to September 2016 and the numbers of participants on CE Schemes per month for counties Galway and Roscommon. The CE numbers in Galway have decreased marginally (by 49) while the CE numbers in Roscommon have increased marginally (by 15). These figures do not suggest that there are major problems in these counties in finding CE participants. While there may be some individual CE schemes experiencing difficulties from time to time, which is to be expected given the significant drop in the Live Register, it does not necessarily follow that such difficulties would not have arisen if JobPath did not exist. Moreover, in the same period, over 3,500 jobseekers have been supported by the JobPath service. If there is a CE scheme experiencing particular difficulties in recruitment, the sponsor should contact their local DSP office so that the matter may be reviewed.

Galway		-	Roscommon	
JobPath	CE	Month	JobPath	CE
-	1,525	Jul-15		331
63	1,522	Aug-15		326
127	1,513	Sep-15		335
149	1,436	Oct-15		353
230	1,493	Nov-15		349
72	1,492	Dec-15		346
239	1,477	Jan-16		348
257	1,481	Feb-16		352
209	1,475	Mar-16		349
205	1,487	Apr-16		349
284	1,476	May-16	30	354
323	1,485	Jun-16	60	353
323	1,492	Jul-16	72	353
400	1,482	Aug-16	99	349
324	1,476	Sep-16	68	346
TOTAL	3,205		329	

JobPath column shows the number of clients referred in the month JobPath clients exit the services after 12 months.

CE column shows the number of participants in the month.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizenship Applications

38. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the application for foreign birth registration of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29972/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The original application for Irish citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration referred to by the Deputy was lodged with the Embassy in Ankara in December 2015 through our Honorary Consul in Pakistan.

Additional supporting documentation required by the Embassy in Ankara was received on 10 August 2016, and the application is now being further reviewed.

The Embassy in Ankara will contact the applicant should any additional information be required to complete the application.

Iarratais Pas

39. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála an bhfuil a Roinn sásta pas a eisiúint chuig duine (sonraí tugtha) agus an áit ar rugadh é á tabhairt i nGaeilge amháin ar an bpas; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [29991/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Nuair a eisítear pasanna ar shaoránaigh a rugadh lasmuigh d'Éirinn, úsáidtear cód trí litir chun an tír inar rugadh an duine a léiriú. An Eagraíocht Eitlíochta Sibhialta Idirnáisiúnta (ICAO) a shocraíonn na cóid sin. Cloíonn Éire le treoirlínte an ICAO chun inghlacthacht pasanna Éireannacha ag calafoirt iontrála a chinntiú. Is cóid chineálacha iad seo le gur féidir le seirbhísí náisiúnta pasanna na cóid chéanna a úsáid go comhsheasmhach. USA an cód do na Stáit Aontaithe. Níl na cóid seo beartaithe a bheith aistrithe nó curtha in oiriúint d'aon teanga faoi leith. Ní féidir lenár gcóras leagan leasaithe, nó leagan eile, de na cóid seo a thairfeadh.

Flood Relief Schemes Eligibility

40. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the River Erne would be eligible for funding under the minor flood mitigation works and coastal protection scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29911/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Local flooding issues are, in the first instance, a matter for each local authority to investigate and address. They may carry out flood alleviation works from their own resources, or apply to the OPW for funding under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme.

The purpose of this scheme is to provide funding to local authorities to undertake minor works to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administra-

tive areas. The scheme generally applies to relatively straightforward cases where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the scheme eligibility criteria, which comprise economic, social and environmental criteria including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management. Details are published on the OPW website *www.opw.ie*.

Commission for Public Service Appointments

41. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the contacts between his office and a person (details supplied); the inquiries he has made on foot of the person's complaint; the actions which were taken by the Commission for Public Service Appointments to investigate the complaint; his views on each of the individual claims submitted by the person; and his proposals to address the concerns raised by the person. [29928/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) is an independent statutory body. It is responsible for overseeing appointments to a wide range of positions in the Civil and Public Service. In carrying out its oversight role, it audits recruitment processes and examines complaints from individuals unhappy with the conduct of an appointment process. The CPSA may make recommendations, offer advice or give instructions to recruiting bodies within its remit however it does not have the statutory authority to reverse a recruitment decision taken by one of those recruiting bodies.

As it is an independent statutory body, my Department has no involvement in the examination of complaints made to the CPSA.

However I am advised that the person for whom the details have been provided did make a complaint to the CPSA in 2015 and, following its examination of the matters complained about, the CPSA issued a report on the matter to the individual and to the recruiting body concerned. I am also informed that the complaint was partially upheld and that the CPSA recommended to the recruiting body that it review its process with a view to ensuring that candidates are assessed in a more consistent manner.

The complaint has been fully and properly addressed.

Legislative Process

42. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the current Stage of the Heritage Bill 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29934/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Heritage Bill 2016 passed its Second Stage reading in Seanad Éireann on 20 January 2016 and is included in the Government Legislation Programme, which was published on 8 June 2016. It is intended that this Bill will proceed to the Committee Stage in the Seanad as soon as possible.

Irish Language

43. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will counteract funding cuts and invest in the development of the Irish language and Gaeltacht authorities by allocating €4.5 million in the upcoming budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29945/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Budget Estimates for 2017 were published by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, yesterday and contain an allocation of €46.736m in total for programme expenditure on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht and the Islands. In addition, €13.239m has also been allocated to An Foras Teanga for 2017.

In addition, I was pleased to confirm yesterday an additional capital allocation of €2.4m in 2016 for Údarás na Gaeltachta, which will greatly assist the organisation in creating and maintaining jobs in Gaeltacht areas.

National Monuments

44. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the European Commission has granted approval to a company (details supplied) for the purchase of Project Jewel and the Moore Street battle field, as defined by the recent High Court decision; if not, the body which is currently in charge of the land on which it sits; the body which is the direct employer of the archaeologists who are working on the Moore Street national monuments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29901/16]

45. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will identify the employer of each worker currently operating on the Moore Street national monument and the contract on which the employment exists; the objectives of the contract; and the person or company which pays the salaries of these employees. [29920/16]

46. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount which has been spent on the Moore Street national monument, as defined by the High Court, by the State in all its activities up until the High Court decision; the amount which has been spent by the State on all activities in this area since; and the money which has been spent in both scenarios. [29921/16]

47. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the person who is the current owner of the lands of the national monument on Moore Street, as defined by the High Court decision; and if there are any loans associated with these lands in the charge of NAMA. [29922/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 to 47, inclusive, together.

Nos. 14-17 and part of No. 18 Moore Street are in my ownership as Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. My functions in this case under the National Monuments Acts do not include oversight of ownership of other properties in the area or interactions between the owners of such properties and other official bodies and institutions. I have no statutory function in relation to these matters, or in regard to the conveyance of ownership or the disposal of loans associated with those properties.

