

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 4, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 5 to 26, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 27 to 38, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Institutes of Technology Funding**

39. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the ongoing funding issues regarding institutes of technology across the country and in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2006/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** My Department and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) are aware of the financial difficulties being experienced by a number of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs), including Letterkenny IoT. The HEA has been closely monitoring the financial position of all of the IoTs and in particular is working closely with those Institutes operating in deficit to ensure appropriate mechanisms are put in place to eliminate the deficit as quickly as possible.

The Financial Review of the Institutes, published last year by the HEA, was carried out in order to provide an overview of the financial health of the sector, to consider capacity issues and to examine the challenges for the institutions given their respective plans for the future. It was based on the assumption that static Exchequer funding coupled with continuing growth in student numbers could make a number of Institutes unsustainable. The Report recognised the need to examine the underlying sustainability issues that existed across the sector and highlighted the need for a review of how funding is being allocated given the significant changes that are occurring in the higher education sector. It makes a number of recommendations on how some of the issues which contribute to funding problems in the IOT sector can be addressed. My Department is working closely with the HEA in relation to those recommendations.

For example, the report clearly identifies the need for a review of the present funding model and work is under way in the HEA to undertake this task as quickly as possible.

Funding overall for the higher education sector is a key concern for me, particularly in light of the additional pressure that will fall on the system over the next decade or so – an issue which is clearly set out in the Report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding for Higher Education, which is currently with the Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration. However, in seeking to address the issue in the short term, I have for the first time in nine years secured additional funding for the sector with €36.5m additional being made available this year and €160m

additional overall over the next three years.

In addition, in Budget 2017 the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I announced a policy review with the aim of designing and implementing a sustainable and predictable multi-annual funding model for higher and further education and training involving increased Employer and Exchequer contributions from 2018. The review will be undertaken as part of the overall response to meeting the anticipated skills needs in the economy over the coming years, in line with the policy framework set out in the National Skills Strategy.

It will include an analysis of the business case for enhanced investment in the higher and further education and training sectors. In this context it will identify key elements of the new funding model and of the expected impacts including those on employers. The review will include consultation with stakeholders. It is expected that the policy review will be published by the end of April 2017, and will complement the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in relation to the Cassells report.

*Question No. 40 answered orally.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

41. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the disparity between primary and secondary level education in the number of school places for children with autism; and the measures his Department is taking to improve access to appropriate places in mainstream secondary schools for children with autism. [1896/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The National Council for Special Education is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including establishing special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

Progress in developing the network of Special Classes has been significant.

In 2011 there were 548 special classes, of which 224 were primary ASD classes, 72 were post-primary ASD classes and 34 were early intervention classes. The remaining 218 were special classes service children with mild to moderate/severe general learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties, including speech and language difficulties.

There are currently 1,153 special classes, which is an increase of over 100% on the number available in 2011. Of these, 127 are ASD early intervention classes, 525 are primary ASD classes and 237 are post-primary ASD classes. The remainder are non-ASD special classes.

The NCSE has advised that there are almost 18,000 students with ASD attending schools nationally. Of these 3,484 are attending primary ASD classes and 1,118 are attending post-primary ASD classes.

The NCSE continues to review special class placement requirements nationally and has informed the Department that, in general, it is satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

The continued growth in post-primary special class numbers is a natural consequence of the earlier growth in primary special class numbers. However, it should not be assumed that the same levels of growth in post-primary class numbers should apply. This is because, for

children with Autism, transferring from a special class in a primary school to a special class in a post-primary school may not always be the optimal choice. Many children can progress to mainstream post-primary with the support of SNA and Resource Teaching hours, while more may transfer from primary to a special school depending on their presentation and needs.

It should also be noted that there is a proportionally larger enrolment at Primary level due to the higher number of standard years. Of the total enrolment in schools currently 68% of students are enrolled at Primary Level (which includes all Special Schools) and 32% are enrolled at Post Primary level.

As such my Department does not consider the lower number of Post-Primary Special classes for students with ASD currently constitutes a shortage of placements.

### **Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme**

42. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the development of the new plan for education inclusion. [1889/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** A great deal of work has gone into the review of the DEIS Programme which began in 2015 and is progressing very well and it is my intention to publish a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion in the coming weeks.

The review process has looked at all aspects of DEIS, including the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, the potential for innovation within and between schools and its scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies in order to improve effectiveness.

The development of a new assessment framework using centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of schools for inclusion in a new Programme is also included in the review process.

A series of pilot schemes aimed at introducing measures shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged students will be introduced. Targeted measures to be included are, School Leadership, School networking/clustering, teaching methodologies, integration of all supports within communities, and greater use of HSCL services.

Implementation of actions arising from the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion will begin in the 2017/18 school year, and will be a continuing theme in our wider Annual Action Plan for Education.

### **Third Level Staff**

43. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the Action Plan for Education will address the increasing use of precarious contracts and poor work conditions and pay in the third level institutions for lecturers and other workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1915/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** In September, I launched the first ever Action Plan for Education aimed at making the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. This plan, which incorporates my Department's Strategy Statement as well as the Action Plan of Education outlines over one hundred actions to be implemented

across the period 2016-2019.

It provides the strategic framework for planning and reporting across the Department and its agencies over the next three years and timeframes for each action are included.

In May 2016 I also welcomed the report of the Chairperson of the Expert Group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Lecturing in Third Level Education in Ireland. The recommendations contained in the report will assist in addressing concerns raised about precarious employment by Union representatives.

In July my Department issued circular letters to employers in the third-level sector, setting out the detailed arrangements and procedures for implementation of the recommendations to academic staff who are covered by the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

### **Schools Building Projects**

44. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the development of an education campus comprising three schools at Ballinrea, County Cork, in association with the Cork Education and Training Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1808/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The delivery of the new education campus at Ballinrea, Carrigaline has been devolved to Cork Education & Training Board (CETB). Planning permission has been received for the three schools following an appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

To comply with recent changes to the Public Works Contract, the Design Team was requested to assess the additional work that needs to be carried out to bring the project to tender ready stage. The Design Team has completed this assessment and it has submitted a fee proposal for the additional work. This is currently being assessed by my Department's Planning and Building Unit.

In addition, the Public Spending Code requires that a Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) be carried out for projects of the scale involved for the Carrigaline Campus. I understand that the CETB have recently appointed consultants to carry out the CBA and the final report is expected by end of January/early February.

As soon as contractors are pre-qualified and tender documents completed, the project will then be considered for progression to tender and construction.

### **Education Policy**

45. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Action Plan for Education will address pay inequality and ensure that workers in the education system receive equal pay for equal work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1914/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** In September, I launched the first ever Action Plan for Education. It set out the overall ambition of making the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. The plan itself focuses on the period 2016-2019 and outlines over one hundred actions to be implemented across the period.

It provides the strategic framework for planning and reporting across the Department and its

agencies over the next three years and timeframes for each action are included.

Equality and fairness are of course at the heart of everything this Government is trying to do, particularly in the education area where I am particularly focused on creating better opportunities for people from disadvantaged areas in our schools system and in higher education. The recent Budget contained measures to deliver on this.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers. The pay increases for new teachers are now also available to ASTI members under the proposals which members will be balloting on shortly.

In education, there is a well-established increment system. Teachers are not paid equally. For example, the pay scale for teachers appointed prior to 2011 ranges from €32,009 to €60,155 depending on the date that the individual began teaching. Part of the negotiation to date has secured a convergence of the scales of recruits at different periods. Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission.

In addition, the Government yesterday moved to address an anomaly issue arising in the context of the recent Labour Court Recommendations in respect of the Garda Associations through an increase in annualised salaries of €1,000 for the period 1 April 2017 to August 2017, inclusive, for public servants on annualised salaries up to €65,000 who are parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement and who do not stand to benefit from those Labour Court Recommendations.

However there are other types of equality that we must also bear in mind – equality between public servants in different parts of the public service, and equality between public servants and people who work elsewhere or do not work at all. It would also not be equal or fair for us to do unaffordable deals with particular groups of public servants that mean that we do not have the money left in the public purse to provide increases in social welfare payments for vulnerable groups, tax reductions for people at work, or investments in improvements in public services that people rely on.

## Education Policy

46. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the plan that has been put in place to develop resilience and emotional coping skills at an early age; the way in which this is being rolled out in primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39935/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** My Department's Action Plan for Education 2016-19 underlines the important function served by the education system in promoting wellbeing in our schools. At an overarching level it commits to supporting schools in the implementation of Wellbeing Guidelines for Primary and Post-Primary schools and providing a framework for a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

There are a wide number of dimensions to my Department's work in this area and I have recently conducted an audit of our work to ensure that our efforts are integrated and effective.

We plan to step up our engagement in this field in a number of different ways. These include, for example:

- Restoring ex quota guidance provision in post-primary schools;
- Rolling out the 'Friends' and 'Incredible Years' programmes in DEIS schools;
- Implementing a new Wellbeing area of learning at Junior Cycle from September 2017;
- Increasing the resources of the National Educational Psychological Service.

I intend as part of the 2017 Action Plan to develop detailed actions to intensify our work in this area.

### **Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme**

47. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the review of the DEIS programme; when the review will be published; the details of the expansion of the programme; the methods by which a school can apply for inclusion in the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1997/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** As the Deputy is aware, a process to review the DEIS Programme is nearing completion. I intend to publish a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion in the coming weeks.

The review process is looking at all aspects of DEIS including the potential for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies to improve effectiveness. Among the measures to be included in the plan are a series of pilot schemes aimed at introducing initiatives shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged children and students. The plan is expected to include targeted measures in the area of:

- School leadership
- School networks and clusters
- Teaching methodologies
- Integration of schools and other State supports within communities
- Greater use of Home School Community Liaison services

A new assessment framework is also being developed using centrally held CSO and DES data to assess schools for inclusion in the Programme. The number of schools to receive supports under a new School Support Programme and any expansion of the programme will be determined by this new identification process and funding available for the programme. All schools in the country will be assessed so there is no requirement for schools to submit an application as the methodology being applied involves the use of centrally held data already available to my Department.

Implementation of actions arising from the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion will begin in the 2017/18 school year, and will be a continuing theme in our wider Annual Action Plan for Education.

### **Schools Healthy Living Strategies**

48. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will

make recommendations and provide support to schools to include certain advertisements in their school journals that promote health and well-being of young persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2000/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I am reviewing the activity of my Department in the area of Wellbeing. I shall ask that the Deputy's suggestion be considered in that context. I am of course conscious that the content and procurement of school journals and resources is a matter for individual schools. This provides schools with the flexibility to select the resources that are most appropriate to the needs of their students.

### Teacher Recruitment

49. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will approve the resources that may be necessary for the allocation of a temporary teaching post until June 2017 for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1300/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The key factor for determining the level of staffing at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30th September. The staffing schedule for the current school year is available in Circular 0007/2016. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application to the Appeals Board under the Small Schools criteria. In order to be granted a second teacher for this school year, the school needed to have an enrolment of 19 on 30th September 2016. As the school had an enrolment of 17 on that date, the Appeals Board determined that the appeal did not satisfy the criteria published in the staffing schedule. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

The measure announced in Budget 2017 provides a capacity for one-teacher mainland schools to make an appeal to the Staffing Appeals Board for a second teacher where the school has a minimum enrolment of 15 pupils across 6 or more class groups. This new measure is in recognition of the challenges faced by the teacher having to teach 6 class groups or more. This measure will be introduced in September for the 2017/18 school year. The detailed arrangements for this measure will be set out in the staffing schedule for the 2017/18 school year which will be published in the coming weeks.

### School Patronage

50. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a progress report on the divestment programme commenced by the last Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2003/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** Ten new primary schools have opened since 2013 under the patronage divesting process, two of which opened in September 2016.

The Government is committed to progressing the development of a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of twenty-first Century Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental

choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

In addition to the phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons already under way, this requires considering new ideas and new approaches to substantially accelerate the changes in school provision in order to achieve greater diversity. By developing new approaches which enable engagement with the landowner, I am convinced that we can significantly increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools. I am progressing these matters as a priority and have already held a round of consultations with patron bodies in this regard. I aim to be in a position to announce these new approaches shortly.

In addition to progressing the reconfiguration of existing school provision to provide greater choice to parents in areas of stable population, the Government is committed to ensuring that parental preferences will continue to be key to patronage decisions on new schools established in areas of demographic growth.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts**

51. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the concerns regarding special education teachers who cannot complete their probationary requirements due to the lack of available opportunities and who cannot get permanent posts or places on the supplementary panel as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2007/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for professional standards at all stages of the teaching career. It has established standards for post-qualification professional practice, as set out in Droihead, the new model of induction and probation for newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers. The Droihead programme was the subject of a three-year pilot before it was approved by the Council in March 2016. The programme is being introduced on a phased basis since last September.

During the growth and development phase of Droihead, teachers employed in a special education or restricted setting must avail of the Droihead programme to achieve full registration with the Council. While a new policy on teacher probation was adopted by the Teaching Council last December, this does not change the requirement for teachers in a special education setting to avail of Droihead.

The INTO issued a directive to its members not to co-operate with or participate in Droihead from 1 July 2016. This directive has prevented newly qualified teachers employed in special education settings from participating in Droihead since September and thereby closed off the registration pathway. I hope the INTO will review its approach.

My Department is also considering the impact of the new policy adopted by the Council.

Budget 2016 made provision for some 2,260 additional teaching posts in the current school year. The new posts provide additional opportunities for newly qualified teachers.

The Supplementary Special National Panel has been phased out since the 2012/13 school year. No new applications to that panel have been accepted since.

## School Patronage

52. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has satisfied himself with the processes in place to determine patronage of new schools, particularly in areas with religious and cultural diversity in the population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2005/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** When it is decided following demographic analyses by my Department that a new school is required to meet demographic needs, my Department runs a separate patronage process to decide who will operate the school. The criteria used in relation to patronage of the new school place particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity of patronage, with parental preferences from the area to be served being central to the process. In this regard, as part of their application under the process, patrons and prospective patrons must collect and demonstrate evidence of parental demand from the area to be served for the model of provision proposed and also parental preferences for Irish-medium or English-medium education.

An external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG), oversees the patronage process. Following their consideration of the Department assessment reports, the NSEG submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are available on my Department's website.

The outcome from the recent patronage process for the nine new post-primary schools due to open in 2017 and 2018 was announced in November of last year. In this regard, eight of the nine schools will operate a multi-denominational ethos. The outcome of this process has also resulted in the inclusion of a new player at post-primary level further increasing diversity of provision in the post-primary school system.

Given the emphasis on parental preferences, along with an analysis of the extent of diversity already provided in the area, and oversight by the independent group, I am satisfied that the needs and preferences of parents in the areas which the school is set up to serve is being taken into account in the patronage processes. In its report to me as part of the patronage process for the nine post-primary schools, the NSEG recommended that consideration be given to an examination of other options for a more effective and efficient means of disseminating information to parents and of collecting parental preferences and my Department is undertaking exploratory work in this regard.

The patronage process for the four new primary schools due to open in 2017 and 2018 is currently underway and I expect to announce the outcome in February.

## School Curriculum

53. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce a subject on education regarding religions, beliefs and ethics in primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2008/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector recommended in its report that programmes in Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics be developed. The NCCA was asked, in response to the report, to explore the development of such programmes.

The NCCA produced a Consultation Paper in 2015 outlining the proposed rationale, vision, aims and features of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics, and engaged in an extensive consultation process with patrons, education partners, schools, teachers and parents. I have received a report on the consultation process from the NCCA, which outlines the key messages arising from the consultation process and emerging directions for the development of a curriculum. It is planned to publish the final Consultation Report shortly. The NCCA will then be commencing work with a network of schools on gathering and sharing examples of good practice in the area of ERB and Ethics.

### **School Admissions**

54. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to alleviate the inordinate waiting lists faced every year by students applying for first-year places in secondary schools in Wexford town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1900/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is monitoring the school accommodation position in the Wexford town area. In that regard, my Department considers that the additional school accommodation planned for the Wexford town area should be adequate to cater for the projected increase in enrolments in that area. My Department will however continue to monitor the position, taking into account the latest pupil enrolment data, the impact of planned expansion of school capacity and developments in the school planning areas adjacent to Wexford town.

My officials are liaising with the authorities of the five post primary schools in Wexford town and a meeting is being arranged with the schools concerned with a view to identifying the various factors that contribute to the compilation and operation of the schools waiting lists.

### **Third Level Participation**

55. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to address the inequalities seen in the league tables of students' accession to universities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1299/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The data referred to by the Deputy actually serve to highlight the significant progress being made in supporting disadvantaged students to progress to third level.

For example, the analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of non-fee paying schools are achieving considerable success in terms of supporting their students to progress to higher education.

Specifically, over the past 6 years, there has been a five-fold increase in the number of non-fee paying schools where all Leaving Certificate candidates proceed to university or another third level college.

The National Access Plan for 2015-19 contains more than 30 actions that are intended to increase representation in higher education by under-represented groups. These include students from low-participating socio-economic groups, learners with disabilities, mature students, and Travellers.

Implementation of the National Access Plan is being supported by investment of more than

€410 million in the 2016/17 academic year. This provides a range of supports such as the Student Grant Scheme, the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

In addition, I secured an additional €8.5 million, arising from Budget 2017, for access measures. As well as the reinstatement of maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged post-graduate students, this new funding will support a number of innovative new measures targeted at disadvantaged students:

- A new centenary bursary scheme will provide bursaries of €10,000 for 100 disadvantaged students each year.

- Higher Education Institutions will receive additional funding to attract 2,500 more disadvantaged students by engaging directly with disadvantaged communities.

- New measures will be introduced to support more lone parents to participate in higher education.

### School Admissions

56. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to end the baptism barrier; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2009/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I believe that it is unfair that preference is given by publicly-funded religious schools to children of their own religion who might live some distance away, ahead of children of a different religion or of no religion who live close to the school.

I also believe that it is unfair that parents, who might otherwise not do so, feel pressure to baptise their children in order to gain admission to the local school and I intend to reform the school admissions system in relation to the role that religion can play in that process.

I have set out four possible approaches for dealing with the issue, in primary schools in the first instance, including:

- A catchment area approach, prohibiting religious schools from giving preference to children of their own religion who live outside the catchment area ahead of non-religious children who live inside the catchment

- A 'nearest school rule', allowing religious schools to give preference to a religious child only where it is that child's nearest school of that particular religion

- A quota system, which would allow a religious school give preference to children of its own religion in respect of only a certain proportion of places, meaning that the remaining places would be allocated based on other admissions criteria – proximity to the school, lottery etc.

