

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 7, inclusive, answered orally.

Labour Activation Measures

8. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the timeline for the procurement process for future employment services; if a payments-by-results model for employment services will be sought despite the unsuitability of this model having been demonstrated in other jurisdictions including here; if the new model will acknowledge distance travelled by which the focus is on the development of the individual as opposed to the sole focus being on the end result of obtaining work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15368/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is considering different options on the structure of any future contracts and potential models for the public employment service for the period post 2019. My Department is progressing this matter with a view to having contracted public employment services in place from the start of 2020 and will continue to engage in the interim with the relevant stakeholders to the extent that is appropriate under EU procurement guidelines.

The future model for the public employment service will be guided by the dual principles of providing all those seeking employment with the most appropriate assistance, while ensuring, on behalf of taxpayers, a service that is effective and that provides value for money.

While my Department will continue to consider appropriate payment models for the future procurement of contracted public services, I would like to remind the Deputy that, contrary to the assertion in his question, JobPath has been a good example of how a payment by results model can work effectively. Ireland had the benefit of learning from the experiences of other jurisdictions when designing the payment model for JobPath services. This enabled my Department to procure a service that was based on paying JobPath providers when their clients secured proven sustained, full-time, employment. My Department also created inbuilt rigorous inspection and complaints systems to ensure JobPath providers met the high standards set for them.

I share the Deputy's wish that any new model should have the capacity to measure the distance travelled by those furthest from the labour market and this will be at the forefront of my Department's thinking on any future contracting.

Questions Nos. 9 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Jobseeker's Payments

13. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the date for the publication of the report into the impact of reduced jobseeker's payments for persons aged 18 to 25 years of age which was due to be published two years ago; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15640/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Reduced rates for young recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) aged 18-25 were introduced on a phased basis to tackle high youth unemployment and prevent long term welfare dependency, and this is in line with practice in other EU and OECD jurisdictions. If a young jobseeker participates in education or training they will receive the maximum weekly rate of payment of €203. This includes the €5 weekly increase applied from last week, which I secured as part of Budget 2019.

There are a number of measures in place to assist young people into employment or training. In 2013 the EU adopted a Council Recommendation to member states on a Youth Guarantee. Under the Youth Guarantee process case officers engage with unemployed young people, on a monthly basis, to prepare and implement personal progression plans for employment.

Where young people do not find work quickly, additional supports are offered through places on employment and training schemes, which are closely aligned to the needs of the labour market. I also recently launched the Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) which is a work experience scheme targeted exclusively at young jobseekers facing barriers to employment. Participants receive a payment of €229.20 per week.

These policies have been effective in reducing both youth and long-term unemployment. For example, the most recent data shows that Irish youth unemployment has fallen from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 13.4% in March 2019. Irish youth unemployment has fallen from well above the EU average in 2012 of 23% to below the current EU figure of 14.9%.

As an input to our review of the impact of the changed payment rates the National University of Ireland, Maynooth undertook research which examined the effectiveness of the reduced rates in encouraging young jobseekers to avail of education, training and employment. This research was completed in late 2018 and found very positive results for those 18 year olds on JA at the age related reduced rate, noting a significant reduction from 111 weeks to approximately 50 weeks in unemployment durations. The detailed findings in the report will be used to inform my Department's own review report which will be completed in the coming months. I will arrange to provide a summary of the NUIM findings to the Deputy.

Question No. 14 answered with Question No. 6.

Disability Allowance

15. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to revise the method by which capital is assessed for those in receipt of disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15509/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department operates a range of means-tested social assistance payments. Social welfare legislation provides that the means test takes account the income and assets of the person (and spouse / partner, if applicable) applying for the relevant scheme. Income and assets include

income from employment, self-employment, occupational pensions, maintenance payments as well as property owned (other than the family home) and capital such as savings, shares and other investments.

The assessment of capital reflects the fact that there is an expectation that people with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

Disability allowance (DA) has the most generous capital disregard of any scheme operated by the Department. A recipient can have up to €50,000 in savings and still receive the full rate of payment. This is compared to €20,000 for most social welfare payments.

Any proposals to change the capital means assessment for means-tested social assistance schemes would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

It should also be noted that people receiving Disability Allowance (DA) may also be eligible for secondary benefits such as free travel, fuel allowance, the household benefits package, living alone allowance and the telephone support allowance.

In addition to this, DA recipients may also work and earn up to €120 per week without their payment being affected.

Question No. 16 answered with Question No. 12.

Employment Rights

17. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review legislation for the protection of the rights of migrant workers engaged in seasonal work on short-term contracts of less than six months duration with a view to strengthening regulations. [15606/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland has a comprehensive body of employment legislation, in respect of which the Workplace Relations Commission is mandated to secure compliance.

Ireland's employment rights legislation protects all employees, including migrant workers, who are legally employed on a contract of service basis. This is specifically set out in Section 20 of the Protection of Employment (Part Time Work) Act, 2001.

Some employment legislation requires that a worker be employed for at least 1 year before they are in a position to take a claim to the Workplace Relations Commission. This would include the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015 and Redundancy Payments Acts 1967-2014. Obviously seasonal employment by its very nature may preclude such workers from bringing a claim under these Acts, but this situation applies to all employees, regardless of status, who are employed for less than 1 year.

Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees they may refer a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication leading to a decision that is enforceable through the District Court. WRC inspectors can also be asked to investigate certain breaches. Complaints can be made on a single online complaint form available at the WRC's website www.workplacelrelations.ie.

The Workplace Relations Customer Service Section can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or via its website www.workplacerelements.ie.

My Department continuously monitors existing employment rights legislation to ensure that it continues to be relevant and fit for purpose and is updated to reflect international developments at European Union, Court of Justice and International Labour Organisation level.

If the Deputy has evidence of specific instances of abuses concerning migrant workers, I would appreciate it if she would direct them to either the WRC or to my office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

18. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when application forms for the State pension (contributory) review will be made available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15365/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement based on post Budget 2012 rate-bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods.

Wherever possible reviews will be processed using information already held by my Department. In some cases additional information is being requested to ensure people receive the best rate possible. Paper application forms are available on request and have been issuing to pensioners since the middle of February. Almost 7,200 forms have issued and as at 2 April 2019 just over 4,600 have been returned. I would urge anyone who has yet to provide additional requested information to the Department to do so as soon as possible so that their review can be processed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

19. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the contracts with JobPath providers will expire; when a decision on the future of the scheme will be made; if the recent Dáil Éireann motion on the issue will be taken into account; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15655/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The JobPath employment service commenced in 2015 and under the terms of the contracts signed with the providers will run for a total of at least six years. This is comprised of two phases; phase one entails four years of client referrals to the end of 2019, while phase two entails a 'run off' period during which employment support will be continued but no additional clients will be referred to JobPath. The contract includes an option to extend the term of referrals for a period no greater than two years.

The process of procuring contracted public employment services for 2020 and beyond is still in its early stages and my officials are working to design a procurement model that will bal-

ance the need for value for money for taxpayers with the importance of preserving high-quality employment advisory and counseling services.

No decisions yet have been taken in this regard, but my Department is currently considering how best to adapt our employment services provision in light of the changing economic circumstances, including how we can best provide employment services to those most distant from the labour market and to people who have not previously availed of these services.

The Government's position on the recent motion debated in the House on the JobPath service was clearly set out in my contribution at the time. I note the views of the House on the matter. However, the position of the Government remains unchanged. The Government is determined that all jobseekers in receipt of welfare payments will have access to and receive a good-quality, case manager based, employment advisory service. This means that we cannot afford, nor should we, reduce case officer capacity. JobPath employs about 600 staff in the provision of such services and, in the absence of alternatives it is not an option to withdraw this service in an unplanned manner. In addition the Department has entered into legally binding agreements with the JobPath providers and the Government will honour these contractual commitments.

JobPath Data

20. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to JobPath since 2015; the number of those that have commenced employment which has been sustained for 12 months or more; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15637/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The primary purpose of JobPath is to provide a case management based, employment advice and counseling service to long term unemployed jobseekers. This is the group of jobseekers that faces the most significant barriers to entering full-time employment.

Between July 2015 and March 2019, some 216,546 jobseekers had commenced their engagement period with the JobPath service. Of this number, 52% were over three years unemployed and a further 10% were over two years unemployed. These groups face significant barriers when seeking to enter or return to employment in the open labour market.

Some 48,792 had commenced employment during their engagement period with almost 13,000 sustaining full time employment for a period of 12 months or more.

It should be noted that these figures are representative of the entire cohort of JobPath clients to date and all job starts in the same period. Many clients who are still currently engaged with JobPath are in the first phase of the service and have not spent sufficient time with the service to have gained employment or sustain that employment for up to 52 weeks.

Between July 2015 and the end of December 2017 - a time period where the full impact of JobPath and job sustainment can now be measured - 146,776 jobseekers, mostly more than two years unemployed, had engaged with the JobPath service of whom 37,522 (23%) had commenced employment. To date 12,711 of these clients (34% of those who started employment) have sustained full time employment for a period of 12 months or more. These employment start and sustainment rates are significantly higher than the historical counterfactual level prior to JobPath employment progression rates for this group - even during periods of economic growth - were as low as 9%.

Job sustainment performance across the entire cohort is expected to improve as more clients complete their engagement with the service and have the opportunity to reach 52 weeks in sustained employment.

Question No. 21 answered with Question No. 12.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

22. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress being made to address the entitlements of those whose profession is of a sporadic nature and the stress this causes for persons, for example, in the acting profession; and her plans to extend the arts scheme for longer than a year. [15646/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The main social welfare supports for unemployed people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment are the jobseeker’s allowance (JA) and jobseeker’s benefit (JB) schemes.

A pilot initiative to assist self-employed visual artists and writers who apply to my Department for JA was launched in June 2017. The initiative involved collaboration between my Department and what is now the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with the support and advice of the Arts Council. It was agreed after a process of consultation that the initiative would apply to members of Visual Arts Ireland and the Irish Writers Centre. The pilot gives recipients 12 months to focus on building up their work and develop their creative potential before they are subject to activation. A total of some 90 people have participated in this pilot since its introduction.

My Department is currently reviewing this pilot and its findings will inform any decisions on the future and its extension to professional artists in other disciplines.

While actors, including those which are self-employed, are not in a position to access this pilot they may qualify for JA or JB provided they satisfy the conditionality of the scheme. Both schemes provide significant support allowing individuals to work up to 3 days a week and still retain access to a reduced jobseeker’s payment. In addition the Government has agreed to introduce a social insurance based JobSeeker Benefit scheme for people who are self-employed. The terms of this scheme are being finalised and will be published shortly. As many people in the arts sector are self-employed this will be of benefit to them.

I would advise that any person experiencing unemployment, including actors whose employment is of a sporadic nature, to engage with their local Intreo office for support.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

23. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to introduce flexibility and support in the social protection system for persons with mental health difficulties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15363/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides a range of income supports for those who are unable to work due to an illness or disability. Entitlement to these supports is not contingent on the nature of the illness or disability itself but on the extent to which a person’s capacity to work is restricted by illness or disability.

The Make Work Pay report for People with Disabilities, published in April 2017, identified the need for flexibility in both the income support and the health, namely medical card, systems. This is particularly the case where a person with a disability takes up a job but that job does not work out.

Anxiety in such circumstances can be particularly pronounced among those with mental health issues, given the episodic nature of such conditions. While work is on-going, in line with recommendations of the Make Work Pay report, a number of changes have already been implemented by my Department to support persons in such circumstances. These include:

- a 'fast-track return to disability allowance' protocol has been put in place should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable;
- people who are participating on the partial capacity benefit scheme may return to illness benefit or invalidity pension if they find that they cannot continue to work;
- people with a long-term disability who take up employment will retain their Free Travel Pass for a period of five years;
- a "Benefits of Work" calculator for persons with a disability is now available on the Department's website to help people calculate the net benefit of entering or returning to work;
- the requirement that work be of a 'rehabilitative' nature, where a person in receipt of Disability Allowance wishes to undertake employment, has been removed.

The Department of Health also recently introduced a significant improvement to the medical card assessment process which will enable persons in receipt of a Disability Allowance payment to have a greater earnings capacity and still retain their medical card. The medical card earnings disregard for persons in receipt of Disability Allowance has been significantly increased from €120 to €427 per week.

In addition, the Department has also supported the HSE in its roll out of its Individual Placement Service, or IPS. The IPS model of support is an evidence based approach to supporting persons who experience mental health difficulties. The model of support aims to improve the mental health outcomes for persons availing of the service as well as to increase the likelihood they will access employment. This service will be available in all HSE Community Healthcare Organisation areas in 2019.

Pension Provisions

24. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the operation of pension schemes for retired members of semi-State organisations; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that one fifth of these pensioners are on a pension of less than €12,000 per annum and many have not received a pension increase in recent years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15371/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has no role in setting the level of pensions received by members of occupational pension schemes. Pension increases for occupational pensions are entirely a matter for the scheme trustees and the sponsoring employer.

If any individual has evidence that pension scheme trustees are not acting in the best interests of scheme members they should complain to the scheme trustees in the first instance. If

the complainant is not satisfied with the trustees' reply they should raise their concerns with the Pensions Authority.

If a person does not qualify for a State pension (contributory) and does not have sufficient means, they may qualify for a means-tested State pension (non-contributory) instead. This is paid at a rate of up to 95% that of the State pension (contributory), with 70% of such pensioners receiving the maximum rate of payment. The rate a person receives will depend upon their means. This is based upon (a) their cash income, (b) the value of capital they have (for example, savings, investments, cash on hand and property but not their own home), and (c) income from property personally used. The highest rate of payment, for those with means of up to €30.00 per week, is €237, although someone with means under €257.50 weekly (€13,390 per annum) may qualify for a reduced rate of payment, depending upon their circumstances.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Payments

25. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she has taken or is planning to take to accelerate the payment process for the working family payment (details supplied). [15599/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children. WFP is payable for a 52 week period from award date and a person must reapply at the end of this period to have their payment renewed.

My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made in a timely fashion.

The average waiting time for processing new WFP applications is currently 7 weeks.

All possible steps are being taken to improve processing times in this area. All available staff are assigned to claims processing to ensure that new applications are dealt with as quickly as possible. As a consequence of the above measures, it is expected that WFP new application processing times will continue to improve in the coming weeks.

WFP renewal forms are issued to customers 8 weeks before the expiry of the 52 week period and these applications are generally processed in advance of the expiry date.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 6.

State Pensions

27. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to set up a taskforce which would consider the appropriate level of pensionable age and make recommendations in view of the way in which pension age increases were agreed without consultation or debate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15641/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): One of the key parameters in any pension system is setting the age at which a State pension can be drawn. To accommodate demographic ageing, all EU countries have undertaken, or have

scheduled, reforms to their State pension age. In Ireland, legislation that progressively increases the Irish State pension age to 68 in 2028 has already been enacted. However, it is recognised that over the longer term, increasing life expectancy may continue to outpace the increase in pension age.