I understand that, in the context of the work of the Moore Street Consultative Forum, the Deputy has been furnished with details of the interdisciplinary project and construction teams responsible for the ongoing works to preserve and protect the buildings in my ownership as

Minister. The personnel involved are employed by the companies identified and consequently my Department would not have the information sought by the Deputy in relation to terms of employment and associated matters. I am advised that it would not be appropriate to disclose any such personal information in the context of data protection laws and the rights of the individuals.

All of the costs incurred by my Department to date have related to the acquisition of the buildings in my ownership as Minister (i.e. Nos. 14-17 and part of No. 18 Moore Street) and to works carried out for the purpose of their protection and preservation. The overall amount to date is €4.35m.

Calafóirt agus Céanna

48. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé ar intinn aici a iarraidh ar Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe dul ar aghaidh leis an bpleanáil ar na hoibreacha breise a theastaíonn ag Céibh an Chalaídh Mhóir, Inis Meáin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [29995/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): Mar atá a fhios ag an Teachta, is cúram do Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe Cé an Chalaídh Mhóir. Cé nach bhfuil acmhainní ag mo Roinnse i láthair na huair chun oibreacha a chuir chun cinn ag an gcé sin, tá iarrtha agam ar mo chuid oifigigh an cheist maidir le réamh-phleanáil don togra a phlé leis an gComhairle Contae.

Ní miste dom a lua gur thug mé cead le déanaí an soláthar €6m a bhí ar fáil do mo Roinnse i mbliana ar mhaithe leis an togra muiroibreacha atá beartaithe d'Inis Oírr a thairiscint do Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe d'fhonn réiteach fad-théarmach a fháil ar an bhfadhb stairiúil a bhain le caiteachas breise suntasach a bhí ag seasamh amach i ndáil leis an obair fheabhsúcháin a rinneadh ar chéanna ar Inis Meáin agus ar Árainn le cabhair deontais ó mo Roinn roinnt blianta siar.

Bhí ar mo chumas an chéim sin a ghlacadh nuair ba léir nach mbeadh an tsuim €6m iníoctha i mbliana do thogra Inis Oírr. Táthar ag súil anois go lorgófar tairiscintí don obair thógála ag Inis Oírr in 2017 agus tá soláthar €2m déanta agam sna Meastacháin chuige sin, figiúr a mheastar a bheidh dóthaineach don bhliain seo chugainn.

Departmental Expenditure

49. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the main areas of underspend against profile, broken down by subhead, by her Department up to 30 September 2016 that has led to an underspend of €11 million or 5.7% on current and an underspend of €23 million or 34.6% on capital against profile on that date; the expected out-turn at the year end on current and capital broken down the same way; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29996/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of provisional expenditure in respect of my Department and all Government Departments are published at Vote level by the Department of Finance on a monthly basis. Provisional current and capital expenditure figures in respect of my Department at Vote level as of 31 August 2016 are available at http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Appendix%20III%20-%20End-August%202016%20Gross%20Voted%20Expenditure_0.pdf and details of

expenditure as of 30 September 2016 will be published shortly.

Details of the actual outturn for my Department at subhead level for 2016 will be published in due course in the Annual Appropriation Account and will be available on the website of the Comptroller and Auditor General as was the case for previous years.

Underspend against profile has occurred principally in relation to the Arts Programme, in respect of once off Decade of Centenary projects, and the Rural and Regional Programmes, which transferred to my Department in June. While it is too early to accurately forecast the end of year outturn at this point in the year, no savings beyond those which can be carried forward by deferred surrender are envisaged at present.

Disability Services Provision

50. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will intervene in the case of a person (details supplied) who requires early intervention services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29986/16]

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.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

51. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that there are mental health services available outside of the average business hours, that is 9am-5pm (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29894/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): 24/7 cover is provided within mental health services by a number of interlinked components across the services. These are as follows:

- During normal working hours i.e. 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday, the Community Mental Health Teams responsible for each age group (children and adolescents, working age adults and older persons) are available to respond to crises. For existing patients of the service, the usual route is that they contact their community mental health nurse or health and social care professional as appropriate. For those without previous contact, the route is through the person's GP who requests an urgent assessment. All mental health teams keep slots for urgent referrals for a person who is acutely suicidal or severely depressed. On occasion where there is no slot available, the cases booked for that day have to be rearranged to facilitate an urgent assessment.

- During the above hours a person may present to the Emergency Department. The Mental Health Division, arising from the Programme for Government investment since 2012, has now ensured that all Level 4 hospitals have a Liaison Psychiatry Service available on the site of the acute hospital. This service provides prompt assessments in the Emergency Department. Most

Level 3 hospitals now have either a service in place or one is planned with the allocation from the Programme for Government in 2015. For the latter, recruitment is taking place and where the liaison service is not yet in place the local service has an alternative arrangement whereby the person is assessed by a liaison nurse or NCHD and the consultant on duty for that day provides advice on management.

- The National Clinical Programme (NCP) for the Assessment and Management of Self-Harm in Emergency Departments began in December 2014. Under this programme 25 senior mental health nurses at Clinical Nurse Specialist level have been trained and deployed to Emergency Departments. This facilitates an onsite, rapid response to those who have self-harmed and/or are suicidal. It supplements and works with the Liaison Psychiatry Service to provide a bespoke response to those who are suicidal or have self-harmed.

- During the on call period i.e. between 5pm and 9am Monday to Friday and throughout the weekend period, there is a Consultant Psychiatrist together with a Psychiatric Registrar or Senior House Officer on duty in acute hospitals. This provides the urgent/crisis response to people presenting to Emergency Departments during the on call period. Since December 2014, this has been supplemented by the development of the Self-Harm Clinical Programme such that where two nurses are available, extended hours are provided to the Emergency Department.

- In addition, approximately half the areas within the country provide a seven day week contact point for existing patients within the mental health service. This is provided for existing patients who are thought to require additional follow-up particularly during Saturday and Sunday when there are no clinics operating. Such patients may attend a designated point such as a day hospital or alternatively the nurse may visit the patient at home.

Cochlear Implants Provision

52. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to an issue with children under six years of age and over awaiting sequential and bilateral cochlear implants at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, or Temple Street; when theatre and capacity issues referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 467 of 8 June 2016 will be addressed; the action being taken by the HSE; if he is aware of significant numbers of children waiting for these implants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29896/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Beaumont Hospital is the national centre for delivering Ireland's national cochlear implant programme, with surgical provision for patients under six years being carried out in the Children's University Hospital Temple Street. A simultaneous bilateral cochlear implantation scheme for patients under six commenced in Temple Street in July 2014. The hospital had a two-year agreement (July 2014 - June 2016) in place with Beaumont Hospital for theatre access to facilitate an initiative on sequential cochlear implants treatments for previously unilateral implanted children under 6 years of age. In June 2016, Temple St completed its commitment to accommodate the treatment of all the under 6s children requiring sequential treatment – 210 in total.