- An outright prohibition on religious schools using religion as a factor in admissions, meaning that all places would be allocated based on other factors. Within this approach, there is capacity to allow religious schools to require parents or students to indicate some support or respect for the ethos of the school.

I am also mindful of the need to avoid possible pitfalls and unintended consequences with each of these approaches, including most importantly possible impacts on minority religions and on the wishes of Protestant, Jewish, Islamic and other communities to be able to run schools in accordance with their ethos and admit children from their communities to attend those schools.

Other possible consequences to be avoided include possible breaches of the constitution, technical and administrative difficulties impacting on the capacity to effectively run the system of over 4000 schools and the possibility of creating ‘postcode lotteries’, such as other countries have experienced, resulting in pronounced divergence in the quality of schools in more advantaged compared to less advantaged areas.

I will be commencing a short, 10-12-week process of consultation, on this issue and I am interested in hearing the views of the groups who stand to be impacted by changes as well as any members of the public with views on the issue. After that I will progress to develop and implement measures to deal with this issue.

These issues should be dealt with on a separate track to the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, shortly to progress to Committee Stage. This view that the two issues should progress on separate tracks was passed by a large majority of the Dáil in a motion last June.

The Admissions Bill includes a series of practical common-sense reforms to the process of admissions to schools, commands broad support across the Dáil, and is on target to be enacted in the coming months.

The issues involved here are complex and potentially controversial, and by linking them in with the Admissions Bill the danger is that the Admissions Bill would be substantially delayed as these issues are worked out.

### **Multidenominational Schools**

57. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will announce his action plan objective to map new approaches to reach the target of 400 multidenominational schools by 2030; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2010/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The Government is committed to progressing the development of a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of Twenty First Century Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government’s objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

In addition to the phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons already under way, this requires considering new ideas and new approaches to substantially accelerate the changes in school provision in order to achieve greater diversity. By developing new approaches which enable engagement with the landowner, I am convinced that we can significantly increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools. I am progressing these matters as a priority and have already held a round of consultations with patron bodies in this regard. I aim to be in a position to announce these new approaches shortly.

In addition to progressing the reconfiguration of existing school provision to provide greater choice to parents in areas of stable population, the Government is committed to ensuring that parental preferences will continue to be key to patronage decisions on new schools established in areas of demographic growth.

### **Education Grants**

58. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the position regarding SUSI grants whereby persons are finding it extremely difficult every year to prove independent living as the guidelines are too strict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1996/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** Very significant numbers of third-level students move out of home to go to college and continue to be supported by their parents while in full-time education. Confirmation that a student is living separately from his/her parents is of itself, not sufficient to establish independent status. When considering whether a student meets the conditions to be assessed independently of his or her parents, grant awarding authorities like SUSI are obliged to satisfy themselves beyond doubt that an acceptable degree of proof of independent living in the relevant period has been submitted by the grant applicant. For student grants purposes, a student may be assessed as an independent student if he/she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved post leaving certificate course or an approved higher education course or of re-entry to an approved course following a break in studies of at least three years, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous 1 October. Otherwise he/she would continue to be assessed on the basis of his/her parents' income. The onus is on the grant applicant to provide the necessary documentary evidence as requested by the relevant grant awarding authority. Such documentary evidence will vary from student to student, depending on each individual's particular set of circumstances.

It is important to note that each year a significant number of student grant applicants are assessed as 'independent' students and awarded student supports on that basis.

If an individual applicant considers that he/she has been unjustly refused a student grant, he/she may appeal, in the first instance, to his/her awarding body. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by the awarding authority and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

### **National Educational Psychological Service Administration**

59. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the length of time it takes for children to be publicly assessed by the National Educational Psychological Service; his further views on whether these waiting times are acceptable; and the measures his Department is taking to improve access to psychological assessment for school children. [1897/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The Deputy will be aware that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA).

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

pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I can inform the Deputy that once a pupil referral to NEPS is agreed an assessment is normally undertaken and a formal report submitted to parents and school authorities within an average of 9 weeks. This data is derived from the NEPS Casetrack system which records shorthand details of NEPS psychologist pupil referrals.

I can also inform the Deputy that these time differentials do not accurately reflect the gap in time between the raising of a referral and the provision of advice and support to the school and parents on the concerns raised in relation to children undergoing assessment. This in fact is usually imparted much earlier through post assessment feedback followed by a later provision of a formal written report.

My Department, over the course of recent economic difficulties, has not only maintained psychologist staffing levels within NEPS, but has increased them by some 10% since late 2008, to 165 whole time equivalent (w.t.e. psychologists currently employed. A process is currently in place to fill vacancies in the coming months and bring the staffing complement up to the approved level of 173 w.t.e posts.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits that we will invest additional resources in the National Educational Psychological Service to ensure earlier intervention and access for young children and teenagers and to offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents. The Programme commits to bring the total number of NEPS psychologists to 238.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

**60. Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of autistic spectrum disorder, ASD, units attached to primary and post-primary schools in the Clondalkin catchment area and the Lucan catchment area; his views on whether there are sufficient ASD units available and, in particular, if there are enough ASD units available at post-primary level to meet the transition from those attending ASD units at primary level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1810/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including establishing special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

Special classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools.

Special classes offer a supportive learning environment to students with ASD who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their

school day. Special classes for students with ASD are staffed 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.

Students enrolled in special classes should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities.

Progress in developing the network of Special Classes has been significant and there are currently 1,153 available, which is an increase of over 100% on the number available in 2011, which was 548. Of these, 127 are ASD early intervention classes, 525 are primary ASD classes and 237 are post-primary ASD classes.

The continued growth in post primary special class numbers is a natural consequence of the earlier growth in primary special class numbers. However, it should not be assumed that the same levels of growth in post primary class numbers should apply. This is because, for children with Autism, transferring from a special class in primary to a special class in post primary school may not always be the optimal choice. Many children can progress to mainstream post primary with support of SNA and Resource Teaching hours, while more may transfer from primary to a special schools depending on their presentation and needs.

The National Council for Special Education has informed my Department that they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD Post Primary special class placements to meet existing demand in the area referred to by the Deputy.

With regard to future potential need in this area, the NCSE has advised that they are continuing to engage with schools in the area to open special classes where there is an identified need for special class provision.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published on 6th July 2016. The Bill contains a provision which will empower the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to designate a school for a child who has no school place for reasons related to the child's special educational needs and for the Child and Family Agency to designate a school for a child who has no school place (other than a child with special educational needs).

In line with recommendations from the NCSE in policy advices provided in 2011, it is the policy of the Department to include a Special Needs Unit in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. In addition, the Department may also provide capital funding to schools to establish special needs provision e.g. re-configure existing accommodation to provide a special class where this has been approved or recommended by the National Council for Special Education.

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](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **Schools Establishment**

61. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will establish a second level educational campus in Enfield, County Meath, to cater for the accelerating population growth in this area of south County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1888/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** My Department uses a Geo-

graphical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and information from 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. The outcome of such demographic analyses was the announcement in November 2015 that four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools will open in 2017 and 2018 to cater for increased demographic needs. As part of that announcement it was noted that a range of areas nationwide, including Enfield (Kilcock school planning area), are experiencing increased demographic pressure and will be kept under review.

My Department is continuing to keep the Kilcock school planning area under review to take into account updated enrolment data and capacity developments in this and adjacent school planning areas.

### **Skills Shortages**

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of sufficient persons with suitable skills to meet the requirements of the modern workforce; if he has identified any specific areas requiring attention in this regard; if adequate apprenticeships are available to meet the demand; the extent to which the quality of education at primary, secondary and third levels here continues to compare favourably with others globally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1913/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills Deputy John Halligan:** The National Skills Strategy 2025 identifies Ireland's current skills profile, provides a strategic vision and specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements, and sets out a road map for how the vision and objectives can be achieved across the education and training sector.

With over 140 Actions, the Strategy sets out the Government's commitment to improving and using skills for sustainable economic growth and outlines how we can develop a well-skilled, adaptable workforce.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to increase the cumulative number of apprenticeship registrations to 31,000 by 2020, this figure is also in line with the target in the National Skills Strategy to increase registrations on apprenticeships in the period 2016-2020. A detailed action plan to deliver on these commitments will be published shortly.

The Action Plan for Education was launched in September 2016 and the vision of the Plan is that Irish Education and Training across primary, secondary and third level should become the best in Europe over the next decade. The plan contains hundreds of actions to be implemented with particular focus on skills, and continuous improvement within the education system. Whilst National and International assessments show that the Irish education and training system is performing well in a number of areas, there are a number of targets and indicators in the Plan focused on improving performances across the system in areas such as PISA performance in Science, Reading and Maths.

### **National Training Fund**

63. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans relating to the surplus of the national training fund. [1890/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills Deputy John Halligan:**

The National Training Fund is mainly resourced by a levy on employers of 0.7% of reckonable earnings in respect of employees in Class A and Class H employments, which represents approximately 75% of all insured employees. The levy is collected through the PAYE/PRSI system and funds are transferred monthly to my Department by the Department of Social Protection.

The amount collected has varied over the last number of years broadly in line with employment levels. Receipts went from a high of €413m in 2008 to €299m in 2012 and have increased to €390m in 2016.

There has been a shift recently in the focus of investment with more funding allocated to training those in employment and less allocated to training jobseekers due to the upturn in our economy and more people in employment. In 2017, by reducing the funding allocated to training for the unemployed I have provided an additional €24 million to training those in employment to meet demand which will arise mainly in the expansion of apprenticeship opportunities.

The accumulated surplus in the fund has been important in maintaining expenditure levels, particularly in the provision of training for the unemployed, in the years when receipts fell below the expenditure levels required. It is prudent to continue to maintain an adequate surplus in the Fund to meet demand in future years and it should be noted that, while the current surplus of €232 million represents a very significant sum, it would only cover 7 months NTF expenditure at current levels. In 2017, I am providing funding of €366 million for training activities from the NTF.

While the NTF does not form part of the Vote of the Department, the allocation for each scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process. The NTF is included as an annex to the published Estimates of the Department and such funding is included in the overall expenditure ceiling for the Department since 2011. This is important as it means that overall expenditure from the Fund cannot be increased, even where receipts increase, without a corresponding drop in voted expenditure.

I will continue to monitor the potential use of the Fund in the context of overall financing arrangements for education and training planned to meet current and emerging skill needs.

### **School Equipment**

64. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the decision of the education procurement service, which is his Department's sector sourcing hub, to issue a tender (details supplied) for the national supply of library books and audiovisual material, which arguably discriminated against small companies here in the tender requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1297/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The decision to issue the tender for the supply of library books and audiovisual material was taken by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and local authorities. The role of the Education Procurement Service (EPS) is to conduct the procurement exercise on behalf of these bodies. The specification of goods and services, evaluation and award of winning tenders are decided by the LGMA with support from the Education Procurement Service.

The EPS ensures adherence with national procurement policy and regulation including advice on initiatives to assist SMEs in public procurement issued by the Office of Government Procurement. Pre-tender meetings were held between the buyers and suppliers in this case. The

subdivision of the tender into lots, a relatively low turnover requirement, acceptance of consortium bids and a balance of quality over cost in award criteria were all designed to facilitate SME involvement. Four of the six lots were won by Irish SME Companies.

The EPS facilitates SME participation in tender competitions in line with government policy on this issue and will continue to encourage and facilitate the inclusion of SMEs in future procurement exercises.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

65. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that the budget granted to a school (details supplied) for its new classroom extension will be increased to cover the current cost of the building; if he will expedite this decision to ensure the costs do not increase further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1999/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The school referred to by the Deputy was approved funding in 2013 for the provision of 2 mainstream classrooms and 2 resource rooms. The school authority has since contacted my Department seeking additional funding for an alternative building project.

Further information, requested by my Department, including details of the tender cost analysis and the new building plans, has recently been supplied by the school and is currently being considered. My Department will be in direct contact with the school authorities concerned as soon as the deliberative process has been concluded.

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

66. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the services and schools available for children who have been diagnosed with dyspraxia and DCD in the greater Dublin area; if the current services available will be upgraded and reviewed in line with demographic changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1813/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** My Department provides for a range of services and supports to ensure that children with special educational needs, including children with Dyspraxia and Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), can have access to an education appropriate to their needs. These supports include additional teaching and care support, enhanced capitation, specialised school transport arrangements, funding for schools for the purchase of assistive technology and/or specialist equipment, adaptations for school buildings where necessary in addition to provision for continuing professional development for teachers of children with special educational needs through the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

My Department's policy is that children with special educational needs should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided, unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or in the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated, as is provided for under Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSSEN Act 2004). In circumstances where children with special educational needs require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

Children with dyspraxia and DCD attending school may be entitled to additional teaching

provision in school, either under the terms of the school's teaching allocation for pupils with high incidence special educational needs, if their educational psychological assessment places the child in the high incidence disability category, or separately, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocates additional resource teaching hours to schools for children who have been assessed within the low incidence, or more complex, category of special need, as defined by my Department's Circular Sp Ed 02/05. The precise level of support is determined by the special educational needs of the particular child.

All mainstream Primary and Post Primary schools have been allocated significant additional teaching resources to cater for children with high incidence special educational needs, including Specific Learning Disability (SLD); dyspraxia and DCD are considered to be Specific Learning Disabilities. It is a matter for individual schools to use their professional judgment to identify pupils who will receive this support and to use the resources available to the school to intervene at the appropriate level with such pupils. Schools are supported in this regard by the National Educational Psychological Services. Schools should monitor and utilise their allocation of additional teaching support to best support the needs of identified pupils. The teaching time afforded to each individual pupil is decided and managed by schools, taking into account each child's individual learning needs.

Schools are not required to apply directly to my Department for learning support for children with SLDs. Schools should monitor and utilise their allocation of additional teaching support to best support the needs of identified pupils, in accordance with my Department's guidance.

My Department provides guidelines for schools in relation to the utilisation of additional teaching resources which have been allocated to them for pupils with high incidence special educational needs. These include:

- Special Education Circular Sp Ed 02/05 - Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools,
- Circular 70/2014 which provides guidelines for post primary schools in relation to the utilisation of additional teaching resources which have been allocated to them for pupils with special educational needs,
- Inclusion of Pupils with Special Educational Needs Post Primary Guidelines, and which describes the graduated problem-solving model of assessment and intervention in schools, which is available on my Department's website [www.education.gov.ie](http://www.education.gov.ie).

As the allocation of support for pupils with SLDs is managed locally by schools, a parent who feels that their child requires additional learning support in school should raise this matter directly with their school Principal in the first instance, or with the Board of Management of the school.

Specific Learning Disability is not a disability category included in the list of low incidence disabilities which are eligible for the allocation of resource teaching hours to individual students, under the terms of the relevant circulars.

The NCSE has a statutory role under the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 to provide me with policy advice in relation to matters concerning the education of persons with special educational needs. In policy advice provided to my Department the NCSE advised that the current system for allocating resource hours to schools to support pupils with specific disabilities is potentially inequitable; this is because the current system fails to take account of the individual needs of the children concerned. The NCSE recommended that a new model would be developed through which resources would be provided to schools on the

basis of profiled needs of each school.

As part the recent Budget announcements, I announced that following development and piloting over the past number of years, a new model for the allocation of teaching resources for children with special educational needs will be implemented from September 2017. An additional €18 million will be provided in 2017 to provide for around 900 resource teacher posts, which represents the period of 2017 from September to the end of the year. Further details regarding implementation of the new model were announced earlier today.

### **Industrial Relations**

**67. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he has taken to resolve ongoing serious industrial relations concerns in second level education highlighted by the ASTI trade union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1298/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** Following discussions, the Teachers Conciliation Council published a set of proposals in November for consideration by ASTI members aimed at finding a resolution to their dispute. The ASTI Central Executive Committee took a decision to put the outcome of the talks process to a ballot of members with a recommendation to reject. The ASTI's leadership have taken a view on the proposals. It is now over to the members to form their view.

The proposals provide ASTI members with an opportunity to benefit from the programme of pay restoration which commenced under recent public service agreements and which I have used to negotiate with TUI and INTO for substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers.

In addition, there are other immediate undoubted benefits for individual ASTI members in accepting the proposals including:

- Avoiding an increment freeze
- Inclusion of the S&S allowance of €1,592 into the pay scale
- Continued alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions
- The Ward Report measures and a revised sequence for filling posts which enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before
- An increase in the quantum of the Croke Park hours that can be worked on other than a whole-school basis
- A review of the usage of the Croke Park hours
- Protection against compulsory redundancy.

In addition, the Government yesterday moved to address an anomaly issue arising in the context of the recent Labour Court Recommendations in respect of the Garda Associations through an increase in annualised salaries of €1,000 for the period 1 April 2017 to August 2017 inclusive for public servants on annualised salaries up to €65,000 who are parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement and who do not stand to benefit from those Labour Court Recommendations.

ASTI members will have to weigh these benefits up for themselves. These benefits are only available to ASTI members if they vote to accept. ASTI's membership now have a decision to make as to whether to accept the TCC proposals and the immediate benefits on offer or to engage again in industrial action. It is for the ASTI leadership to explain its strategy in respect of the latter approach.

ASTI's ballot will take place over the coming weeks. While that process is ongoing it would not be helpful for me to comment further.

### **Literacy Levels**

68. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken to improve adult literacy levels in view of the comparability of the Irish sample in PIAAC with that of other participating countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1998/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills Deputy John Halligan:** Ireland was one of 25 countries that participated in the first round of the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey in 2011-12. A further nine countries participated in the second round in 2014-15.

On the literacy scale, Irish adults achieved an adjusted mean score of 266, slightly above the survey average score of 265, placing Ireland 19 out of the 34 countries that participated to date.

17.9% of Irish adults scored at below level 1 for literacy proficiency which was better than the overall survey average of 20.3%.

The improvement of adult literacy skills is a key priority in the area of Further Education and Training (FET) and has led to significant policy and practice development in recent times. This was reinforced in the legislation establishing SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, with the inclusion of a requirement for the development of a strategy aimed at promoting, developing and encouraging literacy and numeracy.