A policy which sees Ireland linking the State pension age with life expectancy is a measure for Member States advocated at EU level and has also been recommended by the OECD. This change will provide greater certainty and sufficient 'lead in' time to allow individuals plan, both personally and financially, for their retirement. It may also assist workers and employers in their considerations regarding any amendments to the terms of employment contracts.

Therefore, to put in place a fair, transparent and clearly understandable framework underpinning the State pension age, the Government committed in the "Roadmap for Pension Reform" published last year that there would be no further increases to the State Pension Age prior to 2035, other than those increases already provided for in 2021 and 2028.

Any change to the State pension age after 2035 will be directly linked to increases in life expectancy. This will begin with an assessment of life expectancy in 2022 to include a review of the proportionality between time spent in working life and retirement. At that point, informed by the review and assessment, a notice period of no less than 13 years will be given in respect of any planned changes to the State pension age before implementation occurs. Thereafter a similar assessment of life expectancy will take place every 5 years.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

28. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the possibility of increasing the financial thresholds for carer's allowance will be investigated; if the introduction of discretionary assessments in cases of extreme extenuating circumstances, similar to the discretionary system utilised in the medical card application process, will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15644/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means tested payment, made to people who are providing full-time care and attention to elderly people or to people with disabilities and whose income falls below certain limits. The principal conditions for receipt of the allowance are that full time care and attention is required and being provided and that the means test which applies is satisfied.

The conditions attached to payment of CA are consistent with the overall conditions that apply to social assistance payments generally. This system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need with the means test playing the critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency - be that illness/disability, unemployment or caring.

At the end of December 2018, there were 79,914 people in receipt of CA. The projected expenditure on CA in 2019 is almost €840 million.

Decisions on claims are made by deciding officers of the Department in line with current legislative provisions.

The means test for Carer's Allowance is one of the most generous in the social protection system in that €332.50 of gross weekly income is disregarded in the calculation of means for a

single person; the equivalent for someone who is married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting is €665 of combined gross weekly income. A married couple with 2 children could have weekly earnings of €734 net of PRSI, superannuation and union subscription costs and still qualify for the full rate of Carer's Allowance. This is equivalent to over €38,000 per annum.

Any changes to scheme criteria would have to be considered in an overall Budgetary context.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

29. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will amend the Vote of her Department to include the full Christmas payment from budget 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15370/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Christmas Bonus payment is made to long-term social welfare recipients, such as pensioners, carers, people with disabilities, lone parents and long-term unemployed people who rely wholly or mainly on their social welfare payments for financial support.

The payment of a Christmas Bonus is a discretionary decision made by Government in the context of the annual Budget process and available resources. The level of payment made can vary annually and, in fact, was not paid at all in the period from 2009 to 2013. In this regard, it is not included in the Department's annual Estimates.

A decision to pay the bonus at Budget time must be consistent with the legal requirements set out in the Fiscal Responsibility Acts 2012 and 2013, and within the context of achieving targets set for Ireland by the EU rules.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

30. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the stage of the proposals to provide a free hot meal to every school child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10685/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,580 schools and organisations benefitting 250,000 children at a total cost of €57.6 million in 2019 representing an increase of €3.6 million over the previous year. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them.

As part of Budget 2019, it was announced that my department would commence a pilot scheme from September 2019, providing Hot School Meals in 36 schools for an estimated 7,200 children at a cost of €1m for 2019 and €2.5m in a full year.

The Programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement by children.

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Research shows us the value of the provision of adequate and nutritious meals for a child's health, learning, attention and educational achievement. That is why I am providing funds to establish a pilot programme for a hot meals scheme in primary schools.

Eligible primary schools will shortly be issued with an invitation to submit an Expression of Interest to participate in the pilot from September 2019. Funding of €2.90 per meal will be provided and it will not be permitted to seek an additional contribution from families to provide the meals. Schools will identify a supplier who will supply (prepare and deliver) the hot meals in line with HACCP and food safety regulations in compliance with the Healthy Ireland Nutrition Standards for School Meals.

Following the conclusion of the pilot at the end of the 2019/2020 academic year, an evaluation of the pilot scheme will be carried out. If successful, my Department would hope to work with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in extending the scheme on a much wider basis in future years and establish the scheme on a permanent basis.

State Pensions

31. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the review under way of entitlement to an increased rate of contributory pension; the number of cases that remain to be reviewed; when the review will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15530/19]

45. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of progress in completing the reviews for those in receipt of reduced pension amounts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15650/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 45 together.

Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement based on post Budget 2012 rate-bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods.

Reviews commenced from 13 February 2019, the day after I signed the necessary regulations which together with provisions in the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Act 2018, allows the increased payments to be made. The most recently available figures show that as at 2 April 2019, 13,915 reviews have been completed. Of these 75% have resulted in an increase in payment and 25% continue to receive their existing rate.

It will take a number of months to complete all the reviews due to the numbers involved and the individual nature of social insurance records. One hundred and twenty one temporary staff have been recruited to help with this work and at this stage it is anticipated that the reviews will be in the coming months when written outcomes will have issued to all pensioners involved.

Regardless of when a review is conducted, where an increase in payment is due, the person's rate of payment will be adjusted without delay and arrears issued backdated to 30 March 2018, or the pensioner's 66th birthday if later. Where a person's rate does not increase following a review, the person will continue to receive their existing rate of payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Telephone Support Allowance

32. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of full restoration of the telephone allowance including to those that may qualify but do not live alone; and her plans to address the issue in the next period. [15657/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The telephone allowance scheme was an element of the household benefits package (HHB). The decision to discontinue the telephone allowance was estimated to provide annual savings of €48 million at that time. These savings meant that my Department was able to retain the other valuable elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence.

The cost of the telephone allowance scheme had risen significantly each year, as the number of eligible customers grew. At the end of September 2013 before it was discontinued, there were almost 396,000 receiving the telephone allowance compared to approximately 316,000 people in 2007. This was an increase of 25%, or an average increase of nearly 4% per annum.

The value of the telephone allowance before it was discontinued was €9.50 per month (equivalent to €114 per annum). Therefore, the cost of restoring the allowance at this level in 2019 might be estimated at approximately €52 million per annum, although the precise figure would depend on a number of factors.

While the telephone allowance was an important measure for vulnerable persons, the nature of the market has been transformed in recent years with deregulation, mobile services and bundled services including television, broadband and telephone. It makes the former notion of an allowance covering handset rental, standing charges and a number of calls somewhat outdated, when similar assistance can be achieved by increasing the rate of core payments, which benefit people regardless of whether they have a landline or not, and which can be spent by the recipients either on their landline-related costs, or on an alternative good or service of their own choosing.

Any decision to restore the telephone allowance would require additional funding for the HHB scheme and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Separately, the new telephone support allowance (TSA) which was announced in Budget 2018 is a weekly payment of €2.50. The TSA is not the same as the Telephone Allowance that was part of the HHB package, and has different qualifying criteria to the HHB Package. Approximately 129,000 customers are in receipt of the TSA payment. The estimated full year cost of the scheme is over €16 million.

The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people at risk of isolation, including the elderly and those with disabilities, access to personal alarms or phones for security. The risk of social isolation is clearly higher for those living alone than those who live with other people, especially where they have limited personal resources. Therefore the criteria for the allowance were framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. Accordingly, to receive the allowance a customer of my department must be in receipt of a qualifying payment and also in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance.

People who live alone would be considered among those most at risk of social exclusion, and this payment, along with the Living Alone Allowance, are also in part recognition of the greater challenges facing some of those living alone, in avoiding poverty. The deprivation rate of couples over 65 is less than half that recorded among those over that age who live alone, and

while there are people living alone who have significant personal resources, this allowance is only paid to those who satisfy the means test of Fuel Allowance to ensure it is targeted at those most in need.

While the schemes operated by my Department are constantly reviewed, any decision to extend the scheme to people who are not in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Activation Projects

33. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the budget for activation for persons with a disability is slightly lower in the 2019 Estimates than in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15533/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The 2019 Rev Estimate for Disability Activation Supports provides for an allocation of €15.3m in 2019. This is an increase of €1.45m on the 2018 outturn which was €13.9m.

The following table provides the details for 2018 and 2019:

-	2018 provisional outturn	2019 REV estimate	2019 REV vs 2018 outturn	% variance
Disability Activation Supports				
Ability	4,612	5,000	388	8.4%
Employability	8,869	9,910	1,041	11.7%
Disability Employment Support Grants	431	450	19	4.4%
Total Disability Activation Supports	13,912	15,360	1,448	10.4%
Wage Subsidy Scheme	22,321	24,720	2,399	10.7%
Partial Capacity Benefit	18,422	19,370	2,399	5.2%

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

34. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which efforts are being made to reduce the waiting time for the hearing of various social welfare appeals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15624/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

All claim decisions taken by the Department’s Deciding Officers and Designated Persons are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded by the Department and just 1% are appealed. Nevertheless, the Department is concerned that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Accordingly, significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times in respect of all schemes improved between 2011 and 2017 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 26.4 weeks in 2017 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 19.8 weeks in 2017. The corresponding processing times for the year 2018 were 30 weeks for an oral hearing and 24.8 weeks for a summary decision.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects a number of factors including that the appeals process is a quasi-judicial process with appeals officers being required to decide all appeals on a 'de-novo' basis. In addition, appeals decisions are themselves subject to review by the High Court and decisions have to be formally written up to quasi-judicial standards. Other factors that influence appeals processing times include the quality of the initial decision – in this respect the Department has changed the decisions process in respect of medical schemes, in order to provide more information to the claimant. I am advised by my Department that this will help to reduce the number of appeals over time.

In addition, a number of new Appeals Officers have joined the Appeals Office over the past 12-18 months, to replace staff leaving on retirement. Given the complexity of the appeals process it takes some time for new staff to be trained up and develop expertise and this has led to somewhat longer processing times during this period. The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times continue to be a priority for her Office.

Finally, where a claimant has been refused a social welfare payment, regardless of the scheme involved, and is appealing that decision, if their means are insufficient to meet their needs it is open to them to apply for supplementary welfare allowance in the interim.

If their application for supplementary welfare allowance is refused, they can also appeal that decision. The supplementary welfare allowance appeal will be prioritised for attention within the Appeals Office as soon as the appeal file and submission is received from my Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

35. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which women or men who have insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for qualification for the old age pension are now being accommodated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15623/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A person is required to have 520 contributions paid to qualify for the State Pension (contributory). It is reasonable to require people who seek a contributory pension to have made at least 10 years paid contributions into the Social Insurance Fund which finances it, over 50 years of working age life. While it was lower in the past when PRSI coverage was less widespread, legislation was introduced in 1997 to increase this threshold to 520 weeks, or 10 years of contributions. A fifteen year period was allowed pass between that legislation being enacted and the threshold being raised to this level, which would have been sufficient for most people to achieve the required contributions.

For those who do not qualify for the State Pension (contributory) (SPC), there are other State pension payments available.

Notably, they may qualify for the State Pension (non-contributory) which is a means-tested

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payment (based on their share of household means) with a maximum payment of 95% of the SPC. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult (based on their own means), amounting up to 90% of a full rate SPC pension.

Consequently, if a person does not receive a State pension after pension age, they have both significant means and have made little or no contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working life. Introducing a new pension entitlement for such people would reduce the resources available for other pensioners, most of whom have less means than they do, and have contributed significantly more to the Social Insurance Fund.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Projects

36. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the consolidation project being undertaken by the Law Reform Commission on the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005; the cost of the project; the estimated timeframe for completion of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15367/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has recently commenced working collaboratively with the Law Reform Commission for the purpose of preparing and publishing a Revised Version of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005. This will incorporate all amendments to the SWCA 2005 which have (to date) been made in 26 Social Welfare Amendment Acts and, to a lesser extent, in 14 other Acts of the Oireachtas. The Revised Act will also include editorial details of the several hundred Statutory Instruments made under the SWCA 2005, or made under earlier legislation but continued in force by Section 362(2) of SWCA 2005.

The Law Reform Commission has prepared and published 360 Revised Acts covering a wide spectrum of legislative codes. To date the Social Welfare Acts were excluded from this process mainly, I understand, due to their size.

Following discussions between my Department and the Law Reform Commission a Departmental official is working with the Commission to publish the SWCA 2005 on a Revised basis. The work is being undertaken in full compliance with the Commission's Operational Manual for the Preparation of Revised Acts.

It is envisaged that the work will take at least 12 months to complete. Given that the work involved is being undertaken by an existing staff member of my Department and by existing staff of the Law Reform Commission, it is not envisaged that this project will give rise to any additional costs. I am advised by my Department that the work when completed will be very beneficial and will ensure that the body of Social Welfare law will be more accessible and can be kept up-to-date into the future.

Social Welfare Overpayments

37. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of overpayments made in 2018; the number and percentage of same which was a result of fraud; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15532/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The majority of people in receipt of a payment from my Department receive what they are entitled

to. Nevertheless, my Department recognises that abuse of the welfare system is an on-going reality and must be tackled proactively. The Department's anti-fraud and control measures are designed to prevent and detect fraud, ensure effective oversight of schemes, pursue the prosecution of offenders where appropriate and recover any overpaid entitlements identified.

Overpayments of social welfare assistance and benefit payments arise as a consequence of decisions made under the relevant sections of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005 (as amended). Where an overpayment is raised, my Department is obligated to make every effort to recover sums overpaid.

Overpayments arise in relation to past events where a Deciding Officer has sufficient evidence that a person has been paid an amount in excess of their entitlement for a given period. This can arise where a person has received a payment at a rate above that which they should have received or where they are paid beyond the relevant date.

Fraud overpayment cases arise mainly on foot of false declarations by customers concerning their employment, income or family status.

In 2018, some 7,700 cases where an element of fraudulent activity was suspected and the associated value of these cases was €29.7 million.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

38. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the IORP II directive; if she will apply for a derogation for self-directed pension schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15531/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The transposition of the IORP II Directive will result in significant improvements to the regulation and governance of funded occupational pension schemes in Ireland. While the Directive provides for the possibility of derogation from specific Articles for smaller schemes, I believe that members of smaller schemes should get the same protections and oversight as members of large schemes.

The value of investments held in many schemes fell substantially during the financial crisis. This highlighted the need for stricter regulation and greater protections, especially for small schemes investing in riskier unregulated markets.

Concerns in relation to this sector are particularly around the protection of the consumer and the money they have invested, the riskiness of investments, the charges that apply, and the standard of governance. Accordingly, the Government has decided that the provisions of the Directive should apply to all funded occupational pension schemes. Money saved for pension purposes should be properly protected to ensure that people have adequate income for their retirement years.

Under the Directive the underlying principle for capital investment is for schemes to invest in accordance with the 'prudent person' rule and other specific rules set out. It is recognised that there should be an appropriate level of investment freedom for schemes within prudent limits and this is reflected in the rules. Assets must be predominantly invested on regulated markets, i.e., at least 50%. This allows adequate scope for investment in instruments with a long-term economic profile and non-listed undertakings such as property and infrastructure. In

this regard, the application of the Directive is prospective, not retrospective. This means that existing investments and borrowings can remain in place. After transposition all single member schemes, including Small Self-Administered Schemes, who are the only schemes currently allowed to borrow, will not be allowed to enter into new borrowing arrangements, except for short term and liquidity purposes. All of their future investments will have to be made in accordance with the investment rules in the Directive.