In relation to the over 6s, this service is provided by Beaumont Hospital. While Temple Street is willing to have all paediatric cochlear implant services transferred from Beaumont, but this needs to be done in a planned manner, and requires the development of the necessary infrastructure, including theatre capacity, to support the service transfer to Temple Street. Until such time as additional capacity is provided at Temple Street, the position is that service for older children continues to be under the remit of Beaumont Hospital, which has also experienced theatre capacity issues.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy in relation action underway to address the theatre capacity issues.

Medicinal Products Licensing

53. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider allowing the use of cannabidiol oil to treat a person diagnosed with Dravet syndrome (details supplied), who otherwise faces the prospect of having to travel to the United States to access this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29898/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cannabidiol (CBD) is derived from cannabis. However, since it does not have psychoactive properties it is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Acts.

While I am aware that CBD oil is sometimes marketed as a nutritional or dietary supplement, it should be noted that it is not authorised as a medicinal product in Ireland. Under European and Irish legislation, before a medicine can be placed on the Irish market, the manufacturer must seek an authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or, in the case of certain medicinal products, the European Medicines Agency. A determination on an application for authorisation of a medicinal product is based on a rigorous scientific assessment of the application against the criteria of safety, quality, efficacy, legal and regulatory requirements.

Where a medicinal product is not authorised in Ireland, a licensed wholesaler may import it if it has been prescribed by a doctor for a patient under his/her care, on his/her direct responsibility and in order to meet the special needs of a patient. Therefore, if a CBD oil preparation does not contain an ingredient which is a controlled substance, such as THC, it may be feasible to have that product imported and used in Ireland, in accordance with specific conditions, should a patient's doctor be of the opinion that this is an appropriate treatment.

On the wider issue of medicinal cannabis, I am aware that cannabis has been legalised for medicinal use in certain countries. The Deputy will be aware that a Private Members' Bill on this issue was recently published. My officials are considering the contents of this Bill

Mental Health Policy

54. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if he intends dismantling the current directorate structure of the mental health services; if so, the nature of the replacement; if the new structures that are put in place will have its own leadership and budget as was recommended in A Vision For Change only seven years ago and at the time was lauded as a milestone and an indication that mental health would no longer be neglected; if his attention has been drawn to the damage that lack of leadership and funding will have on mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29907/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Department is currently discussing with the Health Service Executive a proposal for the restructuring of senior management in the Executive. The rationale for these proposed changes is to provide more dedicated focus at the most senior level of the HSE on the twin challenges of improved operational performance in our health service on a day to day basis and the planning of a significant programme of change to equip the health service to better meet current and future health challenges.

Changes in the senior management structures within the HSE are a matter in the first instance for the Director General. Accordingly, I am referring the specific question to the Executive for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Provision

55. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the inequity in the services available across the nine community health care organisations; if his attention has further been drawn to the unequal division of health care workers throughout the areas (details supplied); his plans to ensure equitable service delivery of mental health treatment across the community health care areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29908/16]

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.

Health Services Funding

56. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if funding can be made available for a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29909/16]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

57. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29930/16]

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.

National Positive Ageing Strategy Implementation

58. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if the implementation committee for

the national positive ageing strategy has been appointed; if so, the names of the members; when they will meet and report; if it has not been appointed, when he plans to appoint the committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29932/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As the Deputy may be aware my Department is developing a new implementation proposal for the National Positive Ageing Strategy. This plan proposes mechanisms to facilitate the identification by NGO stakeholders of their policy priorities, along with regular on-going structured engagement between relevant State Agencies and stakeholders on the key issues so identified.

The details of the above will be finalised shortly.

Disability Services Funding

59. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); his views on the issue of funding between COPE and the HSE in Cork north Lee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29935/16]

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.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

60. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the caseload per speech and language therapist for counties Louth and Meath, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29936/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

61. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will continue to support the Irish Cancer Society, NCCP, HSE and the national immunisation office working group focused on improving communication around the vaccine and robust and regular public support for the vaccination programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29938/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Immunisation is a simple, safe and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases before they come into contact with them. Immunisation not only protects individuals, but also others, by reducing the spread of disease. Immunisation against infectious disease has saved more lives than any other public health in-

tervention, apart from providing clean water.

Each year in Ireland around 300 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer. The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine protects against two high risk types of HPV (16 & 18) that cause 73% of all cervical cancers. Vaccinated women and girls will still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests.

I am pleased to note the ongoing work by the Irish Cancer Society, NCCP, Health Service Executive and National Immunisation Office to encourage young women to take effective measures to prevent cervical cancer by their support of the HPV vaccine. The HPV vaccine is safe and protects girls and women from developing certain cancers associated with the HPV. The combination of a HPV vaccination programme, along with the effective screening programme, has the potential to reduce the incidence of cervical cancers by up to 90 per cent.

My priority as Minister for Health is to encourage individuals and their families to be fully vaccinated and reduce the risk of cervical cancer. In relation to HPV I would encourage all young women to receive this important vaccine.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

62. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the adult waiting list for speech and language therapies for persons with intellectual disabilities in County Louth and County Meath respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29939/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Procedures

63. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding patients who received hips manufactured by a company (details supplied); the number who have already had them replaced; and the number who remain on the list. [29947/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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

64. **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. [29954/16]

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.

Respite Care Services Availability

65. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if public respite care spaces will be funded and made available as a matter of priority in south Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29955/16]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Provision

66. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will provide a person (details supplied) with more home help hours as they are in serious need of assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29966/16]

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.

Ambulance Service

67. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if ambulance protocols incorporate the transport of patients to the hospital where they might be currently receiving ongoing care and treatment which might not be the nearest hospital to the patient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29969/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Patient Transport Provision

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when the awarding of a contract for the provision of taxi services in Cork city and county by the HSE will next be put out to tender or be the subject of a mini competition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29970/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Pension Provisions

69. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding public health pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29973/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Respite Care Services Provision

70. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in providing respite care for persons (details supplied). [29974/16]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

71. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health when additional staff will be recruited to enable the full capacity of a centre (details supplied) to be utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29977/16]

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.