A Review of Adult Literacy Services in 2013 made a number of recommendations which have been taken into account in devising the FET Literacy strategy and in revising the adult literacy operational guidelines. The FET literacy strategy includes a range of actions to improve the literacy skills of the adult population including CPD provision for staff, embedding of literacy and numeracy within FET provision and setting targets and objectives for literacy and numeracy programmes

An advisory group established to oversee implementation of the strategy includes representation from a range of stakeholders including the Adult Literacy Officers Association (ALOA), Adult Education Officer's Association (AEOA), Education and Training Boards (ETB's), Education Training Board Ireland (ETBI), National Adult Literacy Agency (LA) and SOLAS.

As well as the revision and publication of the operational guidelines for adult literacy, progress to date under the FET literacy strategy includes:

- Launch of the national literacy and numeracy promotional and awareness campaign - [www.takethefirststep.ie](http://www.takethefirststep.ie)

- Development of regional ETB adult Literacy programme strategic plans - informed by the recommendations of the 2013 Review

- Commissioning of two research projects to provide improved assessments systems for literacy and numeracy participants and development of national guidelines for ESOL
- Publication of the FET Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019.

Annual funding to provide adult literacy services, including ESOL, is almost €30million. Services in 2016 were planned to benefit almost 56,000 beneficiaries. My Department will continue to work with SOLAS, the ETBs and national agencies to progress full implementation of the FET literacy strategy and to continue to raise adult literacy skills.

### **Education Schemes**

69. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the interventions his Department makes to assist the educational needs of asylum seekers and refugees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2004/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** All children who do not have Irish nationality can access pre-school, primary and post-primary education in the same manner as children with Irish Nationality, until they have reached the age of 18 years. For children who do not have English as their first language, the priority for them is to gain proficiency in the host language. At both primary and post-primary priority levels, additional language support is provided for students who do not speak English as their first language.

Under Ireland's Refugee Resettlement Programme, arriving migrants are accommodated in Reception centres for an initial period of a number of months before being re-settled in the receiving community. Language and Cultural orientation training is provided so migrants can gain some understanding of English and of Irish culture and mores. For children, there is a transitional Primary School programme run in the Reception centre, the objective of which is to ease their transition into school in the receiving communities.

Asylum seekers who do not have an entitlement to work have free access to adult literacy and English language classes run by the Education and Training Boards. The City of Dublin ETB runs a programme for unaccompanied minors.

There has been extensive consultation with stakeholders as part of the preparation of a Migrant Integration Strategy. The lead Department is the Department of Justice and Equality and while accommodation and employment are key to migrant integration, education is also seen as a pivotal area.

### **School Staff**

70. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide the extra resources as a matter of urgency to a school (details supplied) to end the current situation where there are 33 pupils to one teacher in a specific class; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2001/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule currently operates on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools. DEIS Urban Band 1 schools with vertical classes such as the one referred to by the Deputy is allocated mainstream staffing on the basis of an average of 1 teacher for every 22 pupils.

The school referred to by the Deputy has made an enrolment return of 126 for the current school year. The school has 6 mainstream class teachers, which provides for an average pupil teacher ratio of 1 classroom teacher for every 21 pupils.

The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. My Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.).

### **School Transport Eligibility**

71. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that the decision to use a route over Mamore Gap when calculating the nearest school for children living in Urris, County Donegal, is overturned in order that a school (details supplied) can continue to be the nearest school for these children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1811/17]

**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.

Currently in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Changes to the eligibility criteria for my Department's School Transport Scheme were announced in December 2010 by the then Government as part of measures contained in Budget 2011 and derived from recommendations contained in the Value for Money review of the scheme. This resulted in changes for eligibility in some areas such as the Urris area in Donegal.

Any child who had an eligibility under the old rules retained this eligibility provided there was no change in their circumstances. Under the new rules children are eligible for post primary 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.

Bus Éireann determines distance eligibility by measuring the shortest traversable route, which may be either pedestrian or vehicular from a family's home to their nearest education centre and it is not necessarily the route that the school bus takes. Therefore the Mamore Gap is used when determining school transport eligibility for children resident in the Urris area.

The purpose of this measurement is to assess if children meet the distance eligibility criterion for school transport. In the interests of equity, this is applied on a consistent standard basis across the country irrespective of any local circumstances that may impact on travel conditions on particular routes during parts of the year.

The terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis and will continue to be applied to the children in question.

## **Departmental Reports**

72. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will publish the report of the review which his Department commissioned to identify the supports and barriers to accessing higher education for lone parents and to examine measures to increase participation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1809/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The review of the supports and barriers to accessing higher education for lone parents is currently being finalised and will be completed by the end of Quarter 1 2017.

The review is being conducted by a multi-disciplinary team from NUI Maynooth. The review process is being overseen by a steering committee comprising officials from my Department and from the Departments of Social Protection and Children and Youth Affairs, as well as the Higher Education Authority.

The review has examined existing data and the supports that are currently available for lone parents, with a view to identifying the specific challenges faced by lone parents in accessing higher education. The intention is to identify measures and best practice that will address those challenges in the future.

The review was sufficiently progressed to inform policy discussions between the relevant Departments in advance of Budget 2017.

In this context, I secured additional funding of €1 million in Budget 2017 to support more lone parents to participate in higher education. This new funding will be used to respond to the recommendations contained in the review.

The additional funding I received for lone parents in Budget 2017 will be complemented by measures announced by my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, to assist lone parents to return to education. These measures include the reintroduction of the €500 annual cost of Education allowance.

The Minister for Children & Youth Affairs also is introducing a programme of affordable child care which will be of significant help to lone parents who are using childcare.

## **Schools Building Projects Status**

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the delivery of a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1807/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** A building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is included in the current 6 year construction programme announced in November, 2015. An acquisition process to acquire a suitable site to accommodate the new school building is currently underway.

Officials in my Department have been working closely with officials from Cork County Council towards such an acquisition and a suitable site option has been identified and deemed to be technically feasible. Negotiations have taken place with the landowner and I am pleased to inform the Deputy that agreement in principle for the acquisition of the site by my Department has been reached.

The site acquisition process will now progress to the conveyancing stage where the necessary due diligence will be undertaken by the Chief State Solicitor's Office on my behalf. The acquisition will be subject to the satisfactory completion of the legal conveyance process.

I can assure the Deputy that my officials will continue to work to finalise the acquisition of a suitable site as expeditiously as possible and once this is completed the project will progress into architectural planning.

### **Institutes of Technology**

74. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the impending strike of caterers in a college (details supplied) arising from a ten year pay freeze endured by the workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39183/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** Based on information I have received from the Institute concerned it is my understanding that the dispute relates to a company which is a subsidiary company of Cork IT and which is operating on the Institute's campus. I have been informed that the company have attempted to engage the services of the Workplace Relations Commission but the Union involved have not engaged with the process. I understand that the company is currently in discussions with the employees' union with a view to averting industrial action.

### **School Curriculum**

75. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the 300 hours of mental health classes to be provided to students in schools will commence, as announced by the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People on 3 December 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1901/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The Department of Education and Skills is introducing a new Wellbeing programme for schools which forms part of the new Framework for Junior Cycle. It will be introduced to first year students from September 2017. Wellbeing is not just about mental health. It is about enhancing the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students. Therefore, the area of learning will include Physical Education (PE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). Schools can include other areas in their provision for wellbeing, such as guidance.

Guidelines on Wellbeing in Junior Cycle have been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and will be published shortly. Schools will use the guidelines in formulating their individual Wellbeing programmes from September. Up to 400 hours will be available for learning in the area of Wellbeing over the Junior Cycle period, beginning with a minimum of 300 hours of timetabled engagement in 2017/18 and moving to the full complement of time as the new Junior Cycle is fully implemented in schools.

Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Deputy Helen McEntee, has established the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health which will provide national leadership around youth mental health and wellbeing issues.

Other supports available to schools in the area of student wellbeing are the Wellbeing in Post-primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013)

and Wellbeing in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015). They provide a Framework for schools to present, in an integrated way, the existing elements of good practice to promote positive mental health and direct them to new practices as appropriate.

The curriculum at primary and senior cycle level also includes topics relating to student wellbeing. The Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and wellbeing of the individual child.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

76. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for developing apprenticeship opportunities for persons with disabilities. [1898/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** As the Deputy is aware, in order to be registered as an apprentice by SOLAS, a person must be employed by an approved employer. Recruitment to apprenticeship is therefore driven by employers rather than by SOLAS or by education and training providers.

Currently 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. In recent months, we have seen the first of these new apprenticeships getting underway with the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launching in September 2016 and the Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship commencing in November 2016.

Over the coming months further new apprenticeships will get underway in occupations such as international financial services, accounting and new craft and services areas. Once a number of these new apprenticeships have commenced and SOLAS has assessed the providers' experience with regard to recruitment, they will commission a review on pathways to participation in apprenticeship, including participation of people with a disability. The review will identify any potential barriers that may exist in the system and, if necessary, will make recommendations for the future.

My Department will continue to engage with education and training providers to contribute to the implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy to support people with a disability in gaining and sustaining employment.

### **Departmental Functions**

77. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the functions of the parliamentary liaison unit in his Department; and the way in which these differ from the Office of the Government Chief Whip. [1911/17]

**The Taoiseach:** The role of the Parliamentary Liaison Unit is to facilitate the enhanced relationship between the Government and the Oireachtas and in this regard its work is complementary to that of the Office of the Government Chief Whip in helping to ensure the implementation of the Government's legislative programme.

In addition, however, the Parliamentary Liaison Unit works closely with Government Departments on their input to Private Members' Business in both the Dáil and the Seanad.

The Unit also liaises on a regular basis with advisers and Departments with a view to ensuring that they are aware of Oireachtas issues and to assist them in engaging with the new

processes arising from Dail reform.

### **European Council Meetings**

78. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the issues discussed at the European Council in December 2016. [1990/17]

**The Taoiseach:** The agenda for the European Council which took place in Brussels on 15 December included migration; security; economic and social issues; and international relations, specifically the situation in Syria, and the Dutch ratification of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine. We discussed a number of other topics, including: Russia; Cyprus; energy union; the single market; the digital single market; and the European economy, on which President Draghi spoke. The digital single market is of course particularly important to Ireland and, in advance of the European Council, I wrote a letter to President Juncker, which was co-signed by 15 other EU leaders, calling for greater ambition in the period ahead.

Following the European Council, there was a short meeting of the 27 EU Heads of State of Government, i.e. without Prime Minister May. This meeting focussed on the mechanics and timing of the Brexit negotiations from the EU perspective. President Tusk outlined the process whereby the European Council will agree guidelines for the negotiations, once the UK Government has triggered Article 50. We re-confirmed the principles that we agreed last June i.e. that there can be no negotiation without notification; that the Single Market and the four fundamental freedoms are indivisible; and that, until the withdrawal negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a member of the EU with all the rights and responsibilities that implies. There was no detailed discussion about the future of Europe: this will be the focus of a separate summit in Malta on 3 February.

As set out in the statement which issued from the meeting, the 27 EU Heads of State and Government will remain permanently seized of Brexit and will update the guidelines as necessary. The Commission will lead the detailed negotiations, with Michel Barnier as the chief negotiator for the Commission. The General Affairs Council, the European Parliament, the Committee of Permanent Representatives and official level working groups will also play important roles in the negotiations process.

During conversations with my counterparts in the margins of the meeting, I took the opportunity to reiterate and explain Ireland's particular concerns arising from Brexit, including in relation to Northern Ireland, the Peace Process, the Common Travel Area and our deeply entwined economic and trade links with the UK.

### **Northern Ireland**

79. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he has sought a meeting with the DUP. [1992/17]

**The Taoiseach:** Last Tuesday, following the resignation of deputy First Minister McGuinness, I met with Gerry Adams and Mary Lou McDonald of Sinn Féin to discuss developments.

I then spoke by phone to both Martin McGuinness and DUP Leader Arlene Foster to explore the possibility of a resolution to the difficulties.

Later that day I spoke with Prime Minister May to discuss the events. We agreed that our two Governments would continue to work closely on these matters over the coming period

and that we would keep in close contact. We also agreed that Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, would work together to see if a way forward could be found before an election had to be triggered.

I spoke with Prime Minister May again last evening when it became clear there would be no nomination of a deputy First Minister and that an election was inevitable.

Minister Flanagan and I remained available over the course of last weekend to assist but unfortunately, a way forward for the Executive could not be found and the date for Assembly elections has now been set for 2 March.

The Government will continue to be proactive in seeking input on Northern Ireland's interests, as we prepare for the Brexit negotiations.

### Brexit Issues

80. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the bilateral meetings he has had with foreign Heads of Government outside of European summit meetings since the UK referendum to leave the EU took place at which the issue of Brexit and the unique challenges faced by the island of Ireland as a consequence were discussed (details supplied), in tabular form. [2165/17]

**The Taoiseach:** An extensive programme of engagement with all other EU Governments and the EU institutions, including the Commission's Brexit Negotiations Task Force, is under way. This engagement is being intensified in 2017. As requested, the Taoiseach's meetings with other heads of Government since the UK referendum are set out in the following table.

HOSG	Date	Venue
PM Rajoy, Spain	12 January 2017	Madrid
PM Muscat, Malta	28 November 2016	Dublin
President Anastasiades, Cyprus	18 October 2016	Dublin
PM May, UK	26 July 2016	London
President Hollande, France	21 July 2016	Dublin
Chancellor Merkel, Germany	12 July 2016	Berlin

Although not a head of Government, it is worth noting that the Taoiseach met with Donald Tusk, in his capacity as President of the European Council, on 7 September. The Taoiseach also met the head of the Commission negotiating team, Michel Barnier, in Dublin on 12 October.

The Taoiseach and Ministers will continue to meet and engage with their EU counterparts over the coming weeks to emphasise Ireland's concerns and to ensure that they are fully reflected in the EU position once negotiations commence. This activity is reinforced by extensive engagement at diplomatic and official level. The Government is acutely aware of the potential risks and challenges for the Irish economy and will remain fully engaged on this aspect as the negotiations proceed. An important part of our preparations for the Brexit negotiations is ensuring that our particular concerns are heard and understood across Europe, and engagement with our EU partners and with the EU institutions is therefore critical.

Of course, Ireland will be part of the EU 27 team and looks forward to working with our fellow Member States in delivering the best possible result for Ireland and for the EU.

## Departmental Investigations

81. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department. [2397/17]

**The Taoiseach:** I am the specified Minister under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 in relation to two Commissions of Investigation which are ongoing, the Fennelly Commission which was established in April 2014, and the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Commission which was established in June 2015. To the end of December 2016, the cost to the Exchequer of the Fennelly Commission was €3,019,100 while the cost of the IBRC Commission was €1,498,983. The IBRC Commission has also indicated in its Interim Report that significant third party costs have been incurred which are likely to arise for payment in due course.

## Traveller Culture

82. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans and an anticipated timeframe on the issue of recognition for Traveller ethnicity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2037/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As I have indicated previously, the question of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group in Ireland is being considered in the context of the development of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

In September 2015, my predecessor brought a paper to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Policy on the question of recognising Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within Irish society. This followed a process of dialogue with the national level Traveller NGOs during 2015 which culminated in the presentation of an agreed position paper by them and confirmation that there are no legal or expenditure implications arising from such recognition. The key point is that recognition of the distinct heritage, culture and identity of Travellers and their special place in Irish society would be hugely important to Traveller pride, to Traveller self-esteem and to overcoming the legacy of marginalisation and discrimination that the community has experienced.

I have had a long standing interest in this area, most notably through my chairing of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality when it produced its report on the Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity (April 2014). My officials and I have been working to advance this matter and I made a presentation to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy in December 2016. An invitation has been extended to Traveller representatives to meet that Cabinet Committee to further these discussions.

## Crime Investigation

83. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the actions she has taken since she has met persons (details supplied) in November 2016; if further meetings are to take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2040/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** I can assure the Deputy that I am very mindful of the serious impact of sexual crimes on victims and their families, particularly where young persons are involved.

As I have previously advised the Deputy, I received a series of communications expressing concerns in relation to the case referred to and sought the views of the Garda Commissioner on the issues raised. As the Deputy is aware, I met with four of the victims in Leinster House last November, where I had an opportunity to listen to their concerns first-hand and to acknowledge their bravery for coming forward to tell their story.

As I outlined in correspondence to the Deputy during December, I have also received a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and, having considered this report with the benefit of the first-hand information provided at my meeting with the four persons concerned, I felt it necessary to seek additional clarification from An Garda Síochána regarding certain aspects of their report.

I can assure the Deputy that I share his concern at the very serious issues raised in this case and on receipt of a further report from the Commissioner, I will give it very careful consideration and determine the best course of action at that point.

### **Visa Applications**

84. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for a holiday visa in respect of a person (details supplied). [2103/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to was refused by the Visa Office in Abu Dhabi on 8 September, 2016. The decision was communicated to the applicant who was advised that an appeal could be submitted up to two months following the visa refusal. No such appeal was submitted.

It is open to the applicant to submit a fresh visa application at any time. However she should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to her and be in a position to address these in a new application.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been 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.

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

### **Garda Deployment**

85. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the County Kildare region on 1 January 2013 and on 1 January 2017; the proportion of the proposed additional recruits in 2017 that are likely to be assigned to the Kildare region; her proposals to increase the number of gardaí in County Kildare in view of the population increase in recent years and predicated increase in the population in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2119/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resourc-

es, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I am further informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Kildare Division, on the 30 November 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 306 and the strength of the Division on 31 December 2013 was 315. There are also 22 Garda Reserves and 30 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBCI), the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and the Organised Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve of approximately 300.

Since the reopening of the Garda College, 679 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, including 35 to the Kildare Division. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that another 900 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest in 2017 which will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including Kildare, in the coming years.

In so far as the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, this is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of resources and this consideration includes all relevant factors including population. However, it is important to keep in mind that newly attested Gardaí have a further 16 months of practical and class-room based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 -

2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

### **Garda Resources**

86. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if additional Garda resources will be allocated to the Cavan and Monaghan Garda division in view of the urgent need to re-establish a dedicated drugs unit; if such resources will be provided without further delay in view of the increasing problems due to the availability of illicit drugs throughout both counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2158/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Garda Commissioner that the allocation of Gardaí is continually monitored and reviewed taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question so as to ensure optimal use is made of Garda human resources. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I am informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan Garda Division on the 30 November 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available was 317, with 14 reserves and 35 civilians. It is important to note that all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences or otherwise. The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau leads out the policing strategy for tackling drugs supply. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide.

I am further informed that the prevention and detection of drug related offences is a priority within the Cavan/Monaghan Division and that all Gardaí in the Division, both uniform and detective, are engaged in intelligence-led policing and the undertaking of targeted operations against those involved in drug-related crime. In addition, Garda personnel from the Division continue to work with the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau in this regard. I am advised that local Garda management are satisfied that this strategy ensures the optimal use of resources in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs.