While small self-administered pension schemes may continue to invest in the Irish economy, including property and SMEs, the assets of the scheme must be properly diversified to avoid excessive reliance on any particular asset and thereby minimise risk in the portfolio as a whole.

Such diversification has been proven to reduce investment risk. This approach will enhance consumer protection so that pension savers have adequate income for their retirement years.

The Pension Authority advises that there are approx. 100,000 single member schemes and that c. 98% of these schemes are already compliant with the investment rules of the IORP II Directive.

Officials in my Department, supported by the Pensions Authority, are managing the transposition process of the IORP II Directive. This is a substantial Directive and my Department is working towards transposition into Irish law as early as possible in 2019. Once that is done, and to ensure that schemes are informed of their obligations under the Directive, the Pensions Authority will also undertake a communication campaign on the implementation of the Directive. The Authority will engage and consult with industry stakeholders and trustees on implementation of the new regulatory regime and related codes of practice. The emphasis of this engagement will be on providing sufficient support, time and information in order for industry and trustees to plan for and make the changes needed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 39 answered with Question No. 6.

Illness Benefit Appeals

40. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will commission a review to ascertain the number of workers per year affected by the six-day waiting period while sick from work; and the estimated cost of restoring the waiting period to three days. [15658/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Illness benefit is a short term payment made to insured people who are unable to work due to illness. The payment is funded by the social insurance fund (SIF) through the payment of PRSI contributions by workers and employers and, in the event of a shortfall between contributions received and benefits paid, the Exchequer. The fund is central to Ireland's system of social protection and the Government needs to ensure that it can provide adequate and sustainable social insurance pensions and benefits for a growing and ageing population.

Current arrangements provide that payment of illness benefit begins from the seventh day of the illness. No payment is made for the first six days, known as "waiting days". Waiting days have been a long standing feature of the social insurance system and are a feature of similar social security schemes in many other countries.

Many employers pay sick pay during this period, however where an employee does not

have an occupational sick pay scheme they may be able to avail of the supplementary welfare scheme, subject to normal eligibility requirements.

When the current waiting day arrangements were introduced, it was projected that the full-year annual savings would amount to €22 million per year. No specific research has been commissioned or is currently planned by the Department to establish the cost of reversing this measure. In addition, given the cost implications, any change to the current arrangements would have to be considered within the annual budgetary context.

National Minimum Wage

41. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which she can address the potential impact to the hairdressing industry due to the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 and the abolition of training rates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15652/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Legislation governing the national minimum wage is set down in the National Minimum Wage Acts 2000 and 2015. These Acts provide for the setting of a national minimum wage (NMW) and also provide that in specified circumstances, such as younger workers and trainees, a reduced, sub-minimum rate may be applied.

In September 2015, the Low Pay Commission was requested to examine the appropriateness of the subminimum rates as provided for in the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 with regard, in particular, to their impact on youth unemployment rates and participation in education.

The Commission undertook a consultation process on this subject in line with its evidence-based approach to making recommendations to Government. The consultation process was advertised nationally seeking submissions from interested parties; and the Commission sent a targeted email to a variety of interested parties seeking submissions, including the Irish Hairdressing Federation.

A number of further contacts were made with the Federation inviting it to make a submission on this matter and to participate in the oral hearings to discuss the subject held by the Commission in February 2016.

The Commission received 15 submissions in total, none of which came from the hairdressing sector. The Irish Hairdressing Federation did not make a submission and did not participate in the oral hearings held by the Commission.

The Commission's final report was published in February 2018.

Having examined all available evidence and the submissions received, and having considered a range of options, the Commission recommended the abolition of training rates and the simplification of the age-based rates. The rationale for the Commission's recommendations is set out in its reports, which are available at www.lowpaycommission.ie.

The Low Pay Commission is an independent, authoritative body on matters relating to the national minimum wage and the I am confident that the Commission gave consideration to the impact of any recommendations it made in regard to training rates.

The Commission's recommendations were accepted by Government and the amendments to make the necessary legislative changes to the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 were imple-

mented via the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018. In the passage of the Bill through the Houses of the Oireachtas I set out the rationale for the changes, and the proposed measures received cross-party approval and were accepted without amendment. The changes came into effect on 4 March 2019.

Certain apprenticeships are excluded from the remit of the National Minimum Wage and it is open to the Hairdressing sector to consider whether such an apprenticeship would be appropriate in that sector.

JobPath Programme

42. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to incidences in which JobPath providers insist on seeking a commission for persons that sought work on their own accord after having attended an initial meeting with JobPath employment services despite the new employer verifying this to be the case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15369/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The JobPath service helps and supports people to identify and pursue suitable job opportunities themselves while their personal adviser will provide any appropriate support that the person may require. This ranges from preparing their CV and assisting with the job application to financial assistance for clothing or transport costs at interview stage or in the first days of employment.

JobPath fees are designed to cover the cost of the provision of a case management service. Just as is the case with Intreo and the LES, the jobs secured by JobPath clients are not all secured on their behalf by the service providers. However, the provision of the employment advisory service will, in most cases, have contributed to a client's ability to secure employment for themselves.

Within the terms of the JobPath contract, a JobPath provider may submit a fee for any client who has started with the service who gains employment of over 30 hours per week and maintains it. Payments are made at intervals of thirteen (13), twenty-six (26), thirty-nine (39) and fifty-two weeks.

The JobPath providers are required to offer in-work support to the person for up to twelve months while they remain in employment. This includes scheduled contact with the person as well as ad-hoc contact should they need immediate support or advice, this may be particularly important for those in temporary or part-time employment to provide the specific support needed to progress to more sustainable permanent employment.

A person is not under any obligation to provide employment or employer details to the JobPath provider but, if they wish to do so and avail of the in-employment support offered, all information will be treated confidentially.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Rights

43. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to allegations of abuse of workers on fixed-term contracts in episodic industries; if she has discussed the role she may play in vindicating the rights

of these workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15659/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am not aware of any specific allegations of abuse of workers on fixed term contracts in episodic industries. I would urge the Deputy, if he has evidence of such abuse, to bring it to the attention of the Workplace Relations Commission which is mandated to secure compliance with employment rights.

Ireland has a comprehensive body of employment legislation which protects all employees, who are legally employed on a contract of service basis.

The Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003 applies to most employees on fixed-term contracts.

However, it does not apply to agency workers placed by a temporary work agency at the disposition of a user enterprise or to apprentices, trainees and people in publicly-funded employment schemes such as Community Employment. The Act does apply to agency workers employed directly by an employment agency.

The Act provides that fixed-term employees cannot be treated less favourably than comparable permanent employees unless the employer can objectively justify the different treatment. Any justification offered cannot be connected with the fact that the employee is on a fixed-term contract. Employment rights legislation was recently strengthened by the enactment of the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018. The Act delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to address the challenges of the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious employment.

In a changing world, this reform ensures that the legal protections for all workers will match the conditions experienced by a modern workforce and make a real difference in the lives of thousands of workers.

The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act provides that:

- Employers shall give employees core terms of employment within 5 days of starting work.
- Zero hours contracts will be restricted.
- There will be minimum payments for people called into work but sent home without work.
- A “band of hours” system will be introduced where an employee’s contract does not reflect actual hours worked.
- There are strong anti-penalisation provisions for employees who invoke their rights under this legislation.
- National Minimum Wage rates for younger people and trainees have been simplified.

Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees they may refer a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication leading to a decision that is enforceable through the District Court. WRC inspectors can also be asked to investigate certain breaches. Complaints can be made on a single online complaint form available at the WRC’s website www.workplacereactions.ie.

The Workplace Relations Customer Service Section can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or via its website www.workplacereactions.ie.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Administration

44. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the level of red tape involved in the annual forms that applicants for farm assist are required to fill out and return will be reviewed; if the level of information that is required on an annual basis will be reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15366/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Farm assist is a means-tested income support scheme for farmers. To qualify for the payment, a customer must be a farmer, farming land in the State, aged between 18 and 66 and satisfy a means test. The annual farm assist review form is a necessary part of the normal review process for these customers.

Following the Comptroller and Auditor General examination of the Farm Assist scheme in 2014 and the recommendations arising from that report the Department in response reviewed the annual declaration Farm 12 form. The revised form provides for a detailed annual review process, which includes seeking information regarding the income generated and the operating costs of the farm all of which are required as part of the annual review process.

The means test for farm assist takes account of all income sources with certain disregards applicable to specific income sources. Different rules apply to income from farming and other forms of self-employment. Income from certain schemes such as the Green Low Carbon Agri Environment Scheme (GLAS), income from employment and income from property and capital are taken into account. An examination of farm outgoings is also included in the assessment process.

Income and expenditure figures for the preceding year are generally used as an indicator of the expected position in the following year. Details of any exceptional circumstances are also taken into account so as to ensure that the assessment accurately reflects the current situation.

The annual farm assist review form is kept under ongoing review by my officials.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 31.

State Bodies Data

46. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15705/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The only State board currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. The Army Pensions Board is an independent statutory body established under the Army Pensions Act 1927. The Act specifies that the Board shall consist of a chairman and two ordinary members. The two ordinary members must be qualified medical practitioners of whom one must be an officer of the Army Medical Corps. The chairman and the non military ordinary member are appointed by the Minister for the Defence with the concurrence of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Army Medical Corps ordinary member is appointed by the Minister

for Defence on the recommendation of the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces.

On both 8th March 2016 and 8th March 2019 one of the three members of the Board, or 33% of its membership, was a woman.

Defence Forces Recruitment

47. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces study group convened to review the standards of height for entry have presented their report to him; if so, if he will publish the report; if not, when the report will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15780/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The age limits, minimum height and physical standards for general service recruitment are set out in Defence Force Regulation (DFR) A10. This prescribes a minimum height requirement for enlistment for general service in the Permanent Defence Force of 157.48cm. This requirement was made following recommendations by a Defence Forces Working Group, which reported in January 2006 and reduced the previous height requirements for both males and females.

The determination of a minimum height requirement for enlistment in the Defence Forces (DF) is based on the ergonomic requirements for all members of the DF to train and carry out operations at home and overseas with service Personal Load Carrying Equipment.

The height requirements currently in place were introduced following a detailed consideration and were intended to ensure that personnel can conduct safely the various military tasks assigned to them, and they are of general application to all recruits.

A study group was convened by the Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) in September 2018 to review the standards of height for entry into the Defence Forces. The terms of reference for the group provided for the group to assess and recommend changes to the current height standards.

The group contains representatives from all three services of the Defence Forces and includes medical personnel, personnel from training establishments and military HR.

I am advised that the report is not yet finalised but I expect to receive it in the coming weeks.

State Bodies Data

48. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15709/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no State Boards under the remit of my Department.

Brexit Issues

49. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the existing freedom of movement and residence rights for EU citizen spouses of Irish citizens moving from Ireland to Northern Ireland will be assured following the withdrawal of the UK

from the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15728/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is important to note in the first instance that both the Irish and British Governments have confirmed that neither Irish citizens in the UK nor British citizens in Ireland are required to take any action to protect their status and rights associated with the Common Travel Area.

The Common Travel Area (CTA) is a long-standing arrangement between Ireland and the UK which means Irish citizens can move freely to live, work, and study in the UK on the same basis as UK citizens, and vice versa. After the UK leaves the EU, both Irish citizens in the UK and British citizens in Ireland will continue to enjoy these rights.

For the specific case of an EU citizen moving, as the spouse of Irish citizen, after the UK exits the European Union, from Ireland to Northern Ireland, or to anywhere else in the UK, the draft Withdrawal Agreement safeguards the rights of all EU citizens who were residing under EU law in the UK and all UK nationals who were residing under EU law in one of the EU27 Member States by the end of the transition period 31 December 2020. In the event of a no-deal scenario emerging, the UK will not have ratified the draft Withdrawal Agreement and will not be bound by its terms and in that scenario, non-Irish EU citizens moving to the UK would need to comply with UK immigration rules as they apply at that stage. Further clarity would be required from the UK Government on its approach in this scenario.

The Political Declaration setting out the framework for the Future EU-UK Relationship, which has been endorsed by the European Council, sets out the ambition of the EU and UK to have a deep and comprehensive partnership, including across a range of areas of importance to Ireland.

Ireland wants the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK, including on trade, in order to minimise the impact on our trade and economy and our people.

The Withdrawal Agreement represents the best way to ensure an orderly UK withdrawal which protects the Good Friday Agreement, and will enable both sides to move on to negotiating a deep and comprehensive future partnership. The Government continues to work to this end.

Passport Services

50. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his office and the Passport Office will no longer deal with inquiries about passports from Deputies. [15732/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In order to ensure resources are used effectively many of my Department's functions, including communication channels, are centralised. Accordingly, my office is the dedicated point of contact for public representatives. This ensures consistency, efficiency and fairness in response to the queries of all public representatives. Any passport related queries raised through this channel are dealt with without delay.

Passport Applications

51. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason it takes applicants more than ten working days to receive their passports

through the passport express service in view of the fact that the Passport Office has taken on more staff to deal with the backlog. [15733/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, the Passport Express Service provides an option for citizens to submit their passport application through the network of more than one thousand post offices across the State. The advertised turnaround time on our website and in all communications with the public for renewal applications made through the Passport Express channel is 15 working days and 20 working days for first time applicants. The Passport Service is currently meeting and in many cases exceeding this target. There is no backlog in the Passport Express system.

A range of measures have been undertaken to ensure that we are in this position despite the unprecedented volume of passport applications received so far this year. These include the recruitment of temporary and permanent staff as well as a number of technological and customer service initiatives. The management of the overall demand for passports is continuously under review to ensure that adequate resources are in place to meet the demand. The Online Passport Renewal service, which was introduced in March 2017 for adults and November 2018 for children, means this cohort of Irish citizens can now renew their passports anywhere in the world, 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. The service brings significant benefits with faster turnaround times of 10 working days (excluding postage), with over 50% of applications processed in less than 10 working days. In addition, the cost of renewing a passport online is significantly cheaper than alternative methods, with fees for all online applications reduced by €5 across all applications types.

Brexit Issues

52. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the Alberto Costa amendment in the UK (details supplied). [15737/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The proposal by Alberto Costa MP was that the UK Government should seek a joint UK-EU commitment to adopt the section of the Withdrawal Agreement on Citizens' Rights even if the British Parliament fails to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement.

While I very much understand and indeed sympathise with Mr Costa's motivation and objectives, I do not believe this particular proposal would be workable.

It is the EU's view, shared by the Government, that it would not be possible to treat certain aspects of the Withdrawal Agreement, in isolation. This would amount to a reopening of the Withdrawal Agreement, and, as the European Council made clear on 21 March, the Withdrawal Agreement is not for renegotiation.