Home Care Packages Funding

72. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide sufficient funds to ensure that adequate home care package hours can be provided to persons in need of this

package; if his attention has been drawn to the severe cutbacks made in the home care package hours in the west of Ireland; if his attention has been further drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); when the person will be allocated more home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29983/16]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

73. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the way, under the National Treatment Purchase fund, a person (details supplied) can access an urgently needed knee replacement operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29985/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The NTPF previously arranged for the provision of hospital treatment to classes of persons determined by the Minister. Since 2011 this function has been suspended. Currently, in accordance with Reg 4(1) of the NTPF Board (Establishment) Order 2004, the NTPF carries out activities in respect of data and analytics, audit and quality assurance of waiting lists and pricing under the Nursing Home Support Scheme.

The NTPF supports the management of in-patient, day-case and outpatient waiting lists, by working with the HSE to assist hospitals in developing local demand and capacity planning and providing technical guidance materials to ensure the highest standard of data quality and practice.

The expertise amassed by the NTPF in respect of waiting lists has proven invaluable in assisting the HSE to administer previous waiting list initiatives and in carrying out smaller-scale targeted initiatives in areas such as endoscopy.

The *Programme for Partnership Government* (PfPG) emphasises the need for sustained commitment to improving waiting times for patients, with a particular focus on those patients waiting longest. It commits to €15 million funding to the NTPF for an initiative targeted at those waiting longest as part of a continued investment of €50 million per year to reduce waiting lists. My Department is working closely with the HSE and the NTPF to develop specific initiatives focused on reducing waiting lists in 2017 in accordance with the PfPG's commitments.

Already this year, the NTPF has launched the Endoscopy Initiative 2016 which will assist in reducing waiting lists and waiting times for endoscopy procedures for those patients who are currently waiting over 12 months.

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.

Vaccination Programme

74. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if he, the chief medical officer and the HSE are aware that a number of children and young adults are presenting with symptoms including sleeplessness, over-tiredness, hallucinations, sleep paralysis and slurred speech which they believe is directly connected to receiving the pandemrix swine flu vaccine; if so, the action the HSE is undertaking to provide supports to care for the affected persons; if not, if he

will request the chief medical officer and the HSE to look into this matter with a view to taking appropriate action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29987/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of Ireland's response to the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 the National Public Health Emergency Team, following advice from the Pandemic Influenza Expert Group recommended that vaccination against pandemic influenza would be provided to all citizens.

Following reports of narcolepsy among children and adolescents who were vaccinated with Pandemrix in Ireland, a National Narcolepsy Study Steering Committee was established to conduct a retrospective population based study in relation to the Irish data. This Committee comprised expertise in the areas of epidemiology, neurology, paediatrics and paediatric neurology.

The study found that there was a 13 fold higher risk of narcolepsy in children/adolescents vaccinated with the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccine compared with unvaccinated children/adolescents.

The development of narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination is not a uniquely Irish issue. The results from the Irish data concur with those observed in Finland and Sweden.

As of 7 September 2016, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has received 81 reports with clinical information confirming a diagnosis of narcolepsy in individuals who were vaccinated with Pandemrix (80) and Celvapan (1). The majority of these reports relate to children/adolescents.

My Department, the HSE and the Department of Education and Skills continue to work together to provide a wide range of services and supports for those affected by narcolepsy following the administration of pandemic influenza vaccine.

The HSE's Advocacy Unit acts as liaison with service and support providers and other Government Departments to facilitate access to required services. It is in regular contact with individuals affected and regularly meets with representatives of the SOUND (sufferers of unique narcolepsy disorder). Regional co-ordinators have been appointed to assist individuals by providing advice, information and access to local services.

The ex-gratia health supports include clinical care pathways to ensure access to rapid diagnosis and treatment, multi-disciplinary assessments led by clinical experts, counselling services for both the individuals and their families, discretionary medical cards for those who have been diagnosed have been provided to allow unlimited access to GP care and any prescribed medication, ex-gratia reimbursement of vouched expenses incurred in the process of diagnosis and treatment, including travel expenses for attending medical appointments; physiotherapy, occupational therapy assessments, dental assessments and dietary services all on a needs basis.

As of 10 October 2016, legal proceedings against the Minister, the Health Services Executive and GlaxoSmithKline Biological SA have been initiated by 51 individuals. The plaintiffs allege personal injury in which they claim the development of narcolepsy (cataplexy) resulted from the administration of the H1N1 pandemic vaccine.

Medical Card Administration

75. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the cost associated with returning the income limits for the over 70s medical card to €700 per week for single persons and €1,400 per week for couples; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29990/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Applications for persons aged 70 years and older can be assessed both on the basis of the standard national assessment guidelines and on the basis of the guidelines for persons aged 70 years or over. Under the standard means tested medical card scheme, allowance may be made for rent/mortgage, travel to work and child care costs. Generally, for the over 70's, mortgages have been cleared, children have been catered for and they would not have travel to work related costs. However, persons aged 70 or older who are assessed as ineligible under the gross income thresholds may also have their eligibility assessed under the means tested medical card scheme where they face particularly high expenses, e.g., nursing home or medication costs. As I have outlined, this assessment is based on net income and assessable outgoing expenses and the qualifying income thresholds under this scheme are lower than over 70's gross income thresholds. Furthermore, persons aged over 70 years may still be eligible for a medical card where discretion is exercised where they face undue hardship in arranging medical services as a result of medical or social circumstances.

The gross income limit for an over 70's medical card was set in legislation at €500 per week for a single person and €900 per week for a couple from 1st January 2014. Prior to that date, the limits were €600 per week for a single person and €1,200 per week for a couple. The current gross income limit for an over 70's medical card is equivalent to an annual income of €26,000 for a single person and €48,000 for a couple. There is a statutory obligation on the Minister for Health to review annually the gross income limits for medical cards and GP visit cards for persons aged 70 and over in light of changes in the Consumer Price Index. The last review was conducted in September of this year. No changes were made to the income limits on foot of the review. All persons over 70 regardless of income, qualify for access to free GP care.

The data required to calculate a definitive estimate is not held by the Primary Care Reimbursement section of the HSE, therefore it is not possible to provide an answer to the Deputy. However, it should be noted that there are no proposals at present to amend the income guidelines for the granting of eligibility for medical cards for persons aged 70 and over.

GLAS Data

76. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers in County Wexford which have been paid for GLAS 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29904/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Some three hundred and twenty-eight farmers (328) in Co. Wexford have received a GLAS 2015 part-year payment; these payments have a value of €177,641.

Brexit Issues

77. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has met the EU Commission chief negotiator on Brexit, Michel Barnier, to discuss the implications of Brexit for farmers, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29905/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I welcome Michel Barnier's appointment as the European Commission's chief negotiator for Brexit, and I look forward to hearing his plans for the conduct of exit negotiations with the UK under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

My priority for the exit negotiations is to achieve the best possible outcome for farmers and for the Irish agri-food sector as a whole, consistent with the Government's overall aim of ensuring a strong EU-UK relationship and a well-managed withdrawal. This is particularly important for farmers in border counties such as Cavan and Monaghan, who are particularly exposed to the range of trade and other issues associated with the North-South dimension of the Brexit issue.