This Government is committed to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing throughout the country in order to strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and prevent crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve of approximately 300.

Since the reopening of the Garda College, 679 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, including 17 to the Cavan/Monaghan Division. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that another 900 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest in 2017 which will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Cavan/Monaghan Division, in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will support An Garda Síochána in tackling all criminal activity.

### **Departmental Investigations**

87. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2395/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality Deputy Frances Fitzgerald:** I can inform the Deputy that there is one ongoing investigation in my Department. The MacLochlainn Commission of Investigation was established under SI No. 346 of 2014 to conduct a thorough investigation into the fatal shooting of Mr Ronan MacLochlainn by members of An Garda Síochána in May 1998 in Ashford, Co Wicklow. The final agreed reporting date for the Commission was 31 May 2016. In its report of 24 May 2016 to the Minister, the Sole Member of the Commission, Ms Mary Rose Gearty, SC, advised that on 16 May 2016 one person who is identified in the Commission's final report brought an application to the High Court seeking a direction pursuant to Section 35(1)(b) of the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 that the report be amended before it is submitted to the Minister. The submission of the Commission's final report to the Minister must await the determination of this court application.

The total expenditure incurred to date is €1.15m.

### **VAT Rate Reductions**

88. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason radon barriers are taxable at the higher rate of VAT and treated as a luxury item when it is an essential item for the health and safety of persons; the efforts that will be made to reduce this VAT rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2030/17]

**Minister for Finance Deputy Michael Noonan:** The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of the EU VAT Directive with which Irish VAT law must comply. In general, the Directive provides that all goods and services are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23% in Ireland, unless they fall within the lists of goods and services specified in Annex III of the Directive, in respect of which Member States may apply reduced rates. The supply of radon barriers is not listed in Annex III therefore there is no discretion for Ireland to apply a lower rate to that supply.

### **Vehicle Registration**

89. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Finance if moneys will be issued to a person (details supplied) without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2130/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by Revenue that the application from the person (details supplied) for a refund of VRT on a car under the VRT Export Refund Scheme was approved for payment on 16th January 2017 and payment will be in the person's bank account within 3-5 working days. The person concerned has been informed of this by telephone on 16th January 2017.

### **Banking Sector Regulation**

90. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has considered any of the implications of a television programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2192/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** There were a number of issues raised in the course of the interview referred to.

Firstly, on the issue of liquidity breaches at Unicredit Ireland in 2007, the Central Bank has informed me of the sequence of events and the actions of the Central Bank in relation to those breaches, which are as follows.

In August 2007, the Central Bank of Ireland was notified by Unicredit Ireland of an overnight breach of compliance with the then recently introduced Central Bank Requirements for the Management of Liquidity Risk. An inspection was undertaken by the Central Bank from 3-10 October 2007. Upon investigation, the Bank was satisfied that the breach did not suggest a wider or more systematic erosion of overall liquidity. The bank was back in compliance with the limits within twenty four hours of the breach. The breach was not connected to any other bank operating in Ireland.

Following additional claims made in the media in 2010 that numerous breaches had taken place in the months following the introduction of the Requirements in 2007, a further investigation was undertaken at the instruction of the Central Bank. An independent third party firm was engaged in order to check compliance with the liquidity requirements. This investigation did not highlight any further breaches.

The Central Bank also requested that any individual who had information they wished to share with the Central Bank regarding potential regulatory breaches, to write in confidence to the Public Contact Unit or the Deputy Governor, Financial Regulation. Following contact from a third party at that time, the Central Bank held a meeting with that person to discuss the matter.

The Central Bank has undertaken significant investigations around the issues raised and is satisfied that this matter is now closed.

On the issue of the Central Bank's approach to whistleblowers, new protections for persons making protected disclosures to the Central Bank came into force on 1 August 2013. This also included new obligations on certain categories of persons in regulated firms to disclose breaches of financial services legislation to the Central Bank. The Central Bank has established a whistleblower desk and put in place policies and procedures to ensure such disclosures are dealt with appropriately.

In broad terms, where a person makes a disclosure in good faith to the Central Bank or one of its employees, and the person making the disclosure has reasonable grounds for believing

that the disclosure will show that there has been a breach of, or offence under, financial services legislation or the concealment or destruction of evidence relating to such an offence or breach and provides their name, the disclosure is a protected disclosure. Any correspondence received by the Central Bank through its protected disclosure channel is treated seriously and examined thoroughly.

Furthermore, the EU Regulation establishing the Single Supervisory Mechanism, which formally commenced on 4 November 2014, includes a provision in respect of reporting of breaches, i.e. whistleblower reports, which relate to those banks directly supervised by the European Central Bank. Persons with information on potential breaches of EU law by banks and/or by competent authorities, including the Central Bank of Ireland, can report such breaches to the ECB.

Another issue which was raised in the interview was around attendance at the Banking Inquiry. The Joint Oireachtas Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis was formally established in November 2014 under the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013. The purpose of the Inquiry was to inquire into the reasons Ireland experienced a systemic banking crisis. It was a matter for the Joint Committee to decide on whom it would call as a witness or who would be consulted as part of the Inquiry. The Joint Committee's full report can be found via the link <https://inquiries.oireachtas.ie/banking/>.

Finally, some opinions were expressed during the interview around AIB's solvency. I want to take this opportunity to reassure the House that AIB is now in a healthy financial position, generating good profitability and levels of capital. I've indicated many times before, that our strategy in recent years was to hold onto our investment in the bank until its value had recovered substantially from its lows to the point where it accurately reflected the true value of the franchise. Six years on from when the State last had to put capital into AIB, we are now at a point where funds have already started to come back to the taxpayer, and we see a genuine possibility of being able to sell a portion of our shareholding on the markets in the next 12-18 months.

### **Tax Reliefs Costs**

91. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of claims made by companies for correlative adjustments for each of the years 2005 to 2016; the number of claims for correlative adjustments conceded by the Revenue Commissioners; the total value of the tax involved in those claims; if, in respect of the total number of claims made in these years, he will provide a breakdown by industry and the other country involved; the amount of tax involved in each of the three largest cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2195/17]

92. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of refunds arising from correlative adjustments made in 2016 and likely to be made in 2017. [2196/17]

**Minister for Finance Deputy Michael Noonan:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 92 together.

It is worth noting that a similar question was raised in 2012 (Ref No: 12336/12). Therefore, this response follows on from the information provided in 2012.

Claims for relief from double taxation ("correlative adjustments") arise in Ireland as a result of an upward adjustment to company profits in a country with which we have a double taxation treaty. A company may make a claim for a correlative adjustment to Revenue in Ireland where tax paid in the other country is increased as a result of such an upward adjustment and the associated company in the other country has agreed to such upward adjustment. Each claim is

examined by Revenue and an appropriate amount of relief (including nil amounts) is agreed.

The number of correlative adjustment claims and the amount of tax relief granted in respect of those claims for each of the years 2005 to 2016 is shown in the attached table. It is not possible to provide an estimate of the cost of refunds arising from correlative adjustments likely to be made in 2017.

The countries and industry sector involved are also listed in the table.

The amount of tax involved in the 3 largest cases amounted to approximately €435 million.

Year of claim	Number of claims received	Number of these claims where relief granted	Amount of tax relief granted *
2005	6	5 (1 claim not allowed)	€35.9m
2006	14	12 (2 claims were withdrawn)	€101.7m
2007	8	8	€163.4m
2008	15	11 (1 claim was withdrawn and 3 claims are still open)	€318.7m
2009	13	11 (1 claim was withdrawn and 1 is still open)	€83.1m
2010	16	13 (3 claims are still open)	€70.3m
2011	8	5 (3 claims are still open)	€40.9m
2012	13	9 (1 claim was withdrawn, 2 claims were not allowed and 1 is still open)	€34.2m
2013	10	4 (2 claims were withdrawn and 4 are still open)	€8.7m
2014	12	3 (1 claim was not allowed and 8 are still open)	€2.5m
2015	14	14 claims are still open	€0.0m
2016**	4	4 claims are still open	€0.0m

\*Note that the relief may be granted over a number of years and may take the form of increasing losses to be carried forward as well as refunds and off-sets.

\*\*Note 2016 claims may be understated as a result of claims for correlative relief submitted in December 2016 which are not yet reflected in the records maintained by Revenue.

#### Countries involved

Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA

#### Claims by industry sector

Energy, Financial Services & Insurance, Food & Drink, General Manufacturing, Healthcare and Medical Devices, Hospitality, Information Technology, Retail, Transport.

### Third Level Charges

93. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the action he and his Department are taking to ensure that all unpaid charges are paid to colleges; his views on whether the present systems can be improved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2039/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Third level institutions

are autonomous institutions and my Department does not have any function in their day to day operational affairs. The Governing Bodies and the management staff of the institutions are responsible for operational matters, therefore, the collection and administration of the student contribution and tuition fees where a student is not eligible for funding under my Department's free fees schemes is a matter for individual third level institutions.

### **Emergency Works Scheme Applications**

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will prioritise an early response and approval in respect of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Cork under the emergency works scheme. [2045/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The school referred to by the Deputy applied for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme for extensive works to the roof of the building. The scope of the works applied for are outside the terms of the Emergency Works Scheme. Works of this nature should be applied for under any future Summer Works Scheme.

In the interim the school authority have been advised that if they identify works that will address the problem in the short term they should submit an Emergency Works Application for these works only.

### **School Accommodation**

95. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received an application for capital funding for a school (details supplied); if he has considered the request; if he will include the provision of the school in a revised capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2046/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for major capital works to my Department towards the end of 2016. My Department will consider the application and respond directly to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

### **Education and Training Boards**

96. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the tender report for the Maynooth education campus, Maynooth, County Kildare following the re-tendering of the project; if he has approved the recommended preferred tenderer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2049/17]

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the progress to date in respect of the tendering process related to the provision of the proposed two new schools at Maynooth education campus, Moyglare Road, Maynooth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2205/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 and 111 together.

The delivery of the Maynooth Education Campus, Maynooth, Co. Kildare has been de-

volved to Kildare/Wicklow Education and Training Board (ETB). Tenders were received on the 19th December 2016 and are currently being assessed by the ETB's Design Team.

When the tender report is received from the ETB it will be reviewed by my Department's Planning and Building Unit. As soon as this review is completed my Department will be in contact with the ETB to progress the project as quickly as possible.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

97. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the design team for a school (details supplied) has submitted its assessment of the changes that are required to tender documents for the project arising from changes introduced in public works contracts; if the report has been reviewed; when tenders will be invited for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2050/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b – Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been obtained.

In September 2016, the Board of Management and its Design Team were requested to review the impact of the recently introduced changes to the Public Works Contracts (PWC) and to revert to my Department with an assessment of what, if any, additional works are required to bring the tender documents into line with those changes. The Design Team have confirmed that they are working on this report in parallel with the progression of the stage 2b documentation will submit the documentation to my Department shortly.

Upon receipt and review of this outstanding documentation my Department will revert to Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

98. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the revised fully costed brief from the design team relating to a school (details supplied); if it has been reviewed and cleared by his Department; if the tender report has been submitted to enable the tender process to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2051/17]

101. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when construction of a school (details supplied) will commence; the timeframe for the works, in view of the fact that Kildare county council has granted planning permission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2061/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 101 together.

The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputies is at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2b - Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents. All statutory approvals have been obtained.

The conditions of the Planning Permission required a change to the brief for the project.

The Brief Change Request was received by my Department. However, on initial review it was found that the documents submitted were incomplete and further information was requested. This information was received last week and is under review.

Once the review is complete and a determination has been made on the Brief Change Request the Design Team will be in a position to finalise the Stage 2(b) Report. Upon receipt and review of this report my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

99. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the tender report for a school (details supplied); if it has been reviewed and cleared by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2052/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process for the provision of a new 32 classroom school and demolition of the existing buildings. The tender report for the project was recently submitted to the Department and is currently being reviewed.

When the review is complete my Department will revert to the school and its Design Team regarding next steps.

### **Gaelcholáistí Issues**

100. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 157 of 16 December 2016, when he expects to be in a position to accept the sufficient feasibility of the Irish-medium Aonad at a school (details supplied); if he will formally approve the go-ahead for the north Kildare Gaelcholáiste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2055/17]

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the extent to which plans remain on target to open a gaelcholáiste to serve the area of north Kildare in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2212/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 118 together.

Maynooth Community College opened in 2014 with an Irish-medium Aonad. It was stated that should the Aonad demonstrate sufficient viability after four years from its date of establishment, a Gaelcholáiste would be established.

As part of the November 2015 announcement on the new primary and post-primary schools to open in 2017 and 2018, and in view of the continued support for a Gaelcholáiste, it was confirmed that a Gaelcholáiste to serve the North Kildare area will open in 2019, subject to the continued viability of the Irish-medium Aonad at Maynooth Community College.

In this regard, my Department will continue to work closely with the Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to the establishment of the Gaelcholáiste.

*Question No. 101 answered with Question No. 98.*

**School Staff**

102. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the anomaly whereby non-departmental school secretaries are on inferior contracts and will receive no pension compared to departmental secretaries (details supplied); if he will restore Civil Service pensions to all school secretaries; his views on the fact that his Department overlooked the matter of pensions in its delegation of responsibilities to boards of management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2067/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A scheme was initiated in 1978 for the employment of Clerical Officers in primary and secondary schools. While a small number of these staff remain in schools, the scheme is being phased out and has been superseded by a more extensive capitation grant scheme.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial (and caretaking and cleaning services). Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs and my Department does not stipulate how secretarial services are to be obtained.

Where a school uses the grant funding to employ a secretary, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department therefore does not have any role in determining the pay and conditions under which they are engaged. These are matters to be agreed between the staff concerned and the school authorities.

Notwithstanding the above, in 2015 my Department agreed to engage with the union side in relation to the pay of School Secretaries and Caretakers who are employed using grant funding and to enter an arbitration process if necessary. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for School Secretaries and Caretakers comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019.

My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ secretaries separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

**School Enrolments**

103. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details on section 29 appeals against refusals to enrol pupils to primary schools in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 inclusive, broken down by local authority areas or, if not available by local authority area, by the smallest administrative area divisions used by his Department, in tabular form (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2102/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The details relating to section 29 appeals taken in respect of refused enrolment for primary schools for the years 2011 to 2016 are in the table.

Number of section 29 appeals against refused enrolment, Primary schools

Year	*Total number of refused enrolment Primary Sector	Total number upheld at hearing	Total number not upheld at hearing
2011	89	22	21

Year	*Total number of refused enrolment Primary Sector	Total number upheld at hearing	Total number not upheld at hearing
2012	85	15	19
2013	130	30	29
2014	131	19	39
2015	143	29	47
2016	128	21	29

\*Not all appeals proceeded to hearing, some were resolved/withdrawn prior to hearing

My Department does not hold these statistics by local authority area. Figures given are for the total number of appeals taken throughout the whole country for the years in question, for primary schools.

Details of the category of grounds utilised by schools in refusing to enrol a pupil are not available and would be a matter for each individual school.

### Schools Building Projects Status

104. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when his Department will give approval for the construction of a new school (details supplied) in view of the need for a new school in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2118/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for major capital works to my Department towards the end of 2016. My Department will consider the application and respond directly to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

### Special Educational Needs Service Provision

105. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the efforts being made to ensure that children that are currently attending an ASD unit at preschool level will have their needs met in their communities at primary school level; his plans to develop ASD units at primary level in Clonmel, County Tipperary; his further plans to develop an ASD unit at second level which is accessible for girls in Clonmel, County Tipperary; the detail of the current need for such units based on the number of children diagnosed with autism in Clonmel, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2136/17]

**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.

There are approximately 14,000 students with ASD in the school system.

- 63% are educated in mainstream classes
- 23% are educated in special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools; and
- 14% are educated in special schools

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 for children with ASD 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 Ss 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, 127 are ASD early intervention classes, 525 are primary ASD classes and 237 are post-primary ASD classes.

There are 42 ASD classes in Co. Tipperary, including 8 Early Intervention Classes for children who are not yet school going age, 20 primary school classes and 14 post primary level classes in mainstream schools. This results in the provision of 48 places in early intervention classes, 120 places for primary school pupils and 84 places for post primary pupils in Co. Tipperary. There are currently 5 ASD special classes at primary level in Clonmel.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in Co. Tipperary, are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie) in county order.

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 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](http://www.ncse.ie) .

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

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of places at primary and second level education throughout the country for children with autism, with particular reference to the needs as already identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2200/17]

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of places at primary and second level education throughout County Kildare for children with autism, with particular reference to the needs as already identified; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [2201/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

Funding for special education provision in 2016 amounted to some €1.5 billion, which was equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall allocation for education and training and an increase of 10% in spending in the previous two years.

This funding provided for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, access to S support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation in special schools and special classes, specialised equipment, additional teacher training and the services of the National Educational Psychological Service.

This range of supports and services furthers this Government's commitment to ensure 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.

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 for children with ASD 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 Ss 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, 127 are ASD early intervention classes, 525 are primary ASD classes and 237 are post-primary ASD classes.

There are 4 special schools and 66 special classes attached to mainstream schools in County Kildare for 2016/17 school year (up from 64 in 15/16): 59 classes are for students with ASD, including 6 Early Intervention Classes for children who are not yet school going age, 41 primary school classes and 12 at post primary level in mainstream schools.

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 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](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **Schools Building Projects**

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programme at primary and second level in County Kildare continues to proceed as planned, having particular regard to the urgent requirement for school places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2202/17]

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in delivery of major school building projects as part of the Six Year Capital Plan 2016-21 throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2206/17]

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in delivery of major school building projects as part of the Six Year Capital Plan 2016-2021 throughout County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2207/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 108, 112 and 113 together.

On 1st January 2017, there were 67 major projects under construction nationwide. In addition, there are a further 35 school projects that are expected to proceed to construction in the course of the year.

This represents a total of 102 major projects either under construction or progressing to commence construction in 2017.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the success of the schools building programme is predicated on the need to ensure that at any given time, there are sufficient number of school projects available to proceed to construction. If this is not the case, then there is the risk that capital monies made available for the purpose of accommodating children at primary and post-primary level, cannot be spent and that the state cannot provide for school buildings at maximum capacity. Given that any number of issues can arise at any stage up to construction stage in the process of building schools, it is essential that other projects can be progressed if individual projects are delayed for whatever reason. This can also however have the contrary result that there may be more school projects available to proceed to construction than the available budgetary position will allow.