The Withdrawal Agreement is a carefully balanced and inter-connected legal text. The citizens' rights provisions in the Withdrawal Agreement rely on the general rules providing for the governance of the Agreement and the structures underpinning its applicability and enforceability.

Equally, the Agreement contains other provisions, outside of 'Part 2,' that are relevant to the protection of other rights of citizens – for example, on personal data protection, the orderly completion of judicial cooperation procedures in criminal/civil matters, and the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. Carving out certain provisions, as part of the ring-fencing exercise proposed by Mr Costa, would, therefore, risk the unequal treatment of certain categories of EU and UK citizens.

However, the rights of EU citizens in the UK, and UK nationals in the EU, remain a priority for the EU, as they have throughout the negotiations. In the event of a no deal scenario, the rights of British nationals residing in the Union will be addressed by each Member State, depending on its national law. In this context, like Ireland, EU Member States have taken the necessary measures to regularise the position of UK nationals resident in their countries, and to provide them with legal certainty for the longer term. The Commission has also proposed a number of unilateral contingency measures specifically to address citizens' rights, for example, by agreeing, on a reciprocal basis, that UK citizens will be exempt from the need to have a short-term visa to visit EU countries.

With regard to Ireland, the rights of UK nationals in Ireland, and Irish nationals in the UK, are dealt with under the Common Travel Area. The Common Travel Area is a long-standing arrangement between the UK and Ireland which means Irish citizens can move freely to live, work, and study in the UK on the same basis as UK citizens and vice versa. Both the Irish and UK Governments have committed to the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, and the associated rights and entitlements of Irish and British citizens under this longstanding reciprocal arrangement, in any circumstance. To that end, both Governments have committed to undertaking all the work necessary, including through legislative provision to ensure that the Common Travel Area rights and privileges are protected. Ireland has completed its internal procedures, including with the enactment of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2019, and I understand that the UK has done likewise.

Foreign Conflicts

53. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has made representations to his Nigerian counterparts concerning the killing of approximately 120 Christians in the Middle Belt region of the country in March 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15774/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I am deeply concerned by the tragic events that took place recently in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The violent clashes between nomadic herders and sedentary agrarian communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt region have escalated in recent years and pose a serious challenge to stability and security.

While the vast majority of herders are Muslim and many of the farmers are Christian, the roots of this violence lie in access to land, in a context of scarce natural resources due to rapid climate change in the Sahel.

Ireland works bilaterally, within the European Union, and with UN partners to promote peace and security in areas affected by armed groups and insecurity. Ireland's Embassy in Abuja actively monitors developments in the country, advises on the humanitarian response, and supports Ireland's engagement in EU and UN forums.

The humanitarian situation in Nigeria arising from the Islamist insurgency in the North-East of Nigeria affects millions of people. In 2018, Ireland provided €4.8 million in humanitarian assistance to Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region. The EU provided €90 million to the region. Ireland is one of the top ten donors to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, which last year allocated €43 million to the Lake Chad region. With humanitarian need likely to remain acute in 2019, Irish funding will continue to target those most in need.

This violence is a reminder of the potential of climate change to fuel instability and humani-

tarian need. In our new international development policy, A Better World, the Government has committed to action to prevent dangerous climate change and to address the needs of those most vulnerable to its effects.

Irish Aid

54. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if funding will be provided through Irish Aid or other organisations under the aegis of his Department to facilitate or support access to the termination of pregnancy overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15775/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): No such funding is envisaged.

Brexit Preparations

55. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of times in the past two months his officials have participated in discussions with the European Commission on no-deal scenarios for trade within the island of Ireland; the personnel involved; if the personnel were provided with instructions regarding their participation in these discussions; if papers were exchanged; if he has been informed of the content and outcome of the discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15861/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is ongoing and regular contact between the Government and the European Commission, at all levels, in relation to our preparedness and contingency measures for Brexit, including a no deal scenario. This has included, for example, the visit to Ireland on 4-5 February of the Commission's Brexit Preparedness Group to review our comprehensive, cross-Governmental preparations.

We are working closely with the Commission on how to mitigate against the negative impact on our trade and economy, and to ensure connectivity with the rest of the EU's Single Market, including via the landbridge.

More recently, discussions have had an additional focus on how to protect the Good Friday Agreement and avoid a hard border in the case of no deal, while also protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Customs Union and Ireland's place in them. Ireland and the EU are at one in our determination to do all we can, deal or no deal, to avoid a hard border and to protect the peace process.

The latest meeting with the Commission at official level took place in Brussels on Friday, 29 March, and was attended by officials from the Departments of the Taoiseach, Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Agriculture, Food and the Marine, as well as the Revenue Commissioners. Discussions will continue this week.

If the UK decides to leave without the Withdrawal Agreement, initial, temporary arrangements will be required. Such arrangements will be suboptimal compared to the backstop, and, while we are absolutely determined to avoid physical infrastructure at the border, it would be difficult to avoid serious disruption to the functioning of the all-island economy. There are no easy answers. The seamless trade we enjoy today would not be possible, and the benefits of the backstop for businesses in Northern Ireland will be lost, at least in the short term.

For any sustainable long term solution, discussions between the EU, Ireland and the UK will be required, not least given the UK's obligations under the Good Friday Agreement as a co-guarantor of that agreement. For such a solution, it would be impossible to escape the need for close alignment with the Single Market and Customs Union, and the backstop would be the starting point for these discussions.

This is also why the Withdrawal Agreement is of such importance. It represents the only way to ensure an orderly UK withdrawal, and we continue to work as a priority to support its ratification.

Passport Applications

56. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a holder of a British passport (details supplied) will qualify for an Irish passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15908/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act 2008. The Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her. In order to meet this, each person must demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship by providing acceptable documentary evidence of this entitlement.

Entitlement to Irish citizenship is determined by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, under which Irish citizenship may be obtained by birth, by descent, or by naturalisation.

An individual born on the island of Ireland before 2005 is automatically an Irish citizen. For individuals born outside of Ireland, they may claim citizenship if they had at least one parent who was born in the island of Ireland before 2005.

Individuals born outside of Ireland can also claim citizenship through a parent who was not born in Ireland but was an Irish citizen at the time of the individual's birth, or through a grandparent born in Ireland. Individuals who wish to claim citizenship through these means must have his/her birth entered on the Foreign Births Register (FBR). Citizenship commences after inclusion on the FBR. Further details regarding the process can be consulted at the Passport Service's website: www.dfa.ie/passports-citizenship/citizenship/born-abroad/

In cases where no Irish lineage exists, an individual may apply for Irish citizenship through naturalisation. Minimum residency terms must be satisfied before an individual is eligible for citizenship through naturalisation. The Department of Justice and Equality is responsible for citizenship matters, including applications for naturalisation.

Mortgage Debt

57. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to reports that a company (details supplied) is writing to all borrowers in arrears demanding all arrears be cleared within 30 days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15692/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that it is aware that a regulated entity has written to a number of buy-to-let (BTL) borrowers in arrears and that it is engaged with that particular entity but cannot comment on the specifics of any individual firm.

Any borrower who is concerned or who has received letters should contact their regulated entity directly. If they are not satisfied with how they are treated, they are entitled to make a complaint to the regulated entity. If they are not satisfied with the response they receive, they can make a complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

Where a mortgage loan is not secured by a borrower's primary residence[1], the arrears handling provisions in Chapter 8 of the Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) apply to personal consumers in arrears. This includes a requirement that "where an account is in arrears a regulated entity must seek to agree an approach (whether with a personal consumer or through a third party nominated by the personal consumer) that will assist the personal consumer in resolving the arrears." A regulated entity must ensure that the level of contact and communications from the regulated entity, or any third party acting on its behalf, with a personal consumer in arrears, is proportionate and not excessive.

Where an account remains in arrears ten business days after the arrears first arose, a regulated entity must immediately communicate clearly with the personal consumer to establish in the first instance why the arrears have arisen.

Where an account remains in arrears 31 calendar days after the arrears first arose, a regulated entity must within three business days inform the personal consumer and any guarantor of the loan, on paper or on another durable medium, of the status of the account. This information must include the following:

- a) the date the account fell into arrears;
- b) the number and total amount of repayments (including partial repayments) missed (this information is not required for credit card accounts);
- c) the amount of the arrears to date;
- d) the interest rate applicable to the arrears;
- e) details of any charges in relation to the arrears that may be applied;
- f) the importance of the personal consumer engaging with the regulated entity in order to address the arrears;
- g) relevant contact points;
- h) the consequences of continued non-payment, including where relevant, sharing of data relating to the consumer's arrears with the Irish Credit Bureau or any other credit reference agency;
- i) if relevant, any impact of the non-payment on other accounts held by the personal consumer with that regulated entity including the potential for off-setting of accounts, where there is a possibility that this may occur under existing terms and conditions; and
- j) a statement that the personal consumer may wish to seek assistance from MABS and contact details for the MABS National Helpline and the link to the MABS website.

Where the arrears persist, an updated version of the above information must be provided to the personal consumer, on paper or on another durable medium, every three months.

Under General Principle 2.2 of the Code, regulated entities "must ensure that in all its dealings with customers and within the context of its authorisation it acts with due skill, care and diligence in the best interests of its customers."

Primary Residence: means a property which is:

1. the residential property which the borrower occupies as his/her primary residence in this State, or
2. a residential property which is the only residential property in this State owned by the borrower.

State Bodies Data

58. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15708/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of the number and percentage of women on each State Board under the aegis of my Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019 are in the table:

State Board	8th March 2016	8th March 2019
Central Bank Commission	3 – 30%	3 – 30%
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)	2 – 16.66%	2 – 66.66%(Caretaker Board while awaiting dissolution)
Financial Services Ombudsman Council	4 – 40%	N/A - Merged with Pensions Ombudsman in January 2018 to create the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman
Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman Council	N/A – Established in January 2018 following the merger of the Financial Services Ombudsman Council and the Pensions Ombudsman	4 – 57%
Home Building Finance Ireland	N/A – Established December 2018	0 – 0% There are currently 3 male board members, all serving in an ex officio capacity. An appointment process to fill the 4 remaining board vacancies (including a new Chairperson) is currently underway. This appointment process is being undertaken in full compliance with the 2014 Guidelines on the Appointments to State Boards published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	1 – 20%	2 – 40%
National Asset Management Agency	1 – 14%	2 – 29%
National Treasury Management Agency	3 – 33.33%	4 – 50% (An appointment process is underway to fill an existing board vacancy)
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	4 – 44.4%	3 – 33.3%

Tax Data

59. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the occupations (details supplied) covered in section 118(3)(a) Taxes Consolidation Act 1997; and the provision of accommodation that is exempt to tax. [15722/19]

60. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of employees

covered by the exemption to benefit-in-kind provided by section 118(3)(a) Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in each of the years 2014 to 2018 by employer activity, in tabular form. [15723/19]

61. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of the exemption to benefit-in-kind provided by section 118(3)(a) Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in each of the years 2014 to 2018, by employer activity, in tabular form. [15724/19]

62. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated tax forgone in respect of the largest beneficiary of the exemption granted under section 118(3)(a) Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, in each of the years 2012 to 2018, in tabular form. [15725/19]

63. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons assessed for benefit-in-kind in respect to their employers providing housing for them over the past ten years to date; the rental costs of such properties on a monthly basis over that period; the highest and lowest rental cost properties, respectively; and the average of the rental cost, in tabular form. [15738/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 to 63, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that Section 118 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, as amended, is the general charging provision for the taxation of benefits in kind.

The section provides for a charge to income tax in respect of the provision of certain benefits in kind by a body corporate for a director or employee, which are not otherwise chargeable to income tax. These benefits in kind can include living or other accommodation, entertainment, domestic or other services, or other benefits or facilities of whatever nature. The charge is limited to the amount of the expense incurred by the body corporate in providing the benefit.

Section 118 (3)(a) provides for a specific exemption from the charge to tax in respect of living accommodation provided by a body corporate to an employee, if the employee is required by the terms of the employment to live there so that s/he can perform his or her duties properly. However, for the exemption to apply, the accommodation must be provided in accordance with a practice which, before 30 July 1948, commonly prevailed in trades of the class in question in relation to employees of the class in question. Moreover, the exemption does not apply where the employee is a director of the employing body in question, or of another body corporate which controls, or which is controlled by, the employing body. There is no set list of trades or professions which are eligible for this exemption, rather, it is a requirement of the exemption that the employer can prove eligibility if requested by Revenue.

In relation to Questions 15723/19, 15724/19, 15725/19 and 15738/19, I am advised by Revenue that where an employee is in receipt of a benefit from an employer which is not a taxable benefit, the employer is not required to report the details. Consequently, Revenue has no data on which to provide the information requested.

Housing Policy

64. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the recent report of the UN special rapporteur (details supplied) on the right to adequate housing and the financialisation of housing through preferential tax laws; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15771/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of the recent report con-

cerning the Irish housing market by the UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing.

The Irish government recognises the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to which the Ireland has been a party since 8 December 1989. Article 11.1 of this Covenant recognises the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Given the important implications which developments in the property market can have for the economy, my Department actively monitors developments in this sector on an ongoing basis, and published a paper on Institutional Investment in the Housing Market in February this year. The paper is based on CSO data up to 2017, the latest year available.

While there may be a perception that institutional investors are purchasing large amounts of housing stock, the data show that their activity has been limited in the context of the overall housing market. In 2017 — the latest year for which we have data — firms in this category were net purchasers of just 1 per cent of residential sales, or just over 500 units. Furthermore, from 2010 to 2017, net purchases by Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), real estate funds and private equity firms were less than 0.01 per cent of available units, or just 380 units.

On a national level, institutional investors remain a small minority of landlords. However, such investors do play an increasingly important role in the private rented sector.

Institutional investment in apartments is likely to be the driving force behind a significant recent increase in the number of apartment units granted planning permission in Dublin. In the first nine months of 2018, 57 per cent of units that were granted planning permission in Dublin were apartments, or just over 4,000 units. As a comparison, in the three year period between 2015 and 2017 the same amount were completed nationally.

Increased apartment building is a very positive development, both in terms of boosting overall supply and in relation to the National Planning Framework, which specifically targets more compact growth.

Recognising the importance of investment in the property sector, tax rules have been introduced to facilitate collective investment and to ensure that tax is imposed on funds deriving value from Irish property. For example, the function of the Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) framework is not

to provide an overall tax exemption but rather to facilitate collective investment in rental property by removing a double layer of taxation which would otherwise apply on property investment via a corporate vehicle. REITs are required to distribute 85% of their property profits each year and Dividend Withholding Tax is collected on the distributions. In Finance Act 2016, Irish Real Estate Fund (IREF) provisions were introduced for certain investment funds deriving 25% or more of their value from Irish real estate assets, imposing a Dividend Withholding Tax on distributions to non-resident investors.

However, as Rebuilding Ireland makes clear, such investment can only be one aspect of a multi-pronged response to addressing current issues in the market. This is why the Government has provided record funding for social and affordable housing, to improve housing infrastructure and to address homelessness. Such funding has been accompanied by a range of regulatory and policy changes that facilitate increased supply of both owner occupier and rental housing, and policy measures to help contain rental price inflation such as Rent Pressure Zones.