In that regard, engagement with EU partners and the EU institutions remains a high priority. All members of the Government will remain actively engaged with their European counterparts and, as the negotiations get underway, this will include consultation with the Commission's chief negotiator, as appropriate.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

78. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2015 BPS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) who has had entitlements transferred to them and land leased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29912/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department seeking the transfer of land and entitlements by lease as transferee. The land parcels that were the subject of this transfer application had been declared by a third party on his 2013 Single Payment Scheme Application. As a result the transferor held no allocation right on these parcels and the Private Contract Clause application was deemed to be unsuccessful. The person named was notified in writing of this decision and offered the opportunity to submit a review. The person named subsequently contacted my Department and was advised to submit specific documentation which would assist in resolving the case. My Department has since contacted the person named on more than one occasion requesting the outstanding documentation. To date this documentation has not been submitted. Once the documentation is submitted the application can be further processed with a view to payment issuing as soon as possible thereafter.

Forestry Sector

79. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all sections of the 2014 Forestry Act, specifically with regard to felling, have been put into regulations; the current legislative position regarding felling applicable by law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29933/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Forestry Act 2014 provides that the Minister may make regulations governing various aspects of forestry activities and operations, including felling, and these regulations are currently being finalised with a view to commencing the Act as soon as possible.

At present tree felling is regulated by the 1946 Forestry Act and will continue to be so until such time as the Forestry Act 2014 has commenced.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is any further recourse open to a person (details supplied) relating to a certain appeal

concerning 2014 SPS area over declaration. [29971/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office issued a decision letter to the person named on 6 October 2015. A decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive, except in the following circumstances:

- An Appeals Officer may review a decision where there is new evidence, new facts or a relevant change in circumstances that were not made known during the appeals process;
- The Director of Agriculture Appeals may revise a decision where there has been a mistake made in relation to the law or the facts regarding the decision;
- An appellant may request the Office of the Ombudsman to review the case;
- An appellant may appeal a decision to the High Court on any question of law.

It is open to the person named to consider which, if any, of the foregoing recourse options may be appropriate to his circumstances.

Equine Passports

81. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that it is taking the Connemara Pony Breeders Society up to ten weeks to issue passports for Connemara ponies and that this is holding up the sale of ponies for farmers with a scarcity of grass and fodder; the steps he will take to remedy this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29994/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of its breeding programme, the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society commissions DNA testing on all horses it registers. This process is conducted by a specialist laboratory independent of the Society and the speed at which the Society issues passports to owners is contingent on the completion of the parallel test process. Commission Regulation 2015/262 concerning equine identification prevents a passport being issued by the issuing body until this information is received.

My Department has contacted the Connemara Pony Breeders Society regarding its passport issuing process and have been informed that a large volume of applications were received during the past three months. Connemara Pony Breeders' Society advise breeders to register equines immediately after birth, therefore minimising passport turnaround time.

Horse Racing Ireland

82. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if, on 27 September 2016, and prior to the release of a press statement by Horse Racing Ireland on that date, he is aware and if he will assure Dáil Éireann, that neither the HRI chairman, the board, nor any member of staff employed within HRI had any communication with his Department or with any official in his Department or within the Minister's office in regard to the press release; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30001/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

The issuing of press releases is an operational matter for HRI. The press release which HRI issued on the 27th September 2016 was not discussed with me or with my officials. However, a copy of the press release was sent to my department after its approval by the Board.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

83. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the tender process for the national broadband plan will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29949/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Department is now in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network to the over 750,000 premises in Ireland, covering 100,000km of road network and 96% of the land area of Ireland. Since bidders were invited to participate in dialogue with the Department, there have been approximately 150 hours of meetings, with considerable more interaction to follow over the coming months.

The three bidders in the procurement process have formally indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the home solution for rural Ireland. This means that householders and businesses can expect speeds of not just 30 Mbps but up to 1 Gbps with businesses availing of symmetrical upload and download speeds, in a solution that will endure for 25 years and beyond. It will also effectively reverse the urban rural divide by giving rural businesses and homes access to a technology which is not widely available in our towns and cities at present.

Earlier this year, before I came into office, the Department announced that it would be June 2017 before contract(s) were awarded under the NBP. The bidders in the process have recently indicated that they may need more time to conclude the procurement process.

The timing of each stage of the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team, and bidders, during the procurement process. Bidders need adequate time to prepare detailed proposals and their final formal bids and get the relevant shareholder and funding approvals at key stages of the process. It is also important to ensure that risks in this multi-million euro procurement are carefully managed. I do not propose to comment any further at this juncture, given the sensitivity of discussions in the procurement process. I can assure the Deputy however, that the procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years.

As part of the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated that it could take 3-5 years to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. It is however open to bidder(s) to suggest more aggressive timescales as part of their bids. As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout 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 Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

The Programme for Government also commits 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 two regional action groups, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural

Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

In the meantime, my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and agencies to assist in the commercial deployment of telecommunications networks. The commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services. These investments will further improve the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

In line with commitments in the Programme for Government I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce with my colleague Minister Humphreys in July 2016. The Taskforce will recommend practical actions that can be taken in the short-term to improve mobile phone and broadband access in Ireland, working with Government Departments, Local Authorities, ComReg, State Agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The work of the taskforce will also assist Local Authorities in preparing for the rollout of the new NBP network once contract(s) are in place. I expect that Minister Humphreys and I will bring proposals to Government by the end of 2016, on foot of the Taskforce's report.

Mobile Telephony Services

84. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will engage with the mobile telephone service providers about the poor and sometimes non-existent coverage in rural Tipperary and insist that they cease cherry picking the high population urban centres while neglecting the rural population, in view of the fact that many small businesses in rural Tipperary are depending on mobile Internet coverage to operate their business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29965/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Telecommunications service providers operate in a fully liberalised market under licences provided by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). The management of the radio spectrum is a statutory function of ComReg.

Notwithstanding the independence of ComReg, I am critically aware of the frustration currently being experienced across Ireland, where mobile networks are not always delivering the services people expect. The Programme for Government therefore committed to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. In July, I established the Taskforce, with my colleague, Heather Humphreys. The Taskforce has already met 11 times and is considering immediate measures to address telecommunications deficits in rural Ireland.

The Taskforce involves a number of Government Departments and agencies, as well as engagement with ComReg and telecommunications operators. Measures arising from the Taskforce will be implemented by Government as a matter of priority. I expect that we will bring proposals to Government by the end of 2016, on foot of the Taskforce's report.