The Action Plan for Education sets out the Government ambitions for the Education system, including the commitment contained in the Programme for Government, towards the prioritisation of school educational infrastructure.

My Department will fully engage with the mid-term Capital Review to be conducted by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform over the coming months. In doing so, my Department will be stressing the increasing costs of providing permanent school accommodation and the opportunities which the school building programme presents for productive capital expenditure in this much needed area of the economy.

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

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the special needs teaching requirements in terms of teachers and SNAs at primary and second level in all schools throughout the country; the extent to which he expects to be in position to meet the increased demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2203/17]

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the special needs teaching requirements in terms of teachers and SNAs at primary and second level in all schools throughout County Kildare; the extent to which he expects to be in position to meet the increased demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2204/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 and 110 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that funding for special education provision in 2016 amounted to some €1.5 billion, which was equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall allocation for education and training and an increase of 10% in spending in the previous two years.

This funding provided for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, access to S support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation in special schools and special classes, specialised equipment, additional teacher training and the services of the National Educational Psychological Service.

12,900 Special Needs Assistants (Ss) were available for allocation to schools to the end of 2016, which represents an increase of 23% over the numbers allocated in 2011.

I recently announced that an additional 115 S posts will be provided for allocation from January to June 2017 to bring the total number of Ss available for allocation to schools to 13,015.

There are also over 12,500 Learning Support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools for the 2016/2017 school year. The NCSE has allocated 7430 resource teacher posts to schools for the 2016/17 school year; this represents an increase of 41% in the number of resource teachers which have been allocated since the 2011/12 school year, at which point 5265 posts were allocated. In addition, over 5000 learning support posts are allocated to schools under the General Allocation Model for primary schools and Learning Support allocations for post primary schools. Approximately 900 additional resource teacher posts will be provided for in the 2017/2018 school year.

There are over 1,150 Special Classes in place in comparison to 548 in 2011, with approximately 150 new classes having been made available for the current school year, 2016/17.

125 special schools also provide specialist education for those pupils who need it, from infants to eighteen years of age.

The combination of supports, and the extent of resources provided, means that educational provision can continue to be made for all children with special educational needs, regardless of their level of need, and will ensure that their needs can continue to met throughout the country in the next twelve months, at both primary and post primary school level.

*Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 96.*

*Questions Nos. 112 and 113 answered with Question No. 108.*

## **Departmental Strategies**

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made in respect of the National Skills Strategy 2025 with particular reference to meeting the skills requirements of industry ensuring continued economic growth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2208/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Skills Strategy was published in 2016. With over 120 Actions involving over 50 stakeholders, the Strategy sets out a vision for the period to 2025 of how Ireland can continue to develop relevant skills and ensure that our supply of skills is activated and effectively used in order to help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade.

Implementation of the National Skills Strategy is not the sole responsibility of any one Government Department or agency; it is a cross-cutting strategy, which will require cooperation from many different stakeholders. Implementation of the strategy is ongoing and my Department is currently gathering updates on the various actions from internal and external stakeholders.

A number of the actions in the National Skills Strategy are also being tracked through the Action Plan for Education.

## **Bullying in Schools**

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which ongoing efforts continue to be made to combat school bullying within school premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2209/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Action Plan on Bullying, which was published in January 2013, sets out my Department's approach to tackling bullying and promoting an anti-bullying culture in schools. It recommended actions that focus on support for schools, teacher training, research and awareness raising and aim to ensure that all forms of bullying are addressed. Implementation of the actions is ongoing and good progress has been made across all areas of the plan.

As part of the implementation of the Action Plan my Department published new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year.

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

The procedures for schools include important oversight arrangements that involve the school principal reporting regularly to the Board of Management and a requirement for the Board to undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation that the annual review has been completed must be provided to the Parents' Association and published on the school website.

In addition, my Department's Inspectorate, as part of its inspection work, places a stronger focus on the actions schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying.

Other actions being taken as part of the implementation of the Action Plan include support for anti-bullying awareness raising initiatives and the development and roll out of anti-bullying training materials for parents, teachers and Boards of Management. In addition, a new national anti-bullying website, [www.tacklebullying.ie](http://www.tacklebullying.ie), was launched in November 2015 as a single point of information and support for young people, parents and teachers affected by bullying.

As outlined in the “Action Plan for Education 2016-2019”, my Department is committed to continuing implementation of the Anti-Bullying Action Plan through continued support for the development of anti-bullying training materials and awareness-raising initiatives.

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the pupil-teacher ratio at primary and second level throughout the country is a matter of concern; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to improve the situation in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2210/17]

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the pupil-teacher ratio at primary and second level throughout County Kildare is a matter of concern; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to improve the situation in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2211/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 117 together.

The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to schools is published annually on the Department’s website. The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) is determined by the overall number of posts and enrolments as of the 30th September of the previous year.

The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

Reducing class sizes has been a target of successive Governments. Budget 2016 provided for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by one point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils for the 2016/17 school year. The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

My focus in Budget 2017 was on obtaining additional funding to provide for demographic growth, additional special education and school leadership resources for our schools.

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools for the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

There is no change in relation to the staffing schedule of 27:1 that will apply to primary schools for the 2017/18 school year. However, it should be noted that the current staffing schedule of 27:1 for primary schools has restored it to the position it was at prior to the fiscal

crisis.

In considering any approach to the restoration of posts, it is important that there is a fairness in the restoration and that a balance between primary and post primary is achieved in future budgets. At second level there is still a substantial degree of restoration to be made.

*Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 100.*

### **Student Accommodation**

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which student accommodation requirements can be met in the short to medium term with particular reference to putting in place the necessary measures to ensure adequate accommodation in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2213/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Alleviating the housing crisis is a cross-Government priority and the available analysis indicates that the lack of suitable rental accommodation for students is driving up rents in the private rental sector, particularly in areas where demand for rental property is high. This is contributing to what we know is already a considerable strain on some students and their families to participate in higher education with knock-on effects on completion rates. The reality is that dealing comprehensively with this issue will only take place as part of a more general programme to address the major housing and homelessness issue.

Accordingly, my colleague Mr. Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, on 19 July 2016 published “Rebuilding Ireland – an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness”, following Government approval of this comprehensive and ambitious Plan. The full plan can be accessed at: [http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland\\_Action%20Plan.pdf](http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf)

My Department worked closely with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in developing this Plan, with a specific focus on student accommodation, and I very much welcome the commitments contained in the plan and I look forward to working with colleagues on a cross-Departmental basis to ensure that the commitments contained in the Plan are implemented as soon as practicable.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received submissions from the school authorities in respect of grant aid for a new school in Newtown; the progress to date in determination of the application for assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2214/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for major capital works to my Department towards the end of 2016. My Department will consider the application and respond directly to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

### **Schools Building Projects**

121. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider the need for a new school build to replace an existing school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2216/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving an application for major capital works from the school in question. Any application received will be considered and a response will be conveyed to the school authority subsequently.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

122. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the need for an accelerated school build for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if the project can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2219/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2019-2021). My Department is aware of the school's accommodation needs and will be liaising with the school in due course in the context of progressing the project into the architectural planning process.

### **Departmental Investigations**

123. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2391/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills Deputy Richard Bruton:** I can confirm to the Deputy that in 2016, €67,542.83 was spent by my Department on ongoing investigations or inquiries.

### **Foreshore Issues**

124. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 175 of 1 December 2016, the names of the members and chair of the marine licence vetting committee which will consider the Marine Institute's 35 year foreshore lease application in Galway Bay. [2036/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** The details of the constitution of the Marine Licence Vetting Committee (MLVC) as part of the consideration of the application concerned are expected to be finalised shortly. This information will be forwarded separately at that stage.

### **Private Rented Accommodation Evictions**

125. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when Part 3 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 will be commenced; the protection it will provide for tenants in a development (details supplied); if the protection from termination of tenancies in which ten, or more,

dwellings are being sold will apply and to which this section of the Act applies, is afforded to tenants who are given notice of termination of tenancies on different dates but where the total is over ten; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2064/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 was signed by the President on 23 December 2016. The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2017 commences Part 3 of the Act, insofar as it is not already in operation, other than sections 44, 45, 48 and 49. This Commencement Order takes effect from 17 January 2017. Under Part 3 of the Act, Sections 38 to 40 provide, *inter alia*, that where a landlord proposes to sell 10 or more units within a single development at the same time (i.e. classified as being within a 6-month period), the sale will be subject to the existing tenants remaining in situ, other than in exceptional circumstances. Where, before the commencement of section 40 of the Act, a valid notice of termination has been served on a tenant on the ground that the landlord wishes to sell his/her property, then that notice takes effect as if section 40 had not commenced. However, I understand that, in the particular case referred to by the Deputy, the termination notices have since been withdrawn.

From 17 January 2017, subject to limited exemptions, termination notices issued by a landlord in relation to ten or more tenancies in a single development within a six month period will not be valid.

### Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

126. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2002; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2105/17]

127. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2003; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2106/17]

128. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2004; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2107/17]

129. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2005; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2108/17]

130. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2006; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2109/17]

131. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2007; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and

children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2110/17]

132. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2008; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2111/17]

133. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2009; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2112/17]

134. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Galway city since 2010; the categories the households are in; the number of persons, adults and children that equates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2113/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 to 134, inclusive, together.

Details on the number of households on waiting lists in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing

Assessments. The most recent figures available are the results of the 2016 Summary which are available on my Department's website at the following link: -

*[http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary\\_of\\_social\\_housing\\_assessments\\_2016.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf)*.

The 2016 results show that there were 3,322 households on Galway City Council's waiting list as at 21 September 2016. The results are broken down across a range of categories, including by household composition.

The results of the previous summaries undertaken in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011 and 2013, are available on my Department's website at the link below and include breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories, including household composition: *<http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/sub-topic/needs-assessment>*.

It is important to note that only the results of the 2013 and 2016 summaries are directly comparable with each other. These summaries were carried out using a standardised methodology as specified by the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011. Previous summaries were not carried out under the current standardised assessment regime for social housing support which came into effect on 1 April 2011.

In line with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 future summaries will now be carried out on an annual basis. I expect the results of the 2017 summary to be available for publication in the latter half of this year.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

135. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authority and AHB new build social homes that were completed in quarter 3 and quarter 4 of 2016. [2131/17]

136. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authority and AHB unit acquisitions for social housing purposes that took place in Q3 and Q4 2016. [2132/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 and 136 together.

Information in relation to the number of social housing new builds and acquisitions is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Information is confirmed and published up to Q3 of 2016. Material in respect of Q4 of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility**

137. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to improve the income eligibility limits for social housing in 2017 in view of the fact numerous families are slightly above existing income limits but are unable to obtain loan approval from financial institutions; if the eligibility criteria will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2160/17]

138. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to exclude family income supplement in the assessment of income eligibility for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2161/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 138 together.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all housing authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. Most payments received from the Department of Social Protection are assessable, including Family Income Supplement. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and housing authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off.

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. I am satisfied that the current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this and that they provide for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households unable to provide accommodation from their own resources. These income limits will continue to be kept under review by my Department, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 .

I am aware of the difficulties experienced by some households in purchasing their own home where they are not eligible for social housing support on income grounds. It may be possible for such households to avail of a mortgage from a local authority which is targeted at lower income first-time buyers who can demonstrate that they are unable to get a loan from a building society or bank. A loan can be up to 97% of the price of the property, subject to a maximum loan of €200,000. The relevant terms and conditions applying to local authority housing loans are set out in the Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012 which prescribe a maximum annual gross income threshold of €50,000 for a single person household or a combined annual gross income of €75,000 for a two person household. The Regulations are available on my Department's website at: Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012.

Another option is the Home Choice Loan, a Government backed mortgage for first time buyers. The Home Choice Loan is available through authorised mortgage brokers and can be used to provide up to 92% of the market value of the property being purchased, up to a maximum loan amount of €285,000. A new or second hand property may be purchased under the scheme. Further information is available at: [www.homechoiceloan.ie](http://www.homechoiceloan.ie).

### **Planning Issues**

139. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a proposal contained in the Dublin City Draft Development Plan 2016 - 2022 to redefine low rise to include buildings of nine storeys or 28 metres, that is, twice the height of the typical Georgian buildings that are a feature of Dublin city centre; and his views on whether such a policy constitutes the type of sound planning that must inform housing and urban planning policy. [2166/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** The Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022, adopted by the elected members in September 2016, sets out a coherent, robust and cogent development framework for the Dublin City Council area.

During the consultation process on the making of the Plan, my Department, as a prescribed body, made submissions in December 2015 and July 2016 to Dublin City Council which included recommendations on appropriate heights for future development.

National planning policy strongly supports goals relating to avoiding urban sprawl and securing the efficient use of serviced urban land and increased densities, especially in highly accessible inner city areas, where the full range of employment, retail, educational and recreational facilities are within walking or cycling distance and close to frequent public transport.

As with many other cities around the world of comparable function and scale to Dublin, development sites in inner city areas are a critical and finite resource for its people and its economy and among the best locations within which the housing, community facilities and employment opportunities required can be provided.

Considering the varied building pattern across Dublin, including the scope for taller buildings in certain strategic locations near public transport nodes and centres of employment as provided in the City Development Plan, I have no difficulty with the manner in which the low-rise designation has been arrived at. I would furthermore add that, if building heights in Dublin were required to match or be influenced by Georgian building heights generally, considerable difficulties would be experienced in meeting requirements for additional housing and employment space within the city and in a manner appropriate to the European and global role that

Dublin now increasingly plays.

Moreover, if Dublin was further constrained in terms of achievable building heights, the city would then tend to spread outwards even more than it already has, to the detriment of people's quality of life by forcing increased commuting and distance between living and working.

At the same time, it is also vital that the special character and architectural quality of the City is appropriately managed and conserved through the extensive range of City Development Plan policies and objectives, such as Architectural Conservation Areas and residential conservation areas.

### **Local Elections**

140. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a review of the composition of district electoral divisions, which continue to be delineated as they were in the 1830s, will be included in the terms of reference of the next local electoral area boundary committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2167/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** Notwithstanding any decision that might be made to review local electoral areas in advance of the 2019 local elections, there are no plans at present to review the boundaries of the 3,440 electoral divisions across the country. The electoral divisions in the Dublin area were last amended in 1986. These are specified in the County Borough of Dublin (Wards) Regulations 19 86 and the Dublin County (District Electoral Divisions) Regulations 1986.

### **Emergency Accommodation Data**

141. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of three bedroom units which were offered to families in emergency accommodation in 2016; and the number of three bedroom units which are due to come on stream in 2017 to accommodate large families in emergency accommodation. [2185/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. In accordance with section 37(2) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities. My Department has no function in relation to operational issues, such as those outlined in the Question, which are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

### **Motor Tax**

142. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the actions the Government has taken with regard to the international emissions scandal surrounding a company (details supplied); if the Government has considered the motor tax implications for the company and other connected models as a consequence of the findings of the US EPA; the investigation of its own the Government has set up to investigate

if the company's cars on sale here actually comply with EU emissions standards; if models for sale here achieve the emissions savings outlined in their marketing; if the Government has taken steps to investigate whether the emissions levels advertised by motor manufacturers are actually tested and actually meet their standards in real time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2188/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** My Department has no function in the matter raised, save for motor tax. The motor tax system in Ireland for private vehicles registered from July 2008 is based on carbon dioxide emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>), whereas the matter referred to in the Question relates to nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) emissions. There are, therefore, no implications for the motor tax system.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

143. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses which were constructed by the four Dublin local authorities in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2189/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** Under my Department's Social Housing Capital Investment and Social Housing Current Expenditure Programmes, funding is provided to local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments. Details on the number of properties constructed and purchased by all local authorities, including all four Dublin Local Authorities, up to Q3 2016, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Information on the full year of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

### **Departmental Investigations**

144. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2392/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Deputy Simon Coveney:** In view of the fact that there are no ongoing Commissions of Investigation or Tribunals of Inquiry in my Department, there are no relevant costs arising for the Exchequer.

### **Supplementary Welfare Allowance Applications**

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if interim supplementary welfare payment will be provided as matter of urgency to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2101/17]

**Minister for Social Protection Deputy Leo Varadkar:** An application form for Supplementary Welfare Allowance was posted to the person concerned on 10/01/2017. An assessment will be made when the completed application form and any additional documents are received by the Community Welfare Officer.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Review**

146. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will bring a memorandum to Government on the review of the community employment programme; when he will publish same, as outlined by him in October 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2115/17]

**Minister for Social Protection Deputy Leo Varadkar:** My Department operates a number of programmes including Community Employment (CE), Tús, Gateway and the Rural Social Scheme that provide part-time temporary work in local communities, including opportunities for training and development 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.

These schemes help to break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market. My Department is also conscious of the valuable contribution the schemes are making in the provision of services to individuals and communities across Ireland.

With the ongoing welcome reductions in the live register, issues such as, the appropriate level of expenditure, the number of places and the criteria for participation on employment schemes, including CE, are all being considered. I hope to be in a position to bring a Memorandum to Government on these matters in the coming weeks. If there are any changes to be made, consultations with stakeholders will be facilitated.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Administration**

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a transfer from a community employment scheme will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2123/17]

**Minister for Social Protection Deputy Leo Varadkar:** Subject to the client identifying a suitable vacancy and being facilitated by another Community Employment scheme, the Department will endeavour to facilitate this transfer for the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### **Pension Provisions**

148. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of his proposed reforms to pension and retirement policies that would see an end to the compulsory retirement age; the work that has been undertaken by his Department to date; the timeframe for the proposed introduction of this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2138/17]

**Minister for Social Protection Deputy Leo Varadkar:** The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided for the necessary amendments to increase the State pension age in line with

the National Pensions Framework as set out in the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland. It provided for an increase in the age for qualification for the State Pension from 66 years to 67 years from 2021, and a further increase to 68 years from 2028. It also discontinued the State Pension (transition) for new claimants with effect from 1 January 2014. As the State Pension (transition) could only be paid if the recipient had retired, and given such a criterion does not apply to the State pension (contributory), this removed a significant disincentive to those who did not wish to retire at State pension age.

The Deputy should note that there is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is responsible for the terms and conditions of employment and pensions of public servants, including the age at which they may be required to retire. I am informed by that Department that the specific compulsory retirement age and minimum pension age provisions which affect individual public servants reflect their particular employment sector and time of original recruitment.