Insurance Costs

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects to progress legislative changes on insurance as part of the Consumer Insurance Contracts Bill 2017; the reason the legislative changes are not being drafted as a new Bill in its own right; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15950/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department is currently working on developing legislative changes on insurance as part of the Consumer Insurance Contracts Bill 2017. As the Deputy is aware the purpose of the Bill is to reform and modernise the law of consumer insurance contracts and to “level the playing field so that the consumer is better equipped to stand up to the insurer”. The Bill is based on the 2015 Law Reform Commission Report on Consumer Insurance Contracts.

At Second Stage the then Minister of State Eoghan Murphy TD provided the Government’s “support in principle for the objectives of the Bill”. He also noted the intention of the Minister for Finance to submit substantive amendments should the Bill reach Committee Stage.

A key recommendation that it is proposed to bring forward relates to an amendment to cater for Recommendation 8 of the Motor Report to require insurers to notify and engage with policyholders regarding claims submitted against their policy. This amendment would also apply to small businesses which have an annual turnover of €3 million or less and thus cover much of Recommendation 10 of the Employer/Public Liability Report. Other possible amendments which may be put forward at Committee Stage are currently being considered.

The reason the legislative changes are not being drafted as part a new Bill is because both I and Minister of State D’Arcy see the Consumer Insurance Contract Bill as an ideal vehicle for addressing insurance consumer related issues such as the one referred to above from an efficiency and effectiveness perspective. In addition, as all parties have worked very constructively together on important insurance legislation such as the Insurance (Amendment) Act 2018, and the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018 to date, I see no reason why this constructive engagement cannot continue.

Mortgage Book Sales

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has been consulted regarding the intention of a bank (details supplied) to securitise mortgage loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15951/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland has advised that it cannot comment on specific transactions relating to regulated firms. In addition, the Central has commented as follows:

“While the strategy and commercial decisions of lenders are ultimately matters for the boards of those lenders, the Central Bank, as supervisor, requires that when loans are sold, all statutory legal protections are met. This includes ensuring the terms of existing restructuring arrangements are honoured.

“Where a loan is securitised or sold, that loan must be serviced by a bank, retail credit firm (RCF) or credit servicing firm (CSF) authorised and regulated by the Central Bank. This ensures the protections available to the borrower remain with the loan in all cases, regardless of whether the borrower has an alternative repayment arrangement in place or not. This can be achieved

through re-engaging with borrowers; restructures; accounting write-downs; mortgage to rent; engaging through the Insolvency Service; sales and securitisations; and the legal process.”

Insurance Data

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the CSO report on indexing business insurance prices; his plans to roll out such an index; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15952/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I welcome the publication of the CSO’s report on the feasibility of collecting price information on the cost of insurance to businesses, which was published in February 2019.

Increasing the availability of data in relation to Employer and Public Liability Insurance is a matter which was discussed by the Cost of Insurance Working Group and its Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance (2018) recommends a number of actions to improve transparency in this area. Among these, Recommendation 1 requires the Central Statistics Office to consider the feasibility of collecting price information on the cost of insurance to businesses with this exercise to commence by the end of Q2 2018, with the CSO to report to my Department with the outcome of its review, and if it considers such an index feasible, make appropriate proposals.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) submitted its report to the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) in January 2019 in this regard. In that report, the CSO identified seven potential methods of collecting price information on liability insurance. These data collection options were assessed against four criteria: (i) statistical quality, (ii) burden on respondents, (iii) meeting user needs, and (iv) cost. After analysing each of the options, the CSO found that four options were unfeasible and two further options, while technically feasible, would be extremely difficult to implement in practice. However, the CSO signalled to the CIWG that it will further examine a method that may be feasible. I understand that this method would use a commercially available technology solution to automatically price a high volume of representative profiles, i.e., customer profile such as an office-based company with 20 employees, good safety standards and no claims history, etc. The price quotations for these profiles would be tracked over time to estimate the overall change in premiums.

By way of update to the Deputy, this further examination is currently under way, and it is expected that the CSO will provide the CIWG with a final determination on feasibility during the summer months of this year. On the basis that it will be the CSO that makes proposals to the CIWG, regarding the feasibility of this potential approach, I will await the completion of this work, and the views of the CIWG following from that, prior to making a decision on the introduction of such an index.

Credit Card Levy

68. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance if persons aged 66 years of age and over are exempt from paying the €30 levy per credit card and DIRT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15980/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that there is no age-related exemption from the annual €30 levy that applies to credit card accounts. The charge is applied to an account regardless of the number of credit cards issued to the account.

I am also advised by Revenue that individuals are exempt from Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) on their interest income where they, or their spouse or civil partner, are aged 65 or over and their total income in a year (including the deposit interest) is below the annual exemption limit. For 2019 the exemption limits are €18,000 for a single individual and €36,000 for a married couple or civil partners.

The DIRT exemption does not automatically apply but must be claimed by making a declaration (on form DE1) to the financial institution where the account is held. This declaration states that a person's income is less than the exemption limit and that the financial institution will be notified if this position changes. In the absence of this declaration, a financial institution is obliged to deduct DIRT. However, in any case where DIRT is deducted from the interest income of an individual who would have qualified for the exemption, he or she is entitled to claim a refund of that tax.

Pension Provisions

69. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will examine the possibility of widening the applicability of the home care credit in the calculation of pension entitlements for retired workers, specifically workers in semi-State organisations and bodies such as the Central Bank, who may have no entitlement to State contributory pensions and whose workplace pensions are disadvantaged by the refusal of the semi-State employers to give credit to workers for years out of the workforce raising families; if the legislation can be amended to cover such workers and ensure all women who raise families are given home care credits in calculating their final pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15848/19]

72. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if legislation governing the pension entitlements of workers (details supplied) can be amended to allow women who raised families and took leave from their workplaces for those periods to avail of home care credits similar to those recently amended under the contributory pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15854/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 72 together.

First, I should note that while I have overall policy responsibility in relation to public service pension schemes, questions about the pension schemes of any particular public service body should be referred to the Minister of the parent Department for the body concerned.

To address the general point raised, the Deputy will appreciate that the terms of occupational pension schemes (both private sector and public service pension schemes) are separate and distinct from the conditions laid down by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to the State Pension (contributory).

For example, it is a fundamental feature of occupational pension schemes and of the regulatory framework within which they operate that pension entitlements are, in general, earned in respect of periods of paid employment and having regard to the amounts of remuneration earned. The State Pension (contributory), on the other hand, has regard to each person's social insurance record, which may include periods in insurable employment, voluntary contributions and credited contributions.

Any attempt to insert home credits into public service occupational pension schemes would run counter to fundamental principles underpinning those schemes and would represent a very

substantial cost to the State.

I would also point out that members of most pre-2013 public service pension schemes, including those of State bodies and bodies such as the Central Bank, will have the option to purchase notional pensionable service at full cost to themselves and subject to the normal purchase scheme limits, including compliance with Revenue limits in relation to the obtaining of tax relief on their purchase contributions, and so may compensate in this way for taking time out of work for home caring.

In relation to the Single Public Service Pension Scheme, which is the career average defined benefit pension scheme applicable to most new entrant public servants from January 2013, arrangements to facilitate the purchase of Single Scheme benefits additional to the benefits accrued based on pensionable remuneration earned by the Scheme member, are currently being finalised.

State Bodies Data

70. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15713/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is the only body under the aegis of my Department which has a State Board.

As set out in the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (in consultation with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the Minister for Health and the Minister for Justice and Equality) should appoint members of the Board of the Public Appointments Service. The CEO of PAS is a member of the Board of PAS on an ex-officio basis. The PAS State Boards process is used when making external appointments to the Board.

- On 8th March 2016 there were 5 women on the Board of PAS (56% of the Board).
- On 8th March 2019 there were 4 women on the Board of PAS (44% of the Board).

As the Deputy will be aware, details of the current membership of all State Boards are published on www.stateboards.ie

Public Sector Staff Retirements

71. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding public servants that were forced to retire between 6 December 2017 and the commencement of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 due to reaching 65 years of age; and if a report has been prepared on potential remedies to assist these workers. [15717/19]

73. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the report will be published as stipulated by section 3 of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018; if legislative changes will be brought forward if necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15946/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 73 together.

On 5 December 2017, the Government made the decision to increase the compulsory retirement age to 70, for public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004. Primary legislation was necessary in order to bring that change into effect. It was made clear at the time that until such legislation was enacted, the compulsory retirement age of 65, which applied to the vast majority of this cohort, remained in effect and pre-2004 public servants reaching that age would be required to retire.

I made special interim arrangements for the cohort of public servants who reached their compulsory retirement age of 65 after the Government Decision because, while they would be aware of the Government's decision, they would be unable to avail of it. Those arrangements, clearly conveyed to all concerned, permitted these individuals to be rehired post-retirement for a period of 1 year until they reached the age of eligibility for the State Pension (Contributory). Without that special arrangement, they would have been required to cease working on reaching the age of 65.

The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 was enacted on 26 December 2018. Under the Act, any relevant public servant who had not already reached their compulsory retirement age of 65 before that date has a new compulsory retirement age of 70. Enactment of the legislation had no effect on those public servants who retired at 65 prior to the 26 December 2018 and who availed of a one year contract under the interim arrangements. The terms of their contracts continue to apply and they will cease working when they reach the age of 66.

Section 3 of the 2018 Act also provides that I, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, within three months of the passing of the Act, would prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the public servants who were forced to retire between 6 December 2017 and the commencement of the Act, due to reaching the age of 65 years, and on potential remedies to assist this cohort of worker. This Report was laid before the Oireachtas on 26 March 2019 and is publicly available on the Oireachtas and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform websites.

Whenever legislation is enacted to implement a change in policy, there has to be a dividing line between those who are affected by the change and those who are not. There are always people who will not benefit because they miss the deadline by a matter of days or weeks. Having considered all of the issues in the Report, I am satisfied that the interim arrangements were an appropriate temporary policy response at the time of the Government Decision pending enactment of the legislation. The terms of those arrangements were clear, unambiguous and made known to those who availed of them. Accordingly, as set out in the report, I do not propose to make any changes to those terms, whether by legislative change or otherwise.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 69.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 71.

National Broadband Plan

74. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of involvement his Department has in undergoing a due diligence on the tender for the national

broadband plan as confirmed by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment; if the Office of Government Procurement is actively involved in the due diligence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15947/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Officials in my Department with responsibility for the Vote of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment have been appraised periodically by that Department of progress on the procurement process but have had no involvement or input in that process or any evaluation of same.

The Office of Government Procurement was represented in an advisory role on the Procurement Board for this project. The primary aim of this Board is to independently review the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment's oversight of the evaluation stages of the procurement process but has no decision making or due diligence role in the procurement process. This is a matter for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

Literacy Programmes

75. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for future funding of a society (details supplied); the amount of funding that will help develop and support Irish sign language and specifically the programmes run by the society such as deaf adult literacy services and the Irish sign language academy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15855/19]

82. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the future funding of a society (details supplied); the way in which the funding will help develop and support Irish sign language and specifically the programmes run by the society such as deaf adult literacy services and an academy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15766/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 82 together.

The national further education authority SOLAS, provided funding to the Irish Deaf Society in 2018 for the provision of literacy courses for the deaf community through Irish Sign Language. €241k was allocated in 2018 to achieve the following:

- Provide QQI certified, Continuing Professional Development and personal development training interventions and workshops for approx. 400 learners who are members of the Deaf community.

- Support 60 learners to achieve QQI certification at Levels 2 to 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

I understand the Irish Deaf Society have applied for funding to provide this service in 2019, and the application is currently being considered by SOLAS.

It is not my Department's policy generally to provide funding to representative organisations which operate independently of State provision, or to duplicate funding arrangements where State provision is already in place for services provided.

My Department provides for an extensive range of supports to assist pupils who are Deaf or hard of hearing, including the following:

- The Irish Sign Language (ISL) tuition scheme, where funding is made available to parents/guardians for tuition in ISL for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and their families.

- In 2018/19 school year, there are 1,459 special classes in mainstream schools, including 15 for students who are deaf and 1 early intervention special class for the Deaf. Of 124 special schools nationally, there are 2 special schools for the Deaf.

- Special Education Teaching (SET) support for deaf/hard of hearing students attending mainstream schools.

- The Visiting Teacher Service for Children/Young People who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing are a part of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service and works in partnership with parents of deaf/hard of hearing children throughout the country, helping the children to derive maximum benefit from the educational opportunities available.

- The Support Service also provides funding for individual teachers and whole school staff to undertake courses in Irish Sign Language, which are available throughout the country through a variety of providers.

- Funding to schools for assistive technology such as radio aids and soundfield systems

- Special transport arrangements for pupils

- Enhanced levels of capitation in Special schools and Special Classes.

The NCSE published Policy Advice on the Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland which makes a number of recommendations for the improvement of educational provision for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children, including recommendations relating to ISL provision.

In addition, the Comprehensive review of the SNA Scheme, published by the NCSE in 2018, recommends Irish Sign Language qualified assistants in schools, to support profoundly deaf students whose primary language is ISL and that this provision should be aligned to the requirements of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017.

In line with the recommendations of this review and the requirements of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017, a scheme will be developed to provide Irish Sign Language support for students attending recognised schools, whose primary language is Irish Sign Language.

On 24 January 2019, I launched a new undergraduate programme in DCU that enables deaf and hard of hearing people who use Irish Sign Language (ISL) to enter primary teaching.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

76. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the special education hours allocation will be increased in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15685/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools set out details of a new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

DES Circulars 0007/2019 for primary schools and 0008/2019 for post primary schools also provide details of how the allocations are being updated for schools from September 2019,

based on updated profile data.

All schools have now received revised allocations for September 2019.

As the re profiling occurred, some schools have gained additional allocations, where the profile indicator data indicates these schools have additional needs. Some schools received slightly reduced allocations, where the data indicates less need, and some schools maintained their existing allocations.

The Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

Under the allocation model, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support based on their school profile.

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fair allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the level of need in each school.

Schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile. The allocations to schools include provision to support all pupils in the schools, including where a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school, or where there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

Both my Department and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are committed to ensuring that all schools are treated equally and fairly in the manner in which their school profiles have been calculated.

Accordingly, a number of review processes have been put in place to support schools.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has published details of an appeal process for the 2019 allocation process for schools on their website www.ncse.ie.

Schools are advised that the appeal will consider circumstances where schools considered that their school profile was calculated incorrectly, using the data set out in DES Circulars 007 and 008 2019. An appeal can be submitted for a review of the information used and of the calculation of the allocation.

A second process will be put in place to address circumstances where the school profile significantly changed following the allocation process e.g. a developing school where the net enrolment numbers significantly increased.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in the Primary and Post Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2019/20 school year.

Schools who qualify for additional mainstream developing school posts in accordance with these criteria will also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

Additional special education teaching allocations will be made for schools who have increased enrolments to the extent that they achieve developing status, once school enrolments have been verified at October 2019, as opposed to being based on projected enrolments. As the actual enrolments must be taken account of, this process cannot take place until the new school year is underway.