Under the Programme for Government Minister Humphreys is also establishing two regional action groups. Working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, LEADER Groups and other relevant agencies these groups will help accelerate the rollout of broadband and mobile telecoms services at local level.

These new structures at a national and local level, are designed to address as far as possible immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage.

In addition, I intend to sign Regulations over the coming days, which will allow ComReg to

proceed with an auction of the 3.6GHz spectrum band in early 2017. This auction will provide an 86% increase in total harmonised spectrum available for mobile, nomadic and fixed wireless broadband services.

I have also secured €8m in the Budget for RTÉ which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to auction this spectrum, which will provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage – 4G and 5G. My Department has already established a working group with ComReg and RTÉ, to deliver this important project.

These initiatives should assist in significantly enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland, and particularly in rural Ireland.

In the meantime any customer, including those in County Tipperary and its environs, who experience service difficulties should raise the matter with the service provider in the first instance. If this fails to resolve matters, customers can refer a complaint to ComReg, who will investigate the service provider's compliance with its contractual obligations.

Motor Tax

85. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that tax discs are not making it to their destination after they are dispatched from Shannon (details supplied). [29895/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's office in Shannon issue motor tax discs processed on its website, www.motortax.ie. All transactions are recorded on the National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF), including the date of issue of the tax disc. Where the original disc has been lost (such as in the post) destroyed or otherwise damaged, the law requires the vehicle owner to make an application to their local motor tax office for issue of the replacement. This process involves getting the relevant form (Form RF134) witnessed by a member of An Garda Síochána. No tax discs are re-issued from my Department's offices.

My Department issues over three million online discs per annum and the number that are reported as non-delivered is a very small percentage.

Disability Services Funding

86. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is funding available for a wheelchair bus service in south Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29955/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department provides funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for a rolling programme of bus replacement and refurbishment of the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann PSO fleets both in the Greater Dublin Area and nationally. This has enabled 100% of the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann city fleets to be wheelchair accessible, as well as approximately 80% of Bus Éireann coaches (which are wheelchair accessible by lift) and this will increase as the coach fleet is replaced. Funding is also provided to the NTA to manage an on-going programme of accessibility improvement grants to upgrade existing public transport infrastructure and facilities.

Work to expand accessibility of existing coach services is on-going. During 2016 the NTA has begun the installation of wheelchair accessible bus stops across the Bus Éireann route net-

work. The long-term objective is to install a wheelchair accessible bus stop in every town in the State. The NTA is rolling this out on a route-by-route basis starting this year with Bus Éireann routes 30 (Dublin-Donegal) and 32 (Dublin-Letterkenny).

Noting their responsibility in the matter I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a reply to the specific query raised. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Facilities Provision

87. **Deputy Maria Bailey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the planned all-Ireland national indoor cycling velodrome will commence construction at the National Sports Campus, Abbotstown; the anticipated completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29906/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I am advised that the next step for a proposed velodrome would be for Sport Ireland to undertake an appropriate financial appraisal, i.e. a Cost Benefit Analysis, in accordance with the Public Spending Code. Thereafter, any proposal to proceed would also be subject to the availability of capital funding.

Public Transport Subsidies

88. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the subsidy provided for every one euro in revenue collected by Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus for the past five years; the projected subsidy to be provided for every one euro in revenue for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29924/16]

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.

As I have stated recently there are numerous difficulties faced when attempting to accurately compare subsidy levels across different countries or cities. One of these difficulties is the basis for any calculation of subsidy level as some studies compare subsidy level as a percentage of operating costs, while others use revenue as the basis. Another difficulty is the different methods of organisation and governance in transport across the EU which can result in subsidy levels being reported for all modes of transport in a given city or region rather than just urban bus or regional bus services as represented in the Deputy's question.

Public Transport Subsidies

89. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount provided to Irish Rail under the infrastructure manager multi annual contract in 2016; the projected amount in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29925/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department provides funds to Irish Rail for the maintenance and renewal of the heavy rail network nationwide under the the Multi Annual Infrastructure Manager Contract (IMMAC) as required under EU

Directive 2012/34/EU.

Irish Rail received an allocation of €126 million under the IMMAC in 2016. I intend to increase this amount to nearly €160 million in 2017 to enable further necessary works to be undertaken.

Public Transport Subsidies

90. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to commission a report to give a realistic picture of the way the State compares with our European neighbours in view of the European Commission highlighting the numerous difficulties faced when attempting to accurately benchmark public service obligation subsidy levels across different countries (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29926/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits toward the instigation of a full review of public transport policy.

As I informed members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee last week, I intend to consider with my Department later in the year on how best to progress that commitment.

It is my belief that any such review is the best framework within which to consider fully the levels and type of funding made available to support the provision of public transport. Therefore while I have no plans at present to commission a report as suggested by the Deputy, I do believe the substantive issue of how we fund public transport services will form part of the proposed review of public transport policy.

Greenways Development

91. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is the policy of his Department in developing greenways for cycling and walking to fund the purchase of the land in question in order to secure permanent access to the greenways once built; if permissive access is the preferred approach; if advice has been received from the Comptroller and Auditor General's office as to the acceptability of committing large sums of investment into such projects without long-term security for the use of the greenways; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29989/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's policy is to ensure that cycling infrastructure projects funded using taxpayers money are available to be used at all times by all that wish to use them. This can be achieved through the use of State owned lands for such facilities but, in some instances, the purchase of land using compulsory purchase as a mechanism to do so, may also be pursued by the local authority leading the project. Given the cost of these projects, permissive access is not usually an appropriate model as it does not protect the state's investment. Most Greenways constructed to date and for which my Department has provided funding were built on state owned land.

However, I am aware that land ownership issues have arisen in a number of greenways that are currently at planning and/or design stage so it becoming clear that a consistent approach will be required to deal with this in future. My Department is currently working on developing a Greenways Strategy that will address this issue and many others, including consultation with

landowners and possible compensation for land purchase and will be consulting all relevant stakeholders as this is progressed in the coming months.

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

92. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will set aside time in Dáil Éireann to discuss CETA before the signing of the provisional application at the next Council of Ministers meeting on 16 October 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29900/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) is a comprehensive free trade agreement that will remove tariffs between the EU and Canada and will create sizeable new market access opportunities in services and investment.

CETA represents a modern high standard agreement which has the ability to set a new global standard for Trade Agreements. It will end limitations in access to public contracts, open up markets for services and offer predictable conditions for investors. I fully support and welcome CETA. Ireland stands to gain substantially from this agreement and I am looking forward to Irish firms enjoying the benefits and new opportunities as soon as possible.

CETA will save on duty costs as 99.6% of all industrial tariffs will be eliminated on entry into force. Irish firms will also benefit from the recognition of product standards and certification, thus saving on 'double testing' on both sides of the Atlantic. 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.