An interdepartmental group on fuller working lives was chaired last year by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to consider policy around retirement age in both the public and private sectors and it reported in August. Any question regarding the work of that group, and the retirement age of public servants, may be addressed to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pension Provisions**

149. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current policy direction in respect of pensions; the status of the Green Paper on pensions and the subsequent consultation process; and the way in which he will proceed in this regard. [2139/17]

**Minister for Social Protection Deputy Leo Varadkar:** The Green Paper consultation process commenced in October 2007 and was completed in May 2008 and it formed the basis of the National Pension Framework published in 2010. These reports are available on my Department's website.

Since its publication many of the areas identified have been subject to legislative change. My Department continues to work to improve the pension's landscape for Irish people.

Going forward I have already indicated that one of my priorities for 2017 is pension reform. I intend to set out a road map for the reform of the State pension, rationalisation and reform of the pensions landscape arising from the Pensions Authority's public consultation process, transposition of the EU IORPs II directive, and the design of a universal retirement savings platform for all working people.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

150. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied); when it is expected a

decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2198/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection Deputy Finian McGrath:** I confirm that an application from this lady for disability allowance (DA) was received by my department on 5 September 2016.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Eligibility**

151. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the announcement of illness benefit for the self-employed will be implemented (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2215/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection Deputy Finian McGrath:** The Budget measure referred to in the Deputy's question relates to the extension of cover for Invalidity Pension to the self-employed on the same basis as employees. This is in line with the commitment contained in the Programme for Government for an improved PRSI scheme for the self-employed. Invalidity Pension is a pension payment for people who cannot work because of a long-term illness or disability.

For the first time, the self-employed will access to the safety net of State income supports if they have a serious illness or injury that prevents them from working without having to go through a means test. This is a real advance in the level of cover available to the self-employed. Given that this is a major change in the social protection system, significant adjustments to operational systems and processes will be required to support this measure. Therefore, the measure will come into effect in December 2017.

In addition, the self-employed will have access to the existing Treatment Benefit Scheme, from March 2017. Treatment Benefit entitlements will be extended further from October 2017 for both the self-employed and employees, providing additional dental and optical benefits.

I trust that this provides some clarity on the issue for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Investigations**

152. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2396/17]

**Minister for Social Protection Deputy Leo Varadkar:** Tribunals of inquiry are established by resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas to enquire into matters of urgent public importance. Commissions of investigation can investigate matters of significant public concern and are set up by Government order. Such commissions are currently provided for by the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004.

No such tribunals of inquiry or commissions of investigation are currently ongoing in my

Department.

### Northern Ireland

153. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the possible assembly elections following the resignation of the deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland; his views on whether they can be deferred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2041/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Deputy Charles Flanagan:** I regret the circumstances which have led to the decision of the deputy First Minister to resign his office. I also acknowledge the deputy First Minister's contribution and leadership over the last decade within the power-sharing institutions.

It was clear, immediately following the resignation of the deputy First Minister, that the prospect of a resolution ahead of the triggering of an Assembly election were slim. However both Governments, in their capacity as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, made full use of the narrow window available to encourage that any avenues for resolution between the parties prior to an election be fully explored.

In the event, an Assembly election has been triggered and will be held on Thursday 2 March. It is important to emphasise that this eventuality is one covered by the legislation governing the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. When parties in an administration cannot agree, an election is the consequence and the outcome of that is now for the electorate in Northern Ireland to determine. There is no legislative provision for deferral and I do not believe that such a step would have been helpful in the current circumstances.

In my discussions with each of the party leaders in Northern Ireland, I have emphasised the importance of all parties acting responsibly in word and deed during this election campaign, to prevent any long-term damage to the political institutions of the Agreement.

After the election, it will fall to the parties to form a power-sharing Executive and this will of course require a resolution to the issues which brought about the current situation. As these political difficulties are worked through in Northern Ireland, it is of the utmost importance that all parties bear in mind the principles of mutual respect, partnership and equality, which underpin the Good Friday Agreement, through which so much has been achieved.

As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government will continue to work with the British Government and the political parties to support political stability, reconciliation and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland.

### Northern Ireland

154. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has completed, or plans to carry out, a study or an assessment on the constitutional, legal, financial or other implications in preparation for a possible referendum on Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2042/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Deputy Charles Flanagan:** The full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and succeeding agreements is a priority for my Department and indeed the Government as whole. In this context we are of course also guided by the aspiration contained in Article 3 of the Constitution as amended by the people in 1998.

The principle of consent and the possibility of a change in constitutional status in Northern Ireland is a fundamental part of the Good Friday Agreement, which was endorsed by the people of this island North and South. The trigger for a referendum in this jurisdiction is, of course, connected with the calling of a border poll under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, in Northern Ireland. This occurs when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland considers it likely that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland.

At present, the Government does not believe it likely that such a border poll in Northern Ireland in the near future would result in constitutional change; that is also the view of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In those circumstances, such a poll now might only increase uncertainty and division at an already difficult and sensitive time.

In the absence of any prospect of a referendum in the near future, my Department does not have any active plans to carry out the type of study specifically referred to by the Deputy. However, my Department continues to actively monitor the relevant polls, attitude surveys and academic literature that relate to evolving sentiment on the issue of constitutional change.

There are of course aspects of this constitutional issue which relate to my Department's ongoing work. In the context of Brexit, for example, the Government has made clear its determination to ensure that all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, including those relating to a possible change in constitutional status for Northern Ireland, are upheld regardless of the UK's status within the EU.

## **Human Rights**

155. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); the efforts that have been made to date to assist this person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2145/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Deputy Charles Flanagan:** I am very aware of the extremely difficult circumstances in which this individual and his family find themselves. We understand that the citizen remains on bail and is waiting for his appeal to be logged with the Philippines Supreme Court against his conviction and sentence in 2013. As this is an ongoing legal case, it is for the citizen's legal representatives to advise him and to act on his behalf in matters before the courts.

My Department officials in Dublin and in Singapore have provided and continue to provide all appropriate consular support, within the limits of assistance we can offer in such legal cases. I have personally raised my concerns about the case with my Philippine counterpart on a number of occasions.

In November our Embassy in Singapore wrote to the Administrator of the Supreme Court to request that the individual's appeal hearing be expedited on humanitarian grounds. This request was reiterated at a meeting on 11 January 2017 with senior Philippines Foreign Ministry officials.

The citizen is in regular and direct contact with Department officials both in Dublin and in Singapore, and an Embassy Singapore official visited the individual in October.

The Department in Dublin, our Embassy in Singapore and our Honorary Consulate in the Philippines will continue to provide whatever consular assistance we can to this individual and to his family.

## Registration of Births

156. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a foreign births registration application will be expedited to allow a person (details supplied) to provide proof of nationality for student grant purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2156/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Deputy Charles Flanagan:** Applications for Foreign Births Registration generally take between four and six months to process from the time all the required documentation has been submitted. In light of the exceptional circumstances in the case to which the Deputy refers, the Foreign Births Registration Unit in my Department expedited the processing of this application. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Foreign Birth Registration Certificate was issued on 5 January 2017.

## Flood Relief Schemes

157. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will approve funding for the Lower Morrell River flood scheme in County Kildare, to enable Kildare County Council to seek planning approval for the scheme from An Bord Pleanála; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2054/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Deputy Seán Canney:** The Lower Morrell River flood relief scheme is being progressed by Kildare County Council (KCC) as the Contracting Authority for the scheme with funding provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW).

I am advised that KCC and its consultants are currently working on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and detailed design of the scheme which includes liaising with the various landowners/stakeholders who will be impacted by the proposed works, in advance of the scheme being submitted for planning approval. Once the final details of the scheme have been designed and before the scheme is submitted for planning approval the Council will request formal approval of the scheme and funding arrangements from the OPW. It is envisaged that the scheme will be submitted for planning approval in the first half of 2017.

It is not possible to indicate when exactly works can be commenced until the scheme has been advanced through the planning process by the Council as outlined above but it is hoped that works would commence before the end of 2017. This is, however, dependent on planning approval being received. I can confirm that the Lower Morrell Scheme remains a priority and the OPW has included provision for the cost of the proposed works in its financial profiles in the period up to 2020.

## Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

158. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a meeting will be scheduled in view of the fact that a chairperson has been appointed to the high-level community and voluntary forum and it has not met since April 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2104/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** The issue of pension entitlements for Community Employment Scheme Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors was the subject of a Labour Court recommendation in 2008. The position is that although

the employing bodies concerned are mainly funded by public expenditure programmes, the State does not have any role as an employer in this sector and the employees of such bodies are not public servants.

This matter together with other related issues is the subject of discussion at the Community Sector High Level Forum (or Working Group) (previously the Informal Forum) which was convened to examine certain issues pertaining to the Community Employment sector. The forum met on 27 November 2015 and on 11 April 2016. The forum now has a new Chair and it is intended to reconvene the forum in the first quarter of 2017.

### **Public Sector Staff**

159. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will put in place a more worker-friendly transfer system for public and civil servants (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2155/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** As the Deputy will be aware, Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal calls to ‘Expand career and mobility opportunities for staff across geographic, organisational and sectoral boundaries’.

A Service Wide Mobility Scheme is currently under development. The Scheme will generate an open, fair, transparent and practical system that facilitates effective mobility of staff across the Civil Service in pursuit of development opportunities and relocation while also supporting the needs of the business.

This Scheme will initially be phased in for Civil Service general service grades up to and including EO level for both mobility within a single location, and mobility between locations. Further phases will include Civil Service general service grades up to and including Assistant Principal. Equivalent Professional and Technical grades are not covered under the early phases of the Scheme and consideration will be given to mobility for these grades at a later date. It is anticipated that the first phase of the Scheme will be implemented by end 2017.

The Scheme will extend over time to provide additional development opportunities .

It is not possible at this stage to give a definitive date when the scheme will be extended to the Public Service.

### **Departmental Investigations**

160. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost to the Exchequer of all ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department. [2163/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** In response to the Deputy’s question, my Department has not been responsible for setting up any Commissions of Investigation or Tribunals of Inquiry since it was established in 2011.

### **Civil Service Reform**

161. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the current status of proposals to amalgamate the SO grade of the Civil Service with the EO grade;

if such an upgrade takes place, that staff officers who have been working in that position for a number of years will receive the appropriate pay rise commensurate with the upgrade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2218/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Deputy Paschal Donohoe:** The matter of the amalgamation of the Civil Service Staff Officer grade with the Executive Officer grade is currently under deliberation between the management and union side parties concerned. As this deliberative process has yet to be concluded it is considered that it would not be appropriate in the circumstances to comment on any issues that may arise between the parties concerned.

### Waterways Issues

162. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she is taking in conjunction with Waterways Ireland to bring to an end an issue that is occurring with increasing frequency (details supplied). [2199/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs Deputy Heather Humphreys:** I have been informed that Waterways Ireland technical staff recently visited the location in question to assess the situation referred to by the Deputy and to determine the options available to try to make the location referred to by the Deputy less attractive to such activities. Waterways Ireland is currently assessing these options and, subject to available funding, hope to be in a position to implement measures to improve matters, while ensuring that any changes do not negatively impact on the general public.

With regard to an immediate response to dealing with the specific issue raised by the Deputy, Waterways Ireland staff do not have enforcement powers to restrict this activity.

I and Waterways Ireland would encourage anyone who witnesses such activity to report the matter to An Garda Síochána.

### Gaeltacht Policy

163. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans for the Ráth Cairn Gaeltacht in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2063/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Deputy Seán Kyne:** As the Deputy may be aware, the Gaeltacht Act 2012 gives statutory effect to the language planning process under which language plans may be prepared at community level in areas to be recognised under the Act as Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns or Irish Language Networks. In the case of all Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, including Ráth Chairn and Baile Ghib in Co. Meath, organisations will be given up to 2 years from the date on which they are selected by Údarás na Gaeltachta to submit a language plan to me, as Minister, for approval in line with language planning criteria prescribed under section 12 of the Act.

Once a plan has been approved under the Act, organisations will be given 7 years in which to implement same with the assistance of Údarás na Gaeltachta. My Department will periodically review the implementation of these plans during this period. It is anticipated that the language plan in respect of Ráth Chairn agus Baile Ghib will be submitted for approval under the process by March 2018.

Insofar as all Gaeltacht areas are concerned, including Gaeltacht na Mí, the Deputy should also be aware that both my Department and Údarás na Gaeltachta administer a wide range of schemes, initiatives and programmes through which financial support is provided to assist in the implementation, at Gaeltacht community level, of practical actions, interventions, initiatives and projects which have as their core objective the maintenance and development of Irish as the community language of the Gaeltacht.

### Post Offices and Credit Unions Merger

164. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the work undertaken by his Department to date on the development of public banking here as envisaged in the programme for Government; and the planned timeframe for completion of this work. [2162/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Deputy Michael Ring:** The *Programme for a Partnership Government* envisages that An Post, the League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders will be asked to investigate and propose a new model of “community banking”, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand, which could be delivered through the Post Office network. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions. The role of my Department in this matter will be to work with other Departments and stakeholders to examine the feasibility of these, and potentially other, models.

Senior officials from my Department had an initial meeting with their counterparts in the Department of Finance towards the end of last year and agreed to develop a work programme to examine the potential of the Sparkassen model and other models of local public banking, as referenced in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*.

Officials from both Departments will meet again in the next few weeks, with work anticipated to conclude by the middle of the year. It is envisaged that relevant stakeholders will be consulted as part of the work programme.

My Department has no role in respect of wider public banking issues, which are a matter for the Department of Finance.

### Mental Health Services Provision

165. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the measures that have been taken to date to progress the commitment in the HSE’s mental health operational plan 2016 to invest in the design and development of a clinical programme for persons with comorbid mental illness and substance misuse dual diagnosis; if a working group has been established for the purposes of this programme; the number of times it has met; if a clinical lead has been appointed; when this appointment was made; if there will be a consultation process to engage with key stakeholders on the design and development of the programme; and if so, when this consultation will commence. [2024/17]

**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.

## Medical Card Reviews

166. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card review application will be reopened for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who encountered difficulty in securing and returning a document during the Christmas period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2029/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for Members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas Members.

## Nursing Staff Recruitment

167. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the actions he is taking to address the shortage of nursing staff in the short, medium and long term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2043/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** As you know, my Department and the HSE are already engaged in discussions with the INMO on the issue of recruitment and retention, these talks are due to resume next week. In addition to this a number of specific measures have also been taken in relation to pay that will support the recruitment and retention of Irish nursing and midwifery graduates. Measures to date include additional pay in return for taking on some duties from doctors and an increase in the rate of pay for the student nursing placement to 70% of the first point of the staff nurse pay scale. In the last quarter of 2016 the Government approved restoration of incremental credit for 2011 to 2015 graduate nurses in respect of the 36 week clinical placement undertaken by fourth year student nurses in the context of the 2017 Estimates. All nurses and midwives are now eligible for incremental credit for the 36 week placement. There has been an increase of 1,702 nurses employed in the public health service (34,093 to 35,795) from November 2013 to November 2016.

Yesterday, the Government announced plans to increase those on annualised salaries by €1,000 for the period April to August 2017 for those on salaries up to €65,000 to address anomalies arising from the Labour Court Recommendations in respect of the Garda Associations. A benefit of this decision is that it will make jobs in nursing more attractive.

There are many initiatives currently under way to improve staffing levels throughout the country, the HSE is offering permanent posts to 2016 degree programme graduates, and full time permanent contracts to those in temporary posts. The HSE is also focused on converting agency staffing to permanent posts, while also accepting that there is still the need to have some element of agency. The HSE's National Recruitment Service is actively operating rolling nursing recruitment campaigns. The campaigns encompass General, Mental Health, Intellectual Disability and Registered Children's Nurses, and also Midwives. In addition, a relocation package of up to €1,500 continues to be available to nurses who return from overseas. The HSE ran a three-day open recruitment event over the Christmas holiday period in Dr Steevens' Hospital for nurses and midwives from all disciplines who are interested in working in the Irish Public Health Service. 220 attended the event. 115 nursing and midwifery candidates were deemed successful and panelled following interview.

In September 2016 the HSE set up a Project Group to review nursing workforce planning, recruitment and retention. The main objectives of this Project Group include identifying current recruitment black spots in a coordinated way and developing measures to incentivise and attract nurses to these essential posts.

Given recognised difficulties in filling psychiatric nursing vacancies, an additional 60 undergraduate places were put in place last autumn with a further 70 additional places to be provided this year.

### **Hospital Beds Data**

168. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of long stay beds that have been closed in the past six years on a county basis, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2044/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** Officials from my Department have been in contact with the Deputy's Office requesting clarification regarding what is intended by the use of the term 'Long Stay Beds'. On receipt of this information an answer will be provided directly to the Deputy.

### **Primary Care Services Provision**

169. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if he will include the provision of primary care psychology and counselling in primary care in the new primary care centre for Celbridge, County Kildare, in view of the identified need for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2047/17]

**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.

### **National Positive Ageing Strategy Implementation**

170. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if he has communicated the revised arrangements for the implementation of the national positive ageing strategy to stakeholders; if stakeholders views on same will be taken into account before finalisation of the revised arrangements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2048/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health Deputy Helen McEntee:** The National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS), published on 24 April 2013, provides a framework for co-operation to address age-related policy and service delivery across Government and society in the years ahead. The Strategy is intended to promote older people's health and well being so that older people can continue to contribute to social, economic, cultural and family life in their own communities for as long as possible, thereby representing a vision for an age-friendly society. The Strategy highlights that ageing is not just a health issue, but rather requires a whole of Government approach to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and well-being of our ageing citizens. The Department of Health has an overall coordinating and collating role for the Strategy and a more direct role for the health-related objectives.

At the launch of the Strategy, a commitment was made to publish an Implementation Plan to facilitate the translation of the Goals and Objectives of the Strategy into action on the ground. The approach to implementation originally included in the Strategy would have worked where a finite number of discrete and concrete steps could be taken after which the implementation could be deemed complete. However, many of the objectives included in this Strategy are quite broad, and can be viewed as a set of principles to which Government has committed, and which will inform policies that affect older people on an indefinite basis into the future, rather than concrete objectives that can be delivered in the short term.

The Department has therefore formulated new arrangements to implement and monitor the implementation of the National Positive Ageing Strategy. The new proposals will see mechanisms established that will give stakeholder groups effective and on-going access to Government Departments and State Agencies relevant to older people. Structures will be established for engagement between relevant Government Departments and State Agencies and relevant stakeholders on how the Strategy's principles are being implemented. An Annual Forum for stakeholders will be established which will seek to identify what stakeholders consider to be their key priorities for Government for the coming year and the next three years. Issues will be considered on a thematic basis and will include Health, Social Protection, Transport, Security, Community Housing and Local Government, etc. Clear channels of communications will be established with relevant Government Departments assigning a named senior official to engage with stakeholder representatives on issues relevant to their remit.