Finally, it is acknowledged that there are some circumstances, which may arise in schools,

which fall outside the appeals process, or allocations for developing school status.

These relate to exceptional or emergency circumstances which could not have been anticipated e.g. where the school profile changes very significantly, or where other exceptional circumstances have arisen in a school and which may require a review of schools capacity to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need it in the school, or of their utilisation of their allocations.

A process will also be available where schools can seek a review of their allocations in the coming months, including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

As revised updated allocations have recently been issued to schools, this process will recommence in September 2019.

I am satisfied that there are in place a number of processes which can review the special education teacher allocation for schools where necessary.

This Government is investing heavily in supporting our children with special educational needs, with €1.8bn being spent annually, about €1 in every 5 of the education budget.

There are currently over 13,400 special education teachers in schools, an increase of 37% since 2011.

There are therefore more special education teachers in schools now than we have ever had previously.

The very significant levels of additional provision we have made in recent years to provide additional Special Education Teachers means that all schools are resourced to provide for the special educational needs of children in their schools.

Pupil Data Collection

77. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children who left primary school in summer 2018 that failed to enrol in a second-level school in September 2018; the corresponding figures in each of the years 2014 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15699/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The introduction of the Primary Online Database (POD) has facilitated the monitoring of pupils as they move through the primary education system and on to post primary. The system was first introduced in September 2014 and it became fully operational in September 2016 when it formed the basis for the annual school census. Accordingly, the earliest it has been possible to join the primary and post-primary school systems at a pupil level is for those pupils who left primary school in June 2017 and entered the post-primary system in September 2017.

The Department has recently begun an exercise of linking pupils from 6th class in primary schools in June 2017 and June 2018 to entrants to post-primary schools in September 2017 and September 2018 respectively. This data matching exercise will assist the department in understanding the transitions from the primary to the post-primary system, and allow an assessment of likely future demand for post-primary places at a fine geographic level.

This work is at an advanced stage and is being finalised at present. We will forward the

data requested by the deputy once it is complete. Data for years earlier than 2017 will not be available.

Appointments to State Boards Data

78. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15706/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The closest comparative data that is available on the number and percentage of women on each State Board under the remit of my Department is as at 31 December 2015 and 31 December 2018. The attached table sets out the figures returned by my Department for 31 December 2018 and 31 December 2015 to the Department of Justice and Equality in respect of the 18 aegis bodies under my Department along with the data on boards across the wider education sector.

There are 48 State Boards that fall within the remit of my Department. At 31 December 2018 the overall proportion of positions occupied by women was 42.7%.

My Department participated in the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Gender Balance on State Boards led by the Department of Justice and Equality in recent months. The Government has recently approved a number of the recommendations made by the Group on Gender Balance on State Boards to promote greater gender balance in this area. My Department will work with stakeholders in the education sector to maintain and enhance the progress made to date in regard to gender representation on State Boards.

Board Name	Number of Women	% of Women	Number of Women	% of Women
		December 2015		December 2018
An Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann	0	0.0%	4	36.4%
An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)	6	50.0%	6	50.0%
Athlone IoT	7	36.8%	7	36.8%
Caranua (Residential Institutions Statutory Fund)	4	44.4%	4	44.4%
Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse	3	60.0%	4	66.7%
Cork IoT	7	36.8%	8	42.1%
DCU	10	35.7%	15	53.6%
DIT	9	45.0%	7	35.0%
Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies (DIAS) Council	0	0.0%	1	11.1%
Dún Laoghaire IADT	9	47.4%	10	52.6%
Dundalk IoT	7	36.8%	7	36.8%
Galway-Mayo IoT	7	38.9%	7	36.8%
Grangegorman Development Agency Board	6	40.0%	7	50.0%
HEA	3	27.3%	8	53.3%
IoT Blanchardstown	8	42.1%	8	42.1%
IoT Carlow	11	57.9%	10	52.6%
IoT Sligo	8	42.1%	7	36.8%
IoT Tallaght	7	38.9%	8	42.1%

Questions - Written Answers

Board Name	Number of Women	% of Women	Number of Women	% of Women
		December 2015		December 2018
IoT Tralee	8	44.4%	8	42.1%
Irish Research Council	7	58.3%	6	60.0%
Léargas	3	33.3%	4	50.0%
Letterkenny IoT	7	36.8%	10	52.6%
Limerick IoT	8	42.1%	8	42.1%
National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)	6	46.2%	7	53.8%
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)	13	52.0%	14	56.0%
National Council For Special Education (NCSE)	6	50.0%	7	53.8%
NCAD	5	45.5%	7	63.6%
NUI	12	31.6%	12	31.6%
NUIG	10	25.0%	18	45.0%
NUIM	11	39.3%	13	44.8%
Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	5	50.0%	6	60.0%
Residential Institutions Redress Board	6	54.5%	7	63.6%
Residential Institutions Review Committee	1	16.7%	1	20.0%
School of Celtic Studies	3	50.0%	2	40.0%
School of Cosmic Physics	3	50.0%	1	25.0%
School of Theoretical Physics	2	33.3%	2	33.3%
School Transport Appeals Board	2	40.0%	2	40.0%
Skillnets Limited	4	30.8%	5	38.5%
Solas	5	38.5%	4	50.0%
State Examinations Commission (SEC)	2	40.0%	2	40.0%
Student Grant Appeals Board	5	71.4%	6	54.5%
TCD	8	29.6%	10	38.5%
The Teaching Council	19	51.4%	15	41.7%
UCC	13	33.3%	14	37.8%
UCD	10	25.0%	10	25.0%
UL	12	35.3%	10	34.5%
Waterford IoT	7	36.8%	7	36.8%
Educational Research Centre	n/a	n/a	1	25.0%

Multidenominational Schools

79. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans to open an educate together primary school in Killarney, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15716/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is implementing new plans aimed at accelerating the provision of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment to reach 400 such schools by 2030.

The previous model of patronage divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools

for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (11 since 2013, with a twelfth school, due to be established under this process for September 2019). I believe that the new Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system.

While the Schools Reconfiguration process is being advanced, my Department is continuing to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, including Killarney.

To date, it has not been possible to secure a school property to facilitate a new school being established in Killarney. However, my Department will continue its efforts in relation to identifying a suitable solution under the patronage divesting process, which would facilitate a new Educate Together school being established to serve the Killarney area.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

80. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provision will be made for additional places in an ASD unit at a school (details supplied). [15718/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Individual school boards of management are responsible for the establishment of special classes. It is open to any school to make application to the National Council for Special education (NCSE) to establish a special class.

The NCSE, an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

In deciding where to establish a special class in an area, the NCSE take account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned. In this regard, the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) may approach individual schools to discuss the matter with a view to finding the optimal location in terms of convenience and sustainability.

160 new special classes have been opened for the 2018/19 school year, which means there are now 1,459 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011.

There are 37 special schools and 237 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Dublin. Of these, 17 are ASD early intervention classes, 139 are primary ASD classes and 41 are post primary ASD classes.

The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 197 in 2018/2019.

When the NCSE sanction a special class in a school, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to reconfigure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class and/or to construct additional accommodation.

Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) who are locally based are available to assist and advise parents whose children have special needs. They also assist and advise schools in making decisions in this area.

From time to time, the NCSE identifies local areas where additional special class provision

is required. In those circumstances, Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved. This process is ongoing and the NCSE are actively engaging with schools in relation to establishing ASD classes where there is an identified need for the 2019/2020 school year.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities. A Working Group, chaired by the NCSE, has been established to put in place a new working protocol to ensure that there is effective proactive planning and timely delivery of specialist educational places for students.

My Department is aware that the establishment of special provision in some schools and communities can be challenging.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 will assist in addressing this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act provides the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the NCSE, the board of management and the patron of the school, to compel a school to make additional provision for the education of children with special educational needs.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

81. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the provision of education for a child (details supplied) with autism. [15755/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs. The Council ensures that special schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special school placements.

The NCSE's team of locally based Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) are available to assist and advise parents whose children have special needs and identify available placements. They also support and advise schools in this area. Parents who are experiencing difficulties in locating a special school placement, should contact their local SENO.

Special schools are staffed based on their actual current pupil profiles and the disability category of each pupil, as opposed to primarily by school designation. School staffing levels are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE.

From time to time, the NCSE identifies local areas where additional special school provision is required. In those circumstances, Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved. This process is ongoing and the NCSE are actively engaging with special schools in Cork in relation to ensuring that there will be sufficient placements to meet the identified need for the 2019/2020 school year.

I understand that the local SENO is continuing to work with the family of the child referred to by the Deputy in identifying a suitable school placement.

My Department is aware that the establishment of special school and class provision in some schools and communities can be challenging.

4 April 2019

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 will assist in addressing this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act provides the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the NCSE, the board of management and the patron of the school, to compel a school to make additional provision for the education of children with special educational needs.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 75.

School Equipment

83. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15779/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department operates a scheme of grants towards the purchase of essential assistive technology equipment for pupils with physical or communicative disabilities. On receipt of a recommendation from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) my Department advises schools on the level of grant approved. Schools may then proceed to purchase the equipment and claim the grant payment from my Department.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is necessary to ensure adequate proof of the amount paid for the equipment is received in order to determine the value of the grant that may be paid. Therefore schools are advised to provide the relevant receipts. Unfortunately, while an invoice provides a list of the equipment supplied, it is not confirmation of the value of the payment that the supplier has received for this equipment.

Further information in relation to the operation of this scheme is available in Circular Number 0010/2013 which is published on my Departments website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0010_2013.pdf.

DEIS Status

84. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made in conferring DEIS status on a school (details supplied); if this application will be given further consideration in view of the fact that it has been ongoing for some time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15801/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, the issue of this particular school's inclusion in the DEIS programme has been raised in the House before. As previously set out, my Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage. It is important to note that there is no application process.

This new model involves a calculation of the level of disadvantage in each school, based on the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data as previously outlined and is based on the geographical CSO Small Areas where the pupil cohort resides. A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process under DEIS

plan 2017 is available on my Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>.

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

Further analysis is currently being undertaken to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation. An analysis is also underway on the quality of the address data of individual schools. Until this analysis is complete, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools.

Schools Building Projects Data

85. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the first of four new schools for Donabate, County Dublin; the site location, patronage and timeline for delivery of the school; if the school will open in September 2020 as stated by him in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15808/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new 16 classroom primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Donabate school planning area. This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

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

An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to all parents which will allow them to make an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education. Parental preferences were previously collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies.

The patronage process for the new schools to be established in 2020, including the school referred to by the Deputy, will commence later in 2019. The patronage process for the remainder of the new schools will also be run at a later date, significantly ahead of their due opening. Updates in relation to further patronage processes will be announced on the OPPS website (<https://patronage.education.gov.ie/>) and the Department's website (www.education.ie).

It is intended that the permanent school building will be developed on the zoned school site within the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) residential development at Corballis, Donabate.

The school will be delivered under the Department's Design & Build Programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Manager to progress the project through the relevant stages of architectural planning and construction. A tender competition to establish a Project Manager framework is nearing completion.

Emergency Works Scheme Data

86. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he received an application under the emergency works scheme by a school (details supplied) to provide funding to facilitate special needs pupils attending the school; if the application will be assessed and sanction issued to the school authorities as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15815/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers applied for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme to carry out works to the school building to comply with Part M of the Building Regulations. The application was of a general nature and did not relate to a particular future or currently enrolled pupil. It was deemed to be outside the scope of the scheme in that respect.

However, it is open to the school to appeal this decision in respect of (a) particular pupil(s). It may submit a letter to that effect containing details of the enrolment of that pupil (or those pupils as the case may be) and an Occupational Therapist's Report on which the works being applied for are based. The Emergency Works Circular and Application form are both available on my Departments Website.

Autism Support Services

87. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available for pathological demand avoidance sufferers autism spectrum (details supplied); and the supports in place for persons that do not qualify for home tuition having been diagnosed with autism. [15816/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's preferred approach is that all children with Special Educational Needs are educated in school settings where children may have access to fully qualified teachers, individualised education programmes, special needs assistants, school curriculum with the option, where possible and appropriate, of full or partial integration and interaction with other students.

Where the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) confirm that a school placement is not available for a child with Special Educational Needs my Department provides for a compensatory educational service through the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, as an interim measure, until a placement is available. Home Tuition is not an optional alternative to a school placement.

The July Education Programme (or July Provision Grant Scheme) provides funding for an extended school year for children, enrolled in recognised schools, with a severe/profound general learning disability and/or children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Under

this scheme the school year of recognised schools is extended by four weeks for eligible pupils. Where school-based provision is not feasible, home-based provision may be granted.

Where parents choose to educate their children in places other than recognised schools they have made a decision not to avail of recognised schools. As a result they are not eligible to avail of resources, including the July Education Programme, which they may have accessed through enrolment in a recognised school.

Schools Building Projects Status

88. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress in relation to the development of a new permanent school building for a school (details supplied); the timeline for the delivery of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15940/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the development of a new permanent building for the school referred to by the Deputy is dependent on the completion of a building project for another school which will result in a building becoming available for the school in question.

The major building project for that school is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design) which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured. The Design team is currently completing works on a revised Stage 2b submission. My Department has also authorised the design team to carry out the pre-qualification of contractors. Upon receipt and review of the revised Stage 2b report, my Department will advise that Board of Management of the timeline for the progression of this project to tender and construction.

DEIS Scheme

89. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the DEIS identification review is complete; when it is proposed to progress applications from primary and post-primary schools for inclusion under the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15953/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, my Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage. This new model involves a calculation of the level of disadvantage in each school, based on the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data as previously outlined and is based on the geographical CSO Small Areas where the pupil cohort resides. A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process under DEIS plan 2017 is available on my Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

It is important to note that there is no application process involved and that the new methodology was applied to both the primary and post primary sector. Following an initial application of this new methodology, 79 new schools (14 of which were post primary), were brought into the DEIS programme in 2017 with a further 30 primary schools being upgraded from Band 2 to Band 1 status. These schools were assessed as having the highest levels of concentrated

disadvantage.

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

Further analysis is currently being undertaken to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation. An analysis is also underway on the quality of the address data of individual schools. Until this analysis is complete, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools.

DEIS Eligibility

90. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if DEIS status will be conferred on a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15954/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, my Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage. This new model involves a calculation of the level of disadvantage in each school, based on the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data as previously outlined and is based on the geographical CSO Small Areas where the pupil cohort resides. A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process under DEIS plan 2017 is available on my Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

Further analysis is currently being undertaken to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation. An analysis is also underway on the quality of the address data of individual schools. Until this analysis is complete, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools.

School Staff

91. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application for a third teacher for a school (details supplied) in County Kerry will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15977/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing

schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the appeal process and application form are available in Circular 0019/2019, “Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2019/20 School Year”, which is published on the Department website.