Given the position taken by Ireland and other Member States, the Commission has submitted CETA to the Council for decision as a mixed agreement. That is one requiring both EU and individual Member States ratification. As this process may take a number of years to complete the agreement provides for provisional application.

Provisional application is a standard process in Free Trade Agreements. This provides for the coming into effect of those areas over which the EU has competence. It will be a matter for the Council and the European Parliament to decide on the signature and provisional application of CETA.

Following concerns raised in a number of Member State parliaments and this House, the EU now proposes to exclude investment protection and investment dispute settlement from the provisional application of the Agreement. The EU and Canada are also finalising a legally binding Joint Declaration to provide further assurances in relation to the provision of public services, labour rights, environmental protection and investment.

The EU and Canada are working towards the signature of CETA at the EU-Canada Summit scheduled to take place on 27 October 2016. Prior to this, the Council of EU Trade Ministers will meet in Luxembourg on 18 October 2016 to decide on the signature and provisional application of CETA.

In accordance with Article 218(8) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the full entering into force of CETA will be subject, in the first instance, to a decision by the EU, through a Council decision with the consent of the Parliament, and secondly by the approval of all Member States through the relevant national ratification procedures. In this regard, Dáil Éireann will be a part of the final decision to ratify CETA in accordance with Article 29.5.2 of

the Constitution.

In view of these recent developments including the exclusion of the Investment Protection provision from the provisional application of the Agreement and the proposed additional legal guarantee on public services, labour rights and environmental protection, I take the view that all the concerns raised by Deputies in this House have now been addressed. However, I am available to discuss any remaining concerns with Deputies if required.

Workplace Relations Commission

93. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to information technology issues associated with the WRC's online complaints system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29997/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) was established on 1 October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015 and has responsibility for information provision, workplace advice, mediation, conciliation, adjudication, inspection and enforcement in relation to employment rights, equality and equal status matters and industrial relations.

The WRC assumed the roles and functions previously carried out by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC), Rights Commissioner Service (RCS), Equality Tribunal (ET), the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) and the first instance (Complaints and Referrals) functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT). A single contact portal utilising an online complaint form was introduced as part of the reform project. This reduced the large number of manual complaint forms that had been in existence for each of the previous bodies. I am informed by the WRC that 83% of complaint applications were made between 1 October 2015 and 30 September 2016 using the online e-Complaint facility.

I am aware, that in a recent survey, just under 50% approximately of employment law practitioners, who responded to the survey, indicated that the level of detail provided by complainants through the WRC Online Complaint Form is not sufficiently comprehensive.

The WRC is continuing to encourage complainants and stakeholder groups to provide more detail when making the complaint, in order to provide the Adjudicator with the relevant information in advance of the hearing and to facilitate a shorter hearing.

Low Pay Commission Establishment

94. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the Low Pay Commission is sufficiently resourced and funded to carry out independent evidence based research; the way in which it is resourced in comparison to the UK's LPC; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29998/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The budget for the Low Pay Commission is €474,000 for 2016. This is broken down into pay and non-pay elements. The pay budget is €244,000 and covers salaries for the secretariat and members' fees. The non-pay budget of €230,000 covers research and administration costs.

The secretariat has a designated staffing complement of three full time staff. The Commission has also entered into a 3 year research partnership with the ESRI.

I believe that the resources allocated are sufficient to deliver the Commission's work programme for 2016.

I understand that the UK Low Pay Commission has a budget of Stg£827,000, and eight full time staff members. While the remit of both bodies is broadly similar in nature, the work of the UK Commission covers a wider geographical area and a significantly greater number of stakeholders to engage with.

Enterprise Data

95. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 1905 of 16 September 2016, if she will provide details of the data used in the employment multipliers derived from the supply and use and input-output tables by her Department in making forecasts in *Enterprise 2025*; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29999/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Ireland's enterprise strategy, *Enterprise 2025* is premised on delivering employment that is sustainable over the longer term. *Enterprise 2025* is premised on export-led growth, underpinned by innovation and productivity. An export-led strategy creates a ripple effect in terms of job creation throughout the entire economy as well as an increase in skills and management development, technology adoption, innovation, standards and best practice overall.

The ambition set out in *Enterprise 2025* includes the potential for job creation supported by the work of the enterprise development agencies. The enterprise development agencies are responsible for the attraction of foreign direct investment and for the support of start-ups and scaling enterprises that export, or have the potential to do so. The exporting sector impacts on the wider economy through re-invested profits and expenditure of wages, materials and services. It also generates significant downstream effects in areas such as sub-supply and secondary employment. This impact can be calculated in terms of a multiplier. The value of the multiplier depends upon the percentage of extra money that is spent within the domestic economy.

Analysis undertaken to inform the future potential set out in *Enterprise 2025* included a review of the multiplier effect of export-led growth. The multipliers are derived from the Supply and Use in the CSO Input Output Tables. The employment multipliers used include *direct, indirect and induced impacts* of agency client firm activity (known as Type II Multipliers). These take account of demand on the suppliers and so on down the supply chain as well as induced impacts arising through the additional consumption that takes place as a result of the additional employment incomes created through the indirect impacts.

Based on a robust methodology, sectoral employment multipliers were calculated and applied to the sectoral employment data of agency client firms. The derived sectoral multipliers for employment were then applied to agency client firm employment data. Type II Indicators should be interpreted with caution, as they assume that all additional income generated through indirect employment is spent. It is important to note that employment multipliers are best estimates and may be subject to small changes over time based on structural adjustments in the economy and the composition of the agency client firm base.

The enterprise development agencies place a strong emphasis on promoting linkages with the domestic economy when they are negotiating with investors and in their assessments of proposals seeking state support. The agencies have well developed methodologies for assessing the direct and indirect impacts of investments made.

Analysis of Employment Multiplier Impacts of enterprise agency-assisted firms' export sales-employment

Food, drink and tobacco	2.55
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1.65
Medical device Mfg	1.88
Computer, Electronic...	1.40
Other Mfg	1.54
Computer Programming	1.99
Computer Consultancy	1.99
Business Services	1.64
Financial Services	2.42
Other Svcs	1.95
Total	1.88

Based on Forfás ABSEI and AES data (2013) [export sales employment] and CSO Input-Output and Supply and Use Tables (2011) (Indecon analysis)

The employment multipliers are Type II and include both indirect and induced impacts

The overall multiplier is derived through the ratio of the addition of the individual sectoral economy-wide impacts to the total enterprise agency direct export sales-employment

Enterprise Data

96. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 1905 of 16 September 2016, if she will provide details of the data used in the employment multipliers derived from sectoral multipliers applied to IDA client firm employment data, including Type II multipliers, used by her Department in making forecasts in Enterprise 2025; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30000/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Foreign direct investment helps to develop capabilities and critical mass in sectors and to enhance Ireland's innovative capabilities. It also contributes to greater productivity and value added as well as to regional economic development. IDA Ireland client firms created almost 19,000 direct gross new jobs in 2015, resulting in a net of 11,833 jobs (when job losses are taken into account). This has been an excellent performance coming on the back of a deep economic downturn and continued international uncertainty.