The revised arrangements were approved by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on 27 October 2016. In advance of this, I held a meeting with organisations representing the needs and views of older people at which the organisations were informed of the plans for the revised implementation arrangements, including plans for an annual stakeholder forum. These plans were well received by the organisations, and it was agreed that an annual forum could be a useful tool in moving the implementation of the NPAS forward. Details of the new arrangements will be communicated to these stakeholders shortly and arrangements made to commence implementation. It is anticipated that the inaugural forum will take place in early 2017.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

171. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be provided a date for hip replacement surgery in St James's Hospital. [2057/17]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

172. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the primary care reimbursement department takes all steps necessary to ensure that the freestyle libre system of glucose monitoring (details supplied) is successfully added to the long-term reimbursement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2066/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal devices under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

173. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the hospital waiting lists in County Donegal that have availed of health care under the NTPF or the cross-Border health care directive for each of the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2068/17]

**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. In addition, I have also asked the NTPF to provide the information sought by the Deputy and I will forward this information to her as soon as it is available.

### **Hospital Beds Data**

174. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Carndonagh Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2069/17]

175. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Buncrana Community Nursing Unit, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2070/17]

176. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Ramelton Community Nursing Unit, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2071/17]

177. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Rock Community Nursing Unit, Ballyshannon, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2072/17]

178. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Donegal Town Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2073/17]

179. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Dungloe Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2074/17]

180. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Killybegs Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2075/17]

181. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Lifford Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2076/17]

182. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in Shiel Community Hospital, Ballyshannon, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form [2077/17]

183. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that were operational in St. Joseph's Community Hospital, Stranorlar, County Donegal, for each of the years 2006 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2078/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 to 183, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

184. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Carndonagh Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2079/17]

185. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Buncrana Community Nursing Unit, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2080/17]

186. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Ramelton Community Nursing Unit, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2081/17]

187. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Rock Community Nursing Unit, Ballyshannon, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2082/17]

188. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Donegal Town Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2083/17]

189. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Dungloe Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2084/17]

190. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Killybegs Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2085/17]

191. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Lifford Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2086/17]

192. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Shiel Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to

date in 2017, in tabular form. [2087/17]

193. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at St. Joseph's Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2088/17]

194. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Carndonagh Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2089/17]

195. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Buncrana Community Nursing Unit, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2090/17]

196. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Ramelton Community Nursing Unit, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2091/17]

197. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Rock Community Nursing Unit, Ballyshannon, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2092/17]

198. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Donegal Town Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2093/17]

199. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Dungloe Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2094/17]

200. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Killybegs Community Hospital, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2095/17]

201. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Lifford Community Hospital, County Donegal for each of the years 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form [2096/17]

202. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at Shiel Community Hospital, Ballyshannon, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2097/17]

203. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the overall number of staff employed at St Joseph's Community Hospital, Stranorlar, County Donegal, for each of the years from 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [2098/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 to 203, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Labour Court Recommendations**

204. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the steps the HSE has taken

to implement a recommendation of the Labour Court from 2011 (details supplied) in respect of a specific issue; the current position on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2133/17]

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

### **Medicinal Products**

205. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work being completed by his Department in respect of medicinal cannabis products; the status of the work being completed to review the evidence supporting cannabis-based products on the part of the Health Products Regulatory Authority, which is to make recommendations to him; if he has received these recommendations; if the way in which a person can make an application to him and the person that can make the application, such as the patient or clinician, has been decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2152/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** Cannabis is strictly controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 - 2016. However, I am conscious that some patients believe that cannabis should be available as a treatment for a range of medical conditions and I have initiated a review of policy in this area.

On 3 November 2016 I asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) for expert advice. The HPRA's statutory role is to protect and enhance human health by regulating medicines and other health products. In particular, I requested that the HPRA provide advice on recent developments in the use of cannabis for medical purposes including an overview of products that have been authorised in other countries and an overview of the wider on-going and emerging clinical research in new indications and evidence of efficacy. I have also requested information on the different regulatory regimes in place in countries which allow cannabis to be used for medicinal purposes. I expect to receive an initial report from the HPRA by the end of January. I will then be in a position to consider future policy and progress any legislative changes that may be appropriate.

In the meantime, while cannabis is very strictly controlled under current legislation, it is possible for a doctor to apply for a licence to treat a named patient with a cannabis-based product. To date, one application has been received and following review, a licence has been granted.

### **Drug and Alcohol Task Forces**

206. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the funding allocation in 2017 for the North East Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force in view of the increase in the number of persons accessing services that are funded through the task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2157/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** With effect from 1 January 2014, operational and financial responsibility for the North East Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force was transferred to the Health Service Executive. Therefore, this service matter has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

## **Health Care Policy**

207. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the health care system here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2159/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** The Programme for a Partnership Government committed to the establishment of an Oireachtas All-Party Committee to develop a long-term vision for healthcare and direction of health policy over a 10 year period, with cross-party support.

The Committee on the Future of Healthcare was established in June 2016 and has been specifically tasked with examining and costing different funding models for the health service and to make recommendations on a funding approach that is best suited to the Irish context. The Committee is due to report by 28 April 2017.

## **Hospice Services Provision**

208. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the full human resource requirements for the new dialysis unit at University Hospital Limerick will be provided by the HSE; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are concerns over the lack of extra nurses in view of the fact that the new unit is three times the size of the old unit. [2187/17]

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

## **Hospital Appointments Status**

209. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore. [2194/17]

**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.

## **Residential Institutions Data**

210. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of State-owned residential homes for persons with disabilities by county, in tabular form; and the number of residents in each at the end of 2010, 2013 and 2016. [2197/17]

**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 particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Nursing Home Beds Data**

211. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of State-owned nursing homes in each county and the bed capacity in each at the end 2010 and at the end of 2016, in tabular form. [2217/17]

**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.

### **Departmental Investigations**

212. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigation or inquiry in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2393/17]

**Minister for Health Deputy Simon Harris:** From time to time, a Minister for Health may seek a report into certain issues which may be carried out by Departmental staff, but in the main, bodies such as the Health Service Executive or the Health Information and Quality Authority carry out investigations or inquiries into health related issues.

I will survey the Department to ascertain if there are any such investigations or inquiries ongoing in the Department which have yielded costs to the exchequer. I will advise the Deputy separately of these details as soon as possible.

### **Departmental Staff Relocation**

213. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application (details supplied) under the central applications facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2065/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** Each Government Department holds lists of requests from Civil Servants to transfer to specific locations and a Central Applications Facility was also introduced as part of the Decentralisation Programme which was cancelled in November 2011. The information contained on these lists is dated and in many cases obsolete.

As part of the Civil Service Renewal Process, a review of transfer arrangements is taking place across the Civil Service. A new mobility portal is being developed as part of a revised

service wide mobility scheme and this portal will contain up to date information to facilitate an efficient transfer system. In the interim, my Department is reviewing historic transfer lists to identify officers interested in transferring to one of our locations. As I am sure you will appreciate, my Department has a large number of locations and this process requires significant resources. The applicant's current position on the transfer list for my Department's office in Clonakilty is number 11. My Department is reviewing its lists and will provide updated information to the applicant as soon as possible.

### **GLAS Applications**

214. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a GLAS payment. [2028/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue was identified with the Hen Harrier action. Department officials are examining this issue with a view to resolving and further processing the application for 2016 payment at the earliest opportunity.

### **TAMS Administration**

215. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the problems that are arising with TAMS II, whereby co-ops are providing loans to farmers to purchase equipment but the co-ops are still in ownership of the equipment and the farmers are being refused due to the fact they cannot provide proof of ownership (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2100/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** The Terms and Conditions of the TAMS II Scheme are very specific and state that applicants must have fully paid for the investments before grant aid issues. Only payments made prior to submission of the TAMS II payment claim can be considered as an eligible cost.

The extract from the Terms and Conditions states;

“Grant aid will not be paid in respect of new equipment or investments unless full ownership thereof has been transferred to the applicant prior to the lodgment of the payment claim. Full ownership is defined as when the applicant has fully paid for the investment”.

There are no plans to change these conditions.

### **TAMS Administration**

216. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will initiate an urgent review of the procedures involved in applying for TAMS grants in view of the experience of so many farmers frustrated by the bureaucracy involved and the resultant long delays in the issuance of payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2120/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** Applications for payment for investment work undertaken under the TAMS Schemes are lodged online. Each application is examined and payments are issued where the applications are deemed to be eligible and in order. In a certain number of cases there are issues which need to be resolved before payment can issue. In all cases where issues arise with payment claims Department officials are in direct contact with individual farmers to progress claims towards early payment.

### **Aquaculture Data**

217. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures his Department has taken to ensure that the organic status of fish products at a number of aquaculture sites is still valid in view of his Department's investigation of possible overstocking at these sites. [2124/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** My Department is currently examining possible overstocking in respect of certain aquaculture sites and pending completion of this examination it would not be appropriate to comment further. However, the organic status of all aquaculture products is secured by a separate formal certification process delegated by my Department to various Organic Control Bodies in accordance with the relevant EU regulations. The certification process involves regular inspection of all organic operators, production techniques and sampling of organic produce to ensure compliance with all EU requirements.

### **Aquaculture Development**

218. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures in place within his Department to ensure that the regulatory function in relation to aquaculture is conducted separately from the industry development function. [2125/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** Marine aquaculture licence applications are considered by my Department in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the 1933 Foreshore Act.

There is always a strict separation between my Ministerial role as decision maker in respect of aquaculture licence applications and my Ministerial duty to promote the sustainable development of the industry. This separation of duties is strictly observed.

### **Aquaculture Licences**

219. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he expects to amend the aquaculture licence held by a company (details supplied) at Lough Altan following the company's breach of licence conditions; and if he will publish the amendment. [2126/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** As the Deputy is aware, I have determined that an amendment to the aquaculture licence held by the Company in respect of its Lough Altan Hatchery would be appropriate. My Department is currently examining the nature of the proposed amendment and will be following up with the Company in relation to this matter.

### **Sea Lice Controls**

220. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider establishing an independent assessment body incorporating appropriate environmental representatives to oversee the management and control of sea lice infestation on salmon farms. [2127/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** Sea lice are a naturally occurring marine parasite of fish. Sea lice only affect fish and cause no harm to humans.

The Marine Institute carries out regular inspections of sea lice levels on all fish farms in Ireland in accordance with my Department's sea lice Monitoring Protocol (2000) and National Pest Control Strategy (2008). The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry; data obtained as a result of inspections is published; and treatment trigger levels are set at a low level. These controls are widely accepted as representing best practice internationally. Accordingly I do not believe that the proposal from the Deputy would advance the scientific or practical challenges in managing this issue.

### **Semi-State Bodies**

221. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the scientific advice available to his Department from the Marine Institute can be regarded as truly independent in view of the budgetary and staffing control which his Department has over the institute. [2128/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** The Marine Institute (MI) is a non commercial semi-state body, which was formally established by statute (Marine Institute Act, 1991) in October 1992. The Institute is the national agency responsible for marine research, technology, development and innovation (RTDI). The Institute works in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) and a network of other Government Departments, semi-state agencies, national and international marine partners.

The vision of the Marine Institute is; "a thriving maritime economy in harmony with the ecosystem and supported by the delivery of excellence in our services". In order to achieve this vision, the MI have six service areas; (1) Ocean Science and Information Services, (2) Marine Environment & Food Safety Services, (3) Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services, (4) Irish Maritime Development Office, (5) Policy, Innovation and Research Services and (6) Corporate Services. The Board of the Institute is fully accountable to the Government and produces its own annual report which is laid before the Oireachtas.

The Institute has developed a significant international reputation for the provision of objective independent scientific advice and plays a significant leadership role in the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), a global organization that develops science and advice to support the sustainable use of the oceans. It has also been successful in attracting significant international research funding which is independently awarded and assessed and its research work (and papers) is widely published internationally. The institute participates regularly in high profile international bodies including various committees related to implementation of UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the law of the seas) and AORA the Atlantic Ocean research alliance. The Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance Coordination and Support Action (AORA-CSA) is tasked with supporting the implementation of the Galway Statement on

Atlantic Ocean cooperation which was signed on 24 May 2013 during Ireland's Presidency of the EU and in which the institute played a leading role. This Statement establishes a formal Atlantic Ocean Research Cooperation between the European Union, its Member States, the United States of America and Canada and partner countries that builds on existing initiatives and programmes to increase coherence and coordination of ocean research cooperation.

The Institute seeks to assess and realise the economic potential of Ireland's 220 million acre marine resource; promote the sustainable development of marine industry through strategic funding programmes and scientific services; and safeguard the marine environment through research and environmental monitoring. The MI 3 Year Strategic Plan (2015-2018) is available at; [http://www.marine.ie/Home/sites/default/files/MIFiles/Docs\\_Comms/MI%20Strategic%20Business%20Plan%20-%202015%20-%202018.pdf](http://www.marine.ie/Home/sites/default/files/MIFiles/Docs_Comms/MI%20Strategic%20Business%20Plan%20-%202015%20-%202018.pdf).

### **Aquaculture Licence Applications**

222. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number times his Department's aquaculture licensing division met with a company (details supplied) during 2015 and 2016; and if he will make the minutes of these meetings available. [2129/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** My Department's records indicate that the aquaculture licensing Division of my Department met with the Company referred to by the Deputy on six occasions over the period 2015-2016.

My Department's records of these meetings are available to the public subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and related legislation.

### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments**

223. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive an AEOS payment. [2142/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Payments issued for the 2011-2015 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As all AEOS 2 participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. Officials are working through these files and payment will issue as soon as possible.

### **Laboratory Facilities**

224. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department is conducting a review of the network of regional veterinary laboratories; the status of any review being undertaken; if he will maintain the current regional veterinary laboratory network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2150/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** The Depart-

ment tasked a working group, led by Prof. Alan Reilly, and comprising senior officials with undertaking a review of its laboratory services, including both its Central Laboratory complex in Backweston, Co. Kildare and its network of Regional Laboratories in Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Sligo. The ultimate objective of this review is to assist the Department in developing a long-term strategy for its laboratories that builds on existing capability and expertise in animal health, food safety and plant sciences, and ensures that it achieves both operational and scientific excellence.

The Working Group has presented a report to the Department, which makes recommendations on:

- Oversight and co-ordination of the laboratories activities
- Re-organisation of Divisions and support functions within the Central Laboratory complex
- Options for the future development of the Regional Laboratories – with a view to improving disease investigative and surveillance capability but with the over-riding imperative of maintaining and enhancing services to farmers and
- Human resources management within the laboratories - with a focus on grading structures, career development opportunities and workforce planning

Consultation on this report has commenced with the Department's laboratory-based staff. Further consultation will then take place with other stakeholders. A decision on implementation of these recommendations will await the outcome of this consultative process. In addition, as regards the Regional Laboratories, any decision will also be informed by a cost-benefit analysis of the various options that have been proposed.

### **Departmental Staff Recruitment**

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the publicjobs.ie recruitment campaign for technical agricultural officers; the place on the order of merit from stage 1 of candidates currently being called to stage 2; the number of candidates that have been employed; the number being recruited currently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2151/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** The competition to recruit Technical Agricultural Officers was administered by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Department. The post was advertised on 15th April 2016 with a closing date of 5th May.

All applicants were invited to participate in online psychometric testing and the top 150 candidates were invited to attend for retest. Candidates who successfully passed the retest were invited to interview and a panel of 65 candidates was formed.

Offers of appointment are made strictly on the basis of a person's placing on the panel in conjunction with the candidate's preferred location as originally indicated on the application form. In the event that a candidate refuses an offer of appointment to a specific location, the candidate retains his placing on the panel but forfeits the right to be offered any further vacancy in that location. Where a candidate accepts an offer of appointment, he/she undergoes a clearance process that includes verification of qualifications and experience and Garda vetting.

To date the Department has notified 38 vacancies to PAS and the process of offering positions to persons on the panel is underway. 15 candidates have taken up employment in the Department while a further 15 candidates have accepted offers of appointment and are undergoing the clearance process.

It is envisaged that further vacancies at Technical Agricultural Officer will arise and that a second batch of candidates will be called to interview in due course.

### **Fishing Industry**

226. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the future of Ireland's fishing functions in a post-Brexit, newly configured EU context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2190/17]

227. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position of his Department with regard to the fisheries industry in a post-Brexit context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2191/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 226 and 227 together.

The outcome of the UK Brexit referendum last year is obviously foremost in our minds and in Government it is very much a priority. It poses enormous challenges for the Irish agri-food sector as a whole including the fisheries sector. However, potentially, depending on what the UK seeks to do once they trigger Article 50 later this year, there are additional and unique challenges for our fishing industry.

Fish stocks are a shared resource managed under the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union. Nearly all of the main commercial stocks upon which the Irish fisheries sector is reliant are shared to some degree with the UK. In addition, many of our traditional fishing grounds lie within UK waters. Any change to the existing situation could have very serious negative consequences for our fleets.

My Department, together with its agencies and stakeholders, has been considering all of the potential impacts, looking at the areas where the greatest risks will arise and on which we will need to focus when the negotiations begin. Ensuring that our fishing interests are reflected in the overall EU negotiating position will be a key priority.

I have established a dedicated Brexit unit in my Department, and a consultative committee of stakeholders has been convened in order to ensure a full exchange of information as negotiations proceed. I have also organised a dedicated Dialogue on Sea Fisheries for the 1st of February to enable stake holders to meet and discuss the impact of Brexit on the fishing industry.

I will remain in close contact with fisheries stakeholders as the issues develop and work with them and my fellow fisheries Ministers in the EU to ensure that we are all fully prepared for what are likely to be extremely complex negotiations.

### **Aquaculture Licences**

228. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all the submissions made to the group reviewing aquaculture licensing will be published. [2220/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** An independent group was appointed to carry out a review of the aquaculture licensing process on the 20th of December last. The Independent Review Group is currently holding a public consultation inviting submissions on matters relevant to review, which will close on the 10th February next. This Public Consultation was advertised in the Irish Independent on Tuesday, January 10th last and details of the consultation are also hosted on the Fishingnet.ie website. According to these sources, which are publically available: “All submissions may be published”. Any publication carried out will be done in compliance with the relevant legislation and associated procedures, including Freedom of Information, Access to Information on the Environment and Data Protection.