My Department has received a staffing appeal from the school referred to by the Deputy for consideration by the Appeals Board under the Small Schools criteria. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board will meet to review appeals for the 2019/20 school year in the coming weeks and the school will be notified of the outcome of the appeal.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Schools Building Projects Status

92. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a project (details supplied) will proceed to the next stage at an early date in view of the fact that all details have been submitted by the architect; if his attention has been drawn to the need to upgrade existing accommodation and provide additional permanent accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15992/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently 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 Design Team has recently completed work on its NZEB submission for this project which will ensure the new school building will be a “Near Zero Energy Building” (NZEB) in compliance with the 2017 amendment to Part L of the current Building Regulations.

It is anticipated that this project will shortly be authorised to commence the pre-qualification process to create a shortlist of contractors to which the project will be tendered.

Student Visas Data

93. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress regarding the new non-EEA students scheme in view of the precarious position of a number of applicants that are eligible for the scheme and are awaiting a decision in order to complete their studies. [15757/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Special Scheme for Students closed to new applications on 20 January, 2019. The scheme applies to students who were registered between 1st January 2005 and 31st December 2010 when new immigration arrangements for students came into operation. Part of these arrangements provided for students registered before 2010 to finish their course of study.

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INIS received approximately 3,100 applications comprising former students and their family members under the Special Scheme for Students. To date, INIS has made a decision in approximately 800 cases. The Deputy will appreciate that it is necessary to process such applications in compliance with legal requirements and in accordance with the Scheme criteria. While every effort is made to process applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the overall volume of applications and the complexity of individual cases.

INIS has already taken a number of measures to address this cohort of complex cases including the introduction of an on-line application facility for the Scheme to make it as streamlined as possible for applicants. The resources available for these activities, which includes the provision of overtime, and the accompanying operational and organisational structures, are kept under ongoing review to ensure that applications are processed as efficiently as possible.

Care Orders

94. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide a breakdown of childcare orders by type and District Court division. [15804/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that overall figures in relation to childcare orders per category granted by the District Court in 2017 are contained on pages 64-65 of the Courts Service Annual Report 2017.

The Courts Service has advised that a breakdown of overall figures in relation to childcare orders is recorded by Court Office. However, they advise that it is not possible to provide this breakdown for 2017 in the time available; the information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is to hand.

Courts Service has also informed me that statistics in relation to childcare orders for 2018 is currently being compiled and will be published in the Courts Service Annual Report 2018.

Garda Deployment

95. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a permanent Garda sergeant is stationed in Strokestown Garda station, County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15697/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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. 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.

The Deputy will be aware that Strokestown Garda Station forms part of the Castlerea District. The Garda strength of the Castlerea District on 28 February 2019, the most recent date for which figures are available, was 91 with 4 Gardaí and 1 Sergeant assigned to the Strokestown

Garda station.

When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 recruits have attested as members and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 18 of whom have been assigned to the Roscommon/Longford Division.

The Government has increased the budget by for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion for 2019, which includes provision for the recruitment of up to 800 Gardaí this year. The Commissioner has informed me that he plans to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí in 2019 and he also intends to recruit 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This Garda Staff recruitment will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing in 2019.

I believe that the injection of this large number of experienced officers into the field, along with the new recruits, will be really beneficial in terms of protecting communities. This and on-going recruitment will clearly provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible effective and responsive policing service to communities across all Garda Divisions including the Roscommon/Longford Division.

Appointments to State Boards Data

96. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15712/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The following table outlines the number and percentage of women on each State Board under the aegis of my Department. In circumstances where information in relation to the specified dates was not readily available figures for the end of the previous years have been provided.

On 8 March, the Government agreed to the recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards, established by Government to identify ways to promote better gender balance on all State Boards. To give effect to these recommendations, my Department in consultation with relevant Departments is developing an implementation plan containing actions for implementation by all relevant public bodies. This will of course apply to relevant bodies under the aegis of my Department.

State Board	Date	Number of women	Percentage of women
Censorship of Publications Appeal Board*	December 2015 December 2018	Board has had no members for the period encompassed by the question	n/a
Censorship of Publications Board	December 2015 December 2018	3 3	60% 75%
Classification of Films Appeal Board	December 2015 December 2018	3 3	43% 43%
Courts Service Board	December 2015 December 2018	4 7	22.2% 38.9%

State Board	Date	Number of women	Percentage of women
Garda Síochána Arbitration Board	8 March 2016	0	0%
	8 March 2019	0	0%
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission	8 March 2016	1	33.3%
	8 March 2019	2	66.6%
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission	December 2015	8	53.33%
	December 2018	8	53.33%
Judicial Appointments Advisory Board	December 2015	4	44.9%
	December 2018	3	30%
Legal Aid Board	December 2015	6	46.2%
	December 2018	8	61.5%
Mental Health (Criminal Law) Review Board	8 March 2016	2	50%
	8 March 2019	3	75%
National Disability Authority	December 2015	7	53.85%
	December 2018	8	61.54%
Parole Board	8 March 2016	2	17%
	8 March 2019	2	17%
Policing Authority	8 March 2016	5	55.56%
	8 March 2019	5	55.56%
Private Security Appeal Board	8 March 2016	1	33%
	8 March 2019	2	40%
Private Security Authority	December 2015	6	54.5%
	December 2018	2	18%
Property Services Appeal Board	December 2015	2	33.3%
	December 2018	2	40%
Property Services Regulatory Authority	December 2015	5	45.5%
	December 2018	6	54.5%

*With regard to the Censorship of Publications Appeals Board, owing to the minimal workload of the Censorship of Publications Board, and the lack of Appeals, no selection or recruitment process has been undertaken for the Appeals Board for a number of years.

Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

97. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ensure the compliance of public bodies with obligations under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015 to 2024; the sanctions available to address non-compliant and non-reporting bodies; the number of complaints made in relation to failure to comply with the strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15721/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy will be aware, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2015 – 2024 is a ten-year cross-government approach that brings together actions by different departments and state agencies in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on employment of people with disabilities.

The primary purpose of the Strategy is to ensure that people with disabilities who are able to, and want to, work are supported and enabled to do so. In tandem with that, it seeks to ensure there will be joined-up services and supports at local level to support individuals on their journey into and in employment. The Strategy's six strategic priorities are:

1. Build skills, capacity and independence;

2. Provide bridges and supports into work;
3. Make work pay (the Make Work Pay Report was launched in April 2016 with many of its recommendations already being implemented);
4. Promote job retention and re-entry to work;
5. Provide coordinated and seamless support; and
6. Engage employers.

Implementation of the Strategy is monitored by a working group under the direction of an independent chairperson (Mr Fergus Finlay). This group is tasked with monitoring the progress of the six strategic priorities of the strategy, and with the assistance of representatives and stakeholders from the disability sector, ensures that each Government Department is fulfilling its obligations and meeting its targets.

I can also advise that my officials, in cooperation with the National Disability Authority, and in consultation with the Strategy implementation group, are finalising a second three year action plan under the Strategy to ensure that the progress of implementation continues.

EU Regulations

98. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the island of Ireland having two different time zones following the position of the European Union not to have seasonal time changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15781/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Following an EU wide consultation last year, the EU Commission published a proposal to abolish the twice-yearly clock change. Under the current version of the proposal, the practice of a twice-yearly clock change would cease from 2021.

Discussions with Members States on the proposal are on-going via the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy (TTE) Council. Ireland is one of a large number of Member States which has said that more time is needed to consider the proposal, and in order that Member States can allow for coordination with neighbouring countries.

In this regard, and as the Deputy will be aware, my Department ran a public consultation process on the proposal to end seasonal clock changes. A report on the consultation exercise is being prepared and will be considered by an Interdepartmental Steering Group which my Department chairs. I intend to present the Group's report to Government shortly. Following on from this, more details of the consultation exercise and its outcome will be published on the Department's website.

Ireland's position at all times has been that any measure which resulted in differing time zones between Ireland and the UK would present particular challenges for the island of Ireland. The position adopted by Ireland on the proposal will be informed by this important consideration.

Garda Training

99. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the num-

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ber of gardaí in Dublin who have completed the competency based driving levels 4 and 5 in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15805/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As you will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including the training of its members and civilian staff and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner that there is a five level suite of competency based driving (CBD) courses, with each level specifically catering for the required knowledge base, skill set and operational requirements of the Garda members.

This 5 level suite covers the initial assessment at CBD 1 to advanced driving which includes the highest level of knowledge of road craft and all competency areas necessary to drive high powered vehicles at CBD 4 and the training of Garda driving instructors at CBD 5. The frequency of courses is governed by the operational requirements of An Garda Síochána. Competency Based

Driving Level 3 is the highest level of training given to operational members. The more specialised levels CBD 4 and CBD 5 are held as needed and are of 4 weeks' duration.

With respect to the specific information requested I have been informed that no Gardaí in Dublin have completed the Competency Based Driving Levels 4 and 5 in the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019.

Irish Prison Service

100. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the education budget for the Irish Prison Service in 2017, 2018 and 2019; the amount of the budget that was spent in 2017 and 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15806/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that educational services are available at all prisons, provided in partnership with the Education and Training Boards and a range of other educational agencies. Broad programmes of education are provided which generally follow an adult education approach. Separate to the IPS Education budget, the Department of Education and Skills funds an allocation of 220 whole-time teacher equivalents to the prisons through the Education and Training Boards.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the education budget for the years requested is outlined in the following table, along with expenditure in 2017 and 2018.

Year	Budget	Expenditure
2017	1.065 M	1.072 M
2018	1.265 M	1.162 M
2019	1.265 M	

Expenditure through the Irish Prison Service Vote covers the incidental day-to-day costs of running the Education Centres, including the purchase and repair of educational equipment, the purchase of course resource materials and educational software.

The aim of the Prison Education Service is to deliver a high quality, broad, flexible programme of education that helps people in custody cope with their sentence, achieve personal development, prepare for life after release and establish an appetite and capacity for life-long learning. The Service seeks to deliver relevant programmes that cater for holistic needs, ensure broad access and high participation, and prioritise those with basic education and literacy needs. It promotes the principles of adult and community education and supports a multi-disciplinary approach within the prison system.

Programmes are adapted to take account of the diversity of the prisoner population and the complex nature of prison life, including segregation requirements and high levels of prisoner turnover. Educational courses and curricula which are based on individuals participating in one or more subject areas for an academic year and then sitting examinations are only appropriate for a small number of prisoners. The Junior and Leaving Certificate are made available but increasing numbers of people in custody require a more flexible curriculum which has multiple entry and exit points that take account of prior educational attainment. QQI accreditation is therefore widely used with assessment by portfolio compilation. All prison Education Centres meet the quality assurance standards demanded by QQI.

Public Sector Staff Data

101. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the public service is meeting its obligation to employ a certain percentage of persons in receipt of a disability payment; and the statistics for same for 2017 and 2018. [15948/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy will be aware, Part 5 (section 47) of the Disability Act 2005 requires public sector bodies to ensure, unless there is good reason to the contrary, that 3% of the persons employed by that body are persons with disabilities. This does not necessarily mean those employees are in receipt of a disability payment.

Implementation of Part 5 of the Act is monitored on an ongoing basis by the National Disability Authority. The Authority reports each year on progress made towards the statutory 3% target for employment in the public sector.

The Authority's most recent report on compliance shows that at the end of 2017, 3.5% of staff employed in public sector bodies were people identifying with disabilities, this was the seventh successive year of exceeding the statutory 3% target. A copy of the Report is available from the Authority's website: <http://www.nda.ie>. As the Authority is currently in the process of compiling statistics for 2018, they are not yet available.

The Deputy will also be aware of the Government's Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for Persons with Disabilities 2015 - 2024. This strategy sets out a ten-year cross-Government approach to ensuring that people with disabilities who are able to, and want to, work are supported and enabled to do so, with different Departments and State agencies acting in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on employment of people with disabilities.

One of the key priorities of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy is to increase the statutory target of persons with disabilities employed in our public services from 3% to 6% on a phased basis by January 2024. To give effect to this commitment, legislative proposals are currently being progressed through the Oireachtas as part of the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016.

International Conventions

102. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when Ireland will ratify the optional protocol to the Convention against Torture. [15996/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, Ireland has signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) but has yet to ratify this instrument.

This protocol is in addition to the Convention which Ireland has already signed and ratified. The Protocol is preventative in nature and provides for the establishment of National Preventive Mechanisms which would inspect facilities where a person is held involuntarily.

Though my Department has been tasked with progressing legislation so that this Protocol can be ratified, this instrument impacts on a number of sectors. My Department has therefore consulted a number of key stakeholders during 2018.

On foot of these consultations, a draft scheme is being prepared which I intend to circulate to stakeholders for their comments as soon as possible before it is finalised for submission to Government for approval and transmission to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for formal drafting this year.

Residency Permits

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a person (details supplied); if the person can be considered for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15997/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 25 June 2021.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

Full details of the eligibility criteria and extensive guidelines are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to facilitate naturalisation and stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15998/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it would appear the person's presence in the State may be unlawful as they do not have a permission to remain in the State.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. In order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances, the person concerned should write to Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and provide a detailed account and documentary evidence of their personal circumstances since the expiration of their most recent permission to reside in this State.

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

Residency Permits

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16001/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that this person was granted a declaration of refugee status in 2002. I am further advised that this person has a Stamp 4 which is valid until 19 May 2019, at which point he or she will be required to renew their permission.

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

Residency Permits

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16003/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish

Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it would appear the person's presence in the State may be unlawful as their most recent permission to remain in the State expired in August, 2011.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. In order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances, the person concerned should write to Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and provide a detailed account and documentary evidence of their personal circumstances since the expiration of their permission to reside in this State.

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

Residency Permits

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16004/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation on behalf of the person referred to by the Deputy. The Deputy may wish to note that the registered post tracking number supplied with this question appears to be incorrect.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

Full details of the eligibility criteria and extensive guidelines are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie.

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

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

Residency Permits

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16007/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his legal representative should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either by email to info@protectionappeals.ie, by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office (www.ipo.gov.ie) .

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

Visa Applications

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a visa will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16008/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to will be examined shortly, and a decision will issue directly to the applicant and sponsor.

I am also advised that the Policy Document on Family Reunification contains a stated business target that such visa applications should be dealt with within twelve months of receipt of application. However, it should be noted that this is a business target and does not constitute a legal obligation. The business target reflects the detailed and often complex assessment that is

required to be carried out in relation to applications for family reunification.

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

Residency Permits

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16010/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation on behalf of the person referred to by the Deputy.

As the Deputy will be aware the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

Section 15 of the Act provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation if satisfied that certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. The conditions are that the applicant must:

- be of full age, or a minor born in the State,
- be of good character,
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a further total residence in the State amounting to four years,
- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation,
- have, before a judge of the District Court in open court, in a citizenship ceremony or in such manner as the Minister, for special reasons, allows -
 - (i) made a declaration, in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, and
 - (ii) undertaken to faithfully observe the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values.