The exporting sector, including foreign owned multinationals operating from Ireland to serve international markets, impacts on the wider economy through re-invested profits and expenditure of wages, materials and services. It also generates significant downstream effects in areas such as sub-supply and secondary employment. This impact can be calculated in terms of a multiplier. The value of the multiplier depends upon the percentage of extra money that is spent within the domestic economy.

The employment multipliers are derived from the Supply and Use and Input-Output tables for the Irish economy published by the CSO and cover all sectors of the Irish economy. Sectoral multipliers for employment are derived from these tables and then applied to IDA client firm employment data. The employment multipliers used include *direct, indirect and induced*

impacts of IDA client firm activity (known as Type II Multipliers), taking account of demand on the suppliers as well as induced impacts arising through the additional consumption that takes place as a result of the additional employment incomes created through the indirect impacts. Type II Indicators should be interpreted with caution, as they assume that all additional income generated through indirect employment is spent.

Employment multipliers are best estimates and may be subject to small changes over time based on structural adjustments in the economy and the composition of the IDA client firm base. Recent research as input to *Enterprise 2025* indicates the multiplier for IDA client firms is eight indirect jobs for every ten direct jobs.

Analysis of Employment Multiplier Impacts of IDA Ireland assisted firms' employment

Food, drink and tobacco	2.55
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1.65
Medical device Mfg	1.88
Computer, Electronic...	1.39
Other Mfg	1.47
Computer Programming	1.99
Computer Consultancy	1.99
Business Services	1.64
Financial Services	2.42
Other Svcs	1.98
Total	1.84

Based on Forfás ABSEI and AES data (2013) [export sales employment] and CSO Input-Output and Supply and Use Tables (2011) (Indecon analysis)

The employment multipliers are Type II and include both indirect and induced impacts

The multiplier is derived through the ratio of the addition of the individual sectoral economy-wide impacts to the total IDA direct employment

Family Resource Centres

97. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the value of family resource centres to communities; if additional ring-fenced funding will be allocated to assist in promoting their work and enabling the centres to implement their action plans; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29937/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are currently 109 communities supported through the Family Resource Centre Programme which is funded by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The Family Resource Centre Programme is a national programme with its own dedicated budget. Tusla provides core funding to Family Resource Centres to cover the employment of two to three members of staff and some overhead costs. In 2016, Tusla provided €13.5m in funding for the Family Resource Centre Programme.

I recognise and value the very positive impact of the work of the Family Resource Centres in supporting families and local communities. The Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their community.

This universal accessibility allows for early identification of need, provision of appropriate interventions, and timely referrals to appropriate services for more intensive and targeted work as required.

The precise level of funding to be allocated in 2017 to the Family Resource Centre Programme will be considered by Tusla in preparing its Business Plan for next year, which will be submitted to me for consideration. I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to support the work of the Family Support Centres and to the targeting of available resources at those services which make the greatest impact on vulnerable children and families.

Voluntary Sector Funding

98. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will remedy Government funding cuts experienced by Scouting Ireland by increasing funds to match its increasing size in budget 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29956/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services by the voluntary youth sector, to young people throughout the country. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people. The voluntary youth sector involves approximately 1,400 paid staff, including youth workers and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2016, funding of €51m has been provided to my Department for these schemes.

Scouting Ireland receives funding under the Youth Service Grant Scheme administered by my Department. In 2016 current funding of €834,606 has been allocated to the organisation.

In 2016 some €2.6m has been allocated to my Department for a capital funding scheme for youth projects and services. Organisations in receipt of funding under the Youth Services Grants Scheme were eligible to apply for funding. Scouting Ireland successfully applied for funding under this scheme and was awarded €49,630 under Type Two to fund the improvement of disability access and security at Scouting Ireland, National Water Activity Centre in Killaloe, Co Clare.

In addition, Scouting Ireland has been allocated €200,000 under the Dormant Accounts scheme to support its Lelievlet youth employability initiative for young people who are disadvantaged.

Following the Budget 2017 announcement, my Department will immediately commence a process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2017 and to agree the 2017 allocations. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

99. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will consider the benefits that would come from improving the quality of the current child care system by extending the early childhood care education scheme and establishing formal after school care programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29941/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department

is committed to the provision of high quality and affordable childcare, with a number of initiatives being progressed.

From September 2016, the extension of ECCE made free pre-school available, for 15 hours per week, for 38 weeks per annum, to all children from the time they turn three, until they go to school. Children can enter at three points in the year: September, January and April. On average, children will benefit from 61 weeks, up from the previous provision of 38 weeks. Access to the average 61 weeks of ECCE can reduce the cost of childcare by €4000 per child. The previous ECCE programme accommodated 67,000 children and this figure will increase to 127,000 next year.

As part of Budget 2017, my Department announced the introduction of the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme, a new national scheme of financial supports for parents towards the cost of their childcare. The scheme will replace the existing targeted childcare subsidisation schemes with a single, streamlined and more user-friendly scheme. The scheme will provide a system from which universal and targeted subsidies can be provided towards the cost of childcare.

It is intended that the new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme will ‘wraparound’ the ECCE programme so that the two schemes align seamlessly to support access to early childhood care and education. The two schemes will not be mutually exclusive, in that it will be possible for a child to be simultaneously supported via the ECCE programme and the proposed Single Affordable Scheme, once they meet the qualifying criteria for each.

The 2016 Programme for a Partnership Government contained two specific commitments in relation to School Age children. The first was a commitment to introduce a new system to support and expand quality after school care, and the second was in relation to utilising primary school buildings for after school care provision. In view of these commitments the Ministers for Children and Youth Affairs and for Education and Skills requested senior officials from their Departments to establish a group to consider how best the commitments could be delivered. The Inter-Departmental Group on School Age Childcare was established in June 2016 and is due to report shortly.

As part of its work, the Group has considered and assessed the many issues surrounding this commitment, and the funding implications of implementing an after-school scheme for school-aged children.

Matters to be considered by the Inter-Departmental group included the demand for services and the capacity to provide these and the development of an appropriate quality and standards framework. In addition, the group will gather data, including existing use of school buildings, and consider collaborative models with existing community or private service providers.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has also undertaken consultations with children to identify what children like and dislike about afterschool care and to identify the places where children most like to be cared for after school. The Inter-Departmental group will consider the voice of the child as part of its deliberations.