The decision as to the publication of information received during the public consultation is at the sole discretion of the Independent group, who if they decide to do so, will do so in compliance with the relevant legislative obligations.

### **Departmental Investigations**

229. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2387/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Deputy Michael Creed:** I wish to advise the Deputy that there are no on-going investigations or inquiries within my Department.

### **Gas Networks Ireland**

230. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide the full remit of Bord Gáis in terms of gas safety, including any responsibility with regard to gas leaks, meter replacement and gas supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2038/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Deputy Denis Naughten:** I assume the Deputy is referring to Gas Networks Ireland (GNI), formerly Bord Gáis Éireann, which is a commercial State-sponsored Body under the aegis of the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. GNI is the operator of the gas transmission and distribution networks. It does not engage in the sale of gas to customers. Its functions in relation to safety are provided for in the Gas Act 1976, as amended by the Gas (Interim) (Regulation) Act 2002.

Gas Networks Ireland holds both Asset Owner and Asset Operator Licences for the Natural Gas Transmission and Distribution networks. These licences are granted by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), the independent energy regulator. Gas Networks Ireland’s obligations under the licences are extensive and include responsibility, inter alia, for ensuring overall standards and performance of the transmission and distribution systems, managing all connections to the networks, providing metering and data services, adhering to system standards and operating security standards, procuring the management of the customer service code and safety matters.

Responsibility for the regulation of the gas markets including safety, metering and supply is a matter for the CER. The Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 provides for CER’s independence in the performance of its regulatory functions, and for its accountability for the perfor-

mance of its functions to a Joint Committee of the Oireachtas. Accordingly, I have no function in the areas referred to.

### **National Broadband Plan**

231. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if upgrade works on the national broadband scheme will take place in the Gaeltacht area of Lambay, Cill Bhrí, Trim, County Meath (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2062/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Deputy Denis Naughten:** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment in Broadband through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) shows the extent of the State Intervention area.

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. Investment decisions by the telecommunications networks providers in these areas are taken on commercial grounds by each network operator.

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention which are the subject of the current procurement process.

The area referred to by the Deputy falls within an AMBER area and will therefore be included in the State Intervention procurement process under the NBP. Individuals can check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode.

A formal procurement process is now in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The Department will also shortly update the High Speed Broadband map and finalise this Intervention Area for bidders, taking into account any industry investments that have not materialised and potential other new investments.

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. Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. This provides for a future proofed

solution for the 25 years of the contract and beyond. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

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 a further positive initiative, last July, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce with my colleague Minister Humphreys to address immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage. The Taskforce report, which was published in December, is available at the following link: [www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx](http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx).

I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country, including County Meath.

## **Energy Usage**

232. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has satisfied himself that the ESB is in compliance with EU Directive 2004/ 22/ EC and CER/13/281 (details supplied) in view of information that emerged at the end of December 2016 that 27,000 meters maintained by the ESB contained a fault thought to be caused by deterioration in one of the components which causes the meter to over record; and the steps he will take to ensure compliance by the ESB with these rules. [2117/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Deputy Denis Naughten:** Responsibility for the regulation of the electricity market under the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), which is an independent statutory body. I have passed the Deputy's query to the CER for direct reply. I have no function in monitoring the accuracy of electricity meters.

EU Directive 2004/ 22/EC, the Measuring Instruments Directive (MID), as amended, is the European law that sets down, inter alia, the essential requirements for electricity meters prior to their placing on the market and putting into use. The Directive was transposed into Irish law by the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment via the Legal Metrology (European Conformity Assessment of Measuring Instruments) Regulations 2007. The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is the Government-appointed body responsible for overseeing the requirements of these EU Directives.

I understand that the CER's Metering Code for the Single Electricity Market (CER13/281) sets out the minimum standards for the measurement and recording of metered quantities of electricity for the purposes of electricity trading and transport in Ireland. Included in this Code is the specification of the conditions governing accuracy and calibration of electricity meters. Under this Code ESB Networks (ESBN) is responsible for matters in relation to meter approval, certification and testing. ESBN is also responsible for the installation and maintenance of all electricity meters, meter reading and ensuring the accurate recording of electricity consumption to the standards specified in the Code. The systems whereby ESBN discharges this responsibility are an operational matter for that company under the regulatory oversight of the CER. I have no function in this regard.

### **Departmental Investigations**

233. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2389/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Deputy Denis Naughten:** There are no on going investigations or Commissions of Inquiry in my Department.

### **Coras Iompair Éireann**

234. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount that was taken as reasonable profit by each of the three CIE constituent companies in each year from 2011 to 2016; the description of the concept of reasonable profit; and the purpose this profit is generally used for in view of the fact that these companies do not pay dividends to shareholders. [2031/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** EU Regulation 1370/2007 is the overarching legal framework governing the award of, and payment for, public transport services. This EU Regulation is supplemented here in Ireland by the statutory powers afforded to the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008.

The Annex to the EU Regulation establishes the rules applicable to the compensation paid to what are known as direct award operators. These are operators who have been directly awarded the right to operate public transport services rather than the award of those services having been subject to a tendering process.

These rules state that the compensation paid to operators under direct award contracts may not exceed an amount corresponding to what is known as the net financial effect and provide detail in relation to what comprises the net financial effect. Included within that net financial effect is the concept of "reasonable profit". It is defined as "a rate of return on capital that is normal for the sector in a given Member State and that takes account of the risk, or absence of risk, incurred by the public service operator by virtue of public authority intervention".

Decisions relating to the use of revenues and profits are matters for an individual company and its Board of Directors.

As the issues relating to the detail and award of reasonable profit are statutory functions of the NTA who administer and enforce the PSO contracts with the transport operators, I have

forwarded the Deputy's question to it for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Brexit Issues**

235. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the impact the result of the UK referendum on exiting the EU will have on TEN-T funding for current road and rail projects including the A5 motorway upgrade. [2032/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** The UK will remain a full Member State until it formally exits the EU.

There will be no impact on current projects where applications under TEN-T have been approved by the European Commission.

The planning and implementation of the A5 project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. The Irish Government's commitment to the A5 is as set out in the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start.

### **Transport Policy**

236. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether there will be increased opportunities for Ireland to be eligible for TEN-T designations and funding for the transport corridors due to the fact that Ireland will no longer be linked by land to any part of the EU, including ports such as Rosslare and connecting rail lines, such as Dublin to Rosslare Europort. [2033/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** As part of my Department's analyses of the impact of the exit of the UK from the EU, it is assessing both risks and opportunities that may arise. This includes potential risks and opportunities under TEN-T. However, the current TEN-T regulations and the infrastructure designated as part of the Comprehensive Network, such as Rosslare Port and the connecting rail lines, will remain as part of this network until such time as they have reached the minimum threshold for Core infrastructure as set out in the underlying planning methodology [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure/ten-t-guidelines/legal-basis\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure/ten-t-guidelines/legal-basis_en).

My officials are preparing for, and will monitor, the Article 50 negotiations and will be keeping under review any potential opportunities that may arise.

### **Road Projects**

237. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a list of all roads that are currently in receipt of TEN-T or INTERREG 111A/IVA funding from the EU with a column showing the euro amount that has been invested in each road through each programme to date. [2035/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** My understanding is that no road schemes are currently in receipt of TEN-T or INTERREG 111A/IVA funding from the EU.

TII has advised that it made a preliminary application in December 2016 notifying its intention to apply in 2017 for funding for the M50 Variable Speed Limit project. I am advised by TII that even if this application is successful, no monies would be received under this funding stream in 2017.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

238. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects to announce decisions on the review of the transport elements of the capital plan announced in September 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2053/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** The review of the capital plan announced as part of the Budget is expected to commence in the first half of this year. Transport will be a major priority in the review. Decisions on the transport elements of the capital will be announced when review is complete.

### **Planning Issues**

239. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are any set rules or guidelines with regard to the N11 to preclude a developer putting access to a new housing development from the N11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2056/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** The Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines issued by the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 are aimed at aligning road planning and policy and development planning. The Guidelines were, I understand, prepared by the then Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in consultation with local authorities, my Department and the then National Roads Authority (now TII). They now fall within the responsibilities of the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

The Guidelines indicate that development plans and local area plans should include policies aimed at maintaining the safety and capacity of national roads (such as the N11) by avoiding the creation of additional access points and the generation of additional traffic from existing access points on roads where a speed limit greater than 50 km/h applies.

While I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme, the planning, design and operation of individual road projects (including the N11 scheme) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question regarding the N11 specifically to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Bus Services**

240. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a bus service; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [2060/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** I am not aware of any such review of the services in question.

These services form part of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus network which Bus Éireann operates under contract with the National Transport Authority (NTA). Following an NTA -led review of public transport services in 2015 in County Kerry, Bus Éireann announced a number of bus service improvements and enhancements across the county.

Issues in relation to the PSO bus network in the county are a matter for the 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.

### **Tourism Policy**

241. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policies he and his Department are pursuing to ensure that County Kildare benefits from the increase in tourist numbers occurring especially in visitors to Dublin city in view of the fact that Maynooth has secured the purple flag status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2099/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan) :** The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the boards and management of the two tourism agencies - Tourism Ireland in regard to overseas tourism marketing and Fáilte Ireland in regard to regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to both Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

### **Bus Éireann Services**

242. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure that there is no reduction in Bus Éireann Expressway services in view of the importance of these services for rural Ireland; the measures he will introduce to support these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2154/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** As the Deputy is aware, Bus Éireann is developing plans to address its financial position. The Company is currently loss-making and these losses are not sustainable.

Last week I met with the Chair of the Company who briefed me on the very serious situation the Company faces and how the Board is resolved to address the situation and to restore the company to a sustainable position. The Chair indicated that an invitation would issue shortly to trade unions to commence discussions on the available options.

I am firmly of the belief that difficult issues such as this can only be resolved through open, constructive and realistic engagement between the company and its employees and I encourage both sides to engage constructively on the matter.

Separately I also met with the National Transport Authority who outlined to me their pow-

ers and responsibilities in relation to the provision of public transport services. I was assured by the NTA that it will work with local communities to maintain an appropriate level of public transport connectivity in the event of any reconfiguration of existing services.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

243. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to ongoing vandalism and anti-social behaviour that could jeopardise the provision of services to green line Luas stations beyond Sandyford; and the actions his Department is undertaking to deal with them under the Railways Acts. [2186/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** This issue was raised with me earlier this week and I understand there have been some recent incidents in relation to ‘stone throwing’. Transdev, the Luas operator, is working with local community groups in relation to the issue.

Anti-social behaviour is first and foremost a matter for Transdev as the Luas operator in conjunction with, as appropriate, the Garda.

The Deputy is aware that Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has statutory responsibilities in relation to the oversight of contractual matters relating to Luas and I have therefore forwarded the Deputy’s question to TII for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Departmental Investigations**

244. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2398/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Deputy Shane Ross:** The cost incurred to the exchequer on the Moran Inquiry (Rio Olympic Games Ticketing) to end of December 2016 was €9,200. Final costs are expected to be substantially higher.

### **Departmental Investigations**

245. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2394/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor:** I am interpreting the Deputy’s question as relating to the costs to the Exchequer of any ongoing statutory enquiries or investigations. There have been no costs incurred by my Department in relation to ongoing statutory enquiries or investigations.

### **Child Protection Services Provision**

246. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further

to Parliamentary Question No. 50 of 8 November 2016, if the evaluation report has been reviewed, as suggested by her; if so, the findings; and if not, when the report will be reviewed. [2025/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Deputy Katherine Zappone:** As advised in my response to the Deputy in November 2016, the final evaluation report on the Centres, published by One Family in March 2014, recommended that an integrated response by my Department, the Department of Justice and Equality, supported by their relevant agencies (i.e. The Child and Family Agency, the Courts Service, the Probation Service, the Legal Aid Board, the Family Mediation Service, and COSC) would be the best approach to progressing the recommendations.

I wrote to my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality in June 2016 regarding the final evaluation report of the pilot project. I have suggested that together our Departments might review the evaluation report in light of changing infrastructural arrangements such as the establishment of the Child and Family Agency and the proposed Family Courts Service. I will follow up further with the Minister for Justice and Equality in this regard, and remain committed to examining the potential for advancing further consideration of the final evaluation report's recommendations.

### **Child Care Services Regulation**

247. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will re-examine the 2016 child care regulation stipulating that only staff with a major level 5 qualification in early childhood care and education can be included in adult to child ratios. [2026/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The majority of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 came into effect on 30th June 2016.

The Regulations provide that each employee working directly with children attending the service must hold at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. The Regulations clearly state that the service provider must ensure that their staff meet this standard. This section of the regulations took effect on 30th June 2016 for services registering after that date and for all other services on 31st December 2016.

My Department introduced this regulatory change following many years consultation with the sector. Mindful of the challenge that it would present to the sector, my Department introduced the following supportive measures:

- Learner Funds to provide sector workers with an opportunity to upskill to a Level 5 qualification.

- The Regulations provide an exemption up to 1st September 2021 for certain existing childcare staff who intend to retire from the sector in the near future, do not hold the minimum qualification and who do not wish to undertake a course of training at this stage. This option was first publicised through the City / County Childcare Committees in 2014. The Regulations stipulate that persons wishing to avail of this exemption must, by 30th June 2016, have signed the necessary declaration and be in possession of a letter from the Minister confirming that the exemption had been granted.

Given the considerable lead-in time, during which the sector was aware that a minimum qualification requirement was going to be introduced, I do not consider there is any justification

for amending the Regulations. Staff who have completed a relevant award at NFQ Level 5 or above by the 31st of December, or who were granted an exemption before the 30th June 2016, will meet the regulatory standard. Staff who are currently undergoing education to achieve a Level 5 award will not meet the regulatory standard until that award has been achieved.

### **Child Care Services Regulation**

248. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will implement the proposals put forward by a women's centre (details supplied) in a recent submission relating to the 2016 child care regulation requirements. [2027/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The majority of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 came into effect on 30th June 2016.

The Regulations provide that each employee working directly with children attending the service must hold at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. The Regulations clearly state that the service provider must ensure that their staff meet this standard. This section of the regulations took effect on 30th June 2016 for services registering after that date and for all other services on 31st December 2016.

In light of the implementation of the Childcare Regulations, from December 31st 2016, Community Employment Scheme participants working in childcare services who do not have relevant childcare qualifications can no longer count towards the ratio of staff to children required.

The Department is aware that some community/not-for-profit services have relied on Community Employment workers as a core component of their business model. The Department commissioned Childcare Committees Ireland (CCI) to investigate the extent of likely issues and to work with community childcare services to minimise the impact of this change.

As of end 2016, 201 Community Services had undertaken a review. Of these, CCI have indicated that 60 are likely to be significantly impacted by the qualifications requirement. The Department has indicated that funding may be available to assist these services, and is currently considering proposals in this regard.

CCI, with the approval of Early Years Unit of the Department, have developed a business planning/cost analysis template and is continuing to work with services to identify a sustainable path forward, incorporating the cost of staff to replace CE scheme workers, based on a 'cost per FTE child' analysis.

I have no plans to amend the regulations as they apply to Community Employment Scheme Workers.

### **Garda Vetting of Personnel**

249. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in view of the fact that Tusla currently applies for Garda vetting for its employees, that is, for the pre-school inspectorate and that Tusla is the inspector of early years services' Garda vetting, if the Tusla Garda vetting facility can be opened up to early years services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2058/17]

250. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in view of the fact that Pobal currently applies for Garda vetting for its employees and Pobal administers funding to early years services' Garda vetting, if the Pobal Garda vetting facility can be opened up to early years services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2059/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 249 and 250 together.

Two organisations are funded by this Department to process vetting applications on behalf of the early years sector. These organisations are Early Childhood Ireland and Barnardos. Neither Tusla nor Pobal have responsibility for processing Garda Vetting applications on behalf of the Early Years sector.

I am aware that there have been difficulties in relation to obtaining vetting disclosures for staff. I have provided additional funding to both Early Childhood Ireland and Barnardos to assist the clearance of the backlog of vetting applications that built up during the changeover from paper to e-vetting. In addition, officials from my Department will be meeting with both organisations in the next few weeks to discuss the administration of vetting applications, with the objective of endeavouring to ensure that the process works as efficiently as possible in the interest of early years services and the children attending those services.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

251. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when back pay will issue to certain members of the Defence Forces (details supplied). [2116/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence Deputy Paul Kehoe:** On 27th September 2010 the Adjudicator under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force awarded an increase in the Army Ranger Wing allowance. This award is backdated to 1 June 2006. The Adjudicator's Findings cannot be implemented having regard to the provisions of Sections 2 and 5 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No 2) Act 2009.

This adjudication is part of the outstanding adjudication findings covered under paragraph 1.16 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014. Paragraph 5.3 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018, known as the Lansdowne Road Agreement, states that "The Parties have agreed that any outstanding adjudications as referred to in paragraph 1.16 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 will be reviewed jointly by the Parties prior to the expiry of this agreement." The review mechanism is the subject of ongoing consideration in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Defence Forces Medicinal Products**

252. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on a statement made by the German Minister of Defence (details supplied) regarding Lariam; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2193/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence Deputy Paul Kehoe:** The choice of malaria chemoprophylaxis for use by other armed forces is an internal matter for those forces. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on another State's policy in this regard. Malaria is a serious disease which killed approximately 438,000 people in 2015, with 90% of deaths

occurring in sub-Saharan Africa as reported by the World Health Organisation. It is a serious threat to any military force operating in the area.

There are three anti-malarial drugs in use by the Irish Defence Forces, namely Lariam (mefloquine), Malarone and Doxycycline. The choice of medication is a medical decision made by Medical Officers in the Defence Forces, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Defence Forces.

Significant precautions are taken by Defence Forces Medical Officers in assessing the medical suitability of members of our Defence Forces to take any of the anti-malarial medications. It is the policy of the Defence Forces that personnel are individually screened for fitness for service overseas and medical suitability. I am advised that Mefloquine is listed by the World Health Organisation in its International Travel and Health Handbook as one of the anti-malarial drugs for use as prophylaxis. The use of and information on medications is kept under ongoing review.

The health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a high priority for me and the Defence Forces.

### **Departmental Investigations**

253. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost to the Exchequer of any ongoing investigations or inquiries in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2390/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Professional assistance has been engaged in relation to personnel investigations pertaining to the Defence Forces. My Department paid a total of €23,954 for services in respect of one such matter while services in respect of a second investigation have not yet been the subject of an invoice or payment.