Section 15A provides that, notwithstanding the above, where the application is based on being the spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen the requirements include that the couple are married or civil partners to each other for a period of at least 3 years and are living together and,

immediately before the date of application, have a period of one year's continuous residence in the island of Ireland and, during the preceding four years, have a further period amounting to 2 years (i.e. 3 years in total). Section 15A(2) provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion waive some of the conditions in relation to an application from a spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen if he is satisfied that the applicant would suffer serious consequences in respect of his or her bodily integrity or liberty if not granted Irish citizenship.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory conditions as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, along with the relevant application forms and guidance notes, is available on the INIS website at ww.inis.gov.ie.

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

Asylum Applications

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for refugee status and asylum in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16012/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his legal representative should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either by email to info@protectionappeals.ie, by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office (www.ipo.gov.ie).

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

Immigration Status

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16024/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State, on a stamp 4 basis, for one year on 19 July, 2017. I understand that INIS received an application for renewal of this permission on 14 January, 2019.

I am also advised that INIS wrote to the person concerned seeking further information on 27 March, 2019 and the application will be given further consideration in light of a response from the individual concerned.

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

Appointments to State Boards Data

113. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of her Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15701/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The information requested by the Deputy regarding Gender Balance on the State Boards under the aegis of my Department is set out in the statistical table.

Appointments to the State Boards under the remit of my Department are considered in relation to the gender balance targets set out in the Government Decision (S21590F). Appointments are also reviewed against other criteria, including the specific skills required for the role and for the Board in general, and the regional representation on the Board.

My Department has achieved the Government Decision target of a minimum of 40% female board members in 5 of its 8 Boards. Of these 5 Boards, 4 have exceeded the 45% target. My Department actively engages with the Public Appointments Service to ensure that advertisements are drafted to attract as wide a range of candidates as possible.

Statistical Table

Questions - Written Answers

	March 2016	March 2016	March 2016	March 2016	March 2019	March 2019	March 2019	March 2019	Notes
Name of Board	No. on Board	Male	Female	% M/F	No. on Board	Male	Female	%M/F	
Enterprise Ireland	12	7	5	58/42	12	7	5	58/42	
Health and Safety Authority	12	9	3	75/25	12	9	3	75/25	
Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority	10	3	5	30/50	9	4	5	44/56	2 vacancies in 2016. No. on Board now reduced to 9
IDA Ireland	12	9	3	75/25	12	7	4	64/36	1 current vacancy
National Standards Authority of Ireland	13	7	6	54/46	13	7	6	54/46	
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	11	7	4	63/37	11	5	5	50/50	1 current vacancy
Science Foundation Ireland	12	7	5	58/42	12	7	4	64/36	Chair position currently under consideration following PAS process
Workplace Relations Commission	9	4	5	44/56	9	4	5	44/56	

Abortion Services Provision

114. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he has liaised with other Departments and bodies regarding the introduction of exclusion zones at facilities providing for the termination of pregnancy; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15768/19]

124. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work to introduce legislation to regulate for exclusion zones for facilities providing for the termination of pregnancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15767/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 124 together.

It is my intention to introduce legislation to ensure safe access to premises in which termination of pregnancy services may be provided. It was originally intended to provide for safe access in the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, but a number of legal issues were identified during the drafting process. In order to allow full consideration of these issues, and so that the publication of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill would not be delayed, it was decided that the best option would be to provide for safe access to health services in a separate companion piece of legislation in 2019.

Government approval for this approach was received in September 2018.

Officials in my Department are working with the Office of the Attorney General on this legislation with a view to having a General Scheme drafted by the summer. Key stakeholders will be consulted as part of this process.

Home Care Packages Administration

115. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE reserves the right to terminate contracts it has with private agencies with respect to home support services in County Donegal in order to relinquish responsibility for the provision of such services; the consideration given to the continuity of care for service users in receipt of home supports when terminating contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15694/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Provision

116. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since the commencement of the new 2018 contract awarded by the HSE for the home delivery of incontinence wear to a private courier partner on which deliveries were either delayed, cancelled or orders were only partially delivered; the dates on which same occurred; the reason for the service disruption on each such occasion by CHO in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15695/19]

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

Appointments to State Boards Data

117. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15710/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) currently seeks expressions of interest for membership of boards as vacancies arise, where I, as Minister for Health, have nominating rights under relevant legislation. In considering applications made through PAS due regard is given to Government policy on gender balance on State Boards.

I also appoint members on the nomination of various bodies, again in accordance with the relevant legislation. The external body is requested, where practical, to nominate both a male and female nominee. In so far as possible when making appointments to State Boards, I endeavour to ensure an appropriate balance between men and women.

The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. It is currently being collated and will be provided no later than 10 days from today.

Hospital Appointments Delays

118. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [15726/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disease Incidence

119. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of confirmed cases of Lyme disease here in each of the years 2013 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15727/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the information requested is not readily available, I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Reviews

120. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 700 of 26 March 2019, the terms of reference for the review of the HSE reimbursement and pricing decision making process; the specific instruction the relevant consultancy firm will follow; the estimated timeline for completion of the review; if the review will involve consultation with third party interested stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15731/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has completed a tender process for a review of the HSE reimbursement and pricing decision-making process and is currently appointing a consultancy firm to complete this review.

The terms of reference, which form the basis for the conduct of the review, are as follows. The review is expected to be completed within three months of commencement.

Although not included in the terms of reference, consideration will be given to consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Terms of Reference

Having regard to the introduction of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 and the 2016 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, the Department of Health considers it opportune to commission a review of the governance arrangement, and resources in place in the HSE supporting decisions on applications from drug companies for a medicine to be reimbursed pursuant to the community drug schemes or as a hospital medicine.

In particular, the review will examine governance arrangements (including the systems, structures, processes) and the resources which support the decision-making process for the consideration of an application including:

- the use of expert advice throughout the assessment process (including clinical, pharmacoeconomic, commercial, financial, procurement and legal expertise);

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- the approach to securing the best value and terms to the HSE through commercial negotiations and procurement policies and procedure;
- the procedures for detailing agreements by means of written contracts;
- the arrangements and supports in place to facilitate the HSE Directorate in making reimbursement decisions in line with the criteria set out in Schedule 3, Part 3 of the 2013 Act.

This review should have regard to the policy, legal and institutional framework within which the HSE operates, in particular the requirements set out in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the Health Act 2004 and the processes described in Schedule 1 of the 2016 Framework Agreement.

The review will make recommendations as considered appropriate in respect of any required improvements to the HSE's systems, structures, processes, governance arrangements or use of specialist resources in respect of the review.

In making its recommendations, the review will have regard to best practice regarding the procurement of medicines, the conduct of high-value commercial negotiations, governance, organisational structures, skill-mix and oversight.

The review will complete its work and report to the Department of Health within three months.

Voluntary Sector Funding

121. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason an organisation (details supplied) has been denied funding; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the lack of funding threatens the organisation with closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15735/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Responsibility for the provision of funding in relation to LGBTI services is a matter for the Health Service Executive (HSE) in the first instance. Accordingly, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages

122. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether HSE care company carers should be trained in first aid; and his plans to make it compulsory in particular in circumstances in which the patient in their care is prone to having choking incidents. [15740/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

123. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Sativex is authorised here for sale; if so, if it is available by prescription; the number of persons prescribed same here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15743/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. As Minister for Health I have no role in this statutory process.

I am informed by the HSE that a new application for the reimbursement of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol/Cannabidiol, THC/CBD (Sativex) was received in February 2018.

A rapid review by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) was completed on 3 April 2018 and a full pharmacoeconomic assessment was recommended to assess the clinical and cost effectiveness of this medicine compared with the current standard of care.

The HSE commissioned a full pharmacoeconomic assessment on 20 April 2018 and requested that the manufacturer submit the required dossier to enable the application to be assessed.

The NCPE engaged in a pre-submission consultation with the applicant company in September 2018.

The NCPE has not received a dossier from the applicant company to date. The submission of a dossier by the applicant company is the next required step to complete this assessment process.

Question No. 124 answered with Question No. 114.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

125. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if his Department is responsible for the salaries of the members of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board; if so, the amount that has issued in salaries to the members of the board to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15772/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is established under the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (Establishment) Order, 2007 (SI No 246 of 2007). Article 12 (1) of that Order provides that members of the Board, including the Chairperson, may receive such remuneration as may from time to time be determined by the Minister for Health, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The annual Chairperson and member fees which apply to the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board are €11,970 and €7,695 respectively.

Details of the fees paid to individual members of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board are published in the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board's Annual Report each year. This includes the details of individuals who have waived their entitlements and those who do not receive a Board fee under the One Person One Salary principle precluding public servants and public sector employees who sit on State Boards from receiving fees.

Hospital Appointments Status

126. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15776/19]

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

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Physiotherapy Provision

127. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the physiotherapy waiting list; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and more than 65 years, respectively, by each category in each local healthcare area at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available, in tabular form. [15807/19]

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.

Counselling Services Provision

128. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a counselling appointment in primary care at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting less than 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15813/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

129. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each local health office area waiting for a child and adolescent mental health services appointment at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting less than 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15814/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

130. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider adding fibromyalgia to the long-term illness list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15821/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of thalidomide.

Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme at this time. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that the LTI Scheme will be included as part of a review of the current eligibility framework, including the basis for existing hospital and medication charges, to be carried out under commitments given in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

For people who are not eligible for the LTI scheme, there are other arrangements which protect them from excessive medicine costs.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €124 a month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines.

People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

People who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

131. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a three year cap on farm businesses' assets in circumstances in which a family successor commits to continue to farm the asset for a period of six years (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15822/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions based on farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. My Department is working on the development of draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of complex ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

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It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

The General Scheme of a Bill has been drafted and we are currently working closely with legal advisers on advice and legal quality control. The focus on matters relating to Brexit, including planning and preparing in a legal and legislative context, has unfortunately had an impact on progressing the Heads of Bill. However, subject to legal advice, I expect to bring the Heads of Bill to Government in May. The changes to the Scheme will come into effect in 2019 subject to the legislative process.

Disability Definitions

132. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the issue of having fibromyalgia classified as a disability under the Disability Act 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15823/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Fibromyalgia is a syndrome associated with wide-spread pain and fatigue. It is labelled a syndrome as fibromyalgia is a collection of signs, symptoms and medical problems that tend to occur together but are not related to a specific, identifiable cause. Fibromyalgia is not classified as a disability and there are currently no plans for the reclassification of fibromyalgia.

Health Services

133. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason children who travelled under the scoliosis action plan outsourcing initiative to a hospital (details supplied) now find themselves without access to their referring Irish consultant. [15830/19]

134. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason children with scoliosis who travelled to a hospital (details supplied) are treated differently to children who travelled to Germany who remain patients of their Irish consultant, post-surgery. [15831/19]

135. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason letters were not issued to parents to explain the change to their child's terms of their scoliosis outsourcing agreement with the HSE and that some children are now without access to an Irish orthopaedic consultant and must present to their local emergency department if they require a spinal assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15832/19]

136. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of scoliosis outsourcing initiatives considering it now entails long-term follow up of children by a hospital (details supplied) resulting in numerous trips to the United Kingdom by teams and patients; his views on whether this is the best policy; and his further views on whether it would be better to invest in capacity and services to carry out the surgeries and treatments here. [15833/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 to 136, inclusive, together.

The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services is a priority for my Department and for the HSE, and the impact of investment and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan is now delivering results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being

recorded.

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advise that the total number of surgeries performed in 2018 was 418 compared with 371 in 2017. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 and an increase in activity of 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

CHI advise that as of the 29th March 2019 there were 174 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List (including suspensions). This is a reduction of 26% (61 patients) since the same period last year when there were 235 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List. Furthermore, the number of patients suspended has decreased by 77% in the same period, down from 64 at the end of March 2018 to 15 at the end of March 2019.

CHI is currently recruiting two additional general orthopaedic consultants which will further reduce waiting times for children for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment. More broadly, all patient referrals to the orthopaedic spinal service at CHI are reviewed and clinically prioritised by a consultant. These patients are seen in order of clinical priority. Most patients are seen within 12 months.

An additional 800 Outpatient appointments were given to patients in CHI at Crumlin in 2018 compared to 2017, which led to a 31% reduction in the overall orthopaedic outpatient waiting list.

The Department of Health is working closely with CHI with the aim of supporting the further development of a sustainable scoliosis service and ensuring that the on-going demand for services is met.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy regarding outsourcing initiatives, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

137. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the wait time for an MRI at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin. [15834/19]

138. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the wait time for a first orthopaedic appointment at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin. [15835/19]

139. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the wait time for scoliosis surgery at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin. [15836/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 to 139, inclusive, together.

The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services is a priority for my Department and for the HSE, and the impact of investment and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan is now delivering results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded.

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advise that the total number of surgeries performed in 2018 was 418 compared with 371 in 2017. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 and an increase in activity of 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

CHI advise that as of the 29th March 2019 there were 174 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List (including suspensions). This is a reduction of 26% (61 patients) since the same period

last year when there were 235 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List. Furthermore, the number of patients suspended has decreased by 77% in the same period, down from 64 at the end of March 2018 to 15 at the end of March 2019.

CHI is currently recruiting two additional general orthopaedic consultants which will further reduce waiting times for children for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment. More broadly, all patient referrals to the orthopaedic spinal service at CHI are reviewed and clinically prioritised by a consultant. These patients are seen in order of clinical priority. Most patients are seen within 12 months.

An additional 800 Outpatient appointments were given to patients in CHI at Crumlin in 2018 compared to 2017, which led to a 31% reduction in the overall orthopaedic outpatient waiting list.

The Department of Health is working closely with CHI with the aim of supporting the further development of a sustainable scoliosis service and ensuring that the on-going demand for services is met.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy regarding waiting times at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

140. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the wait time for an MRI at Temple Street Children's University Hospital. [15837/19]

141. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the wait time for a first orthopaedic appointment at Temple Street Children's University Hospital. [15838/19]

142. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the wait time for scoliosis surgery at Temple Street Children's University Hospital. [15839/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 to 142, inclusive together.

The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services is a priority for my Department and for the HSE, and the impact of investment and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan is now delivering results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded.

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advise that the total number of surgeries performed in 2018 was 418 compared with 371 in 2017. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 and an increase in activity of 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

CHI advise that as of the 29th March 2019 there were 174 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List (including suspensions). This is a reduction of 26% (61 patients) since the same period last year when there were 235 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List. Furthermore, the number of patients suspended has decreased by 77% in the same period, down from 64 at the end of March 2018 to 15 at the end of March 2019.

CHI is currently recruiting two additional general orthopaedic consultants which will further reduce waiting times for children for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment. More broadly, all patient referrals to the orthopaedic spinal service at CHI are reviewed and clinically prioritised by a consultant. These patients are seen in order of clinical priority. Most patients are seen

within 12 months.

An additional 800 Outpatient appointments were given to patients in CHI at Crumlin in 2018 compared to 2017, which led to a 31% reduction in the overall orthopaedic outpatient waiting list.

The Department of Health is working closely with CHI with the aim of supporting the further development of a sustainable scoliosis service and ensuring that the on-going demand for services is met.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy regarding waiting times at Temple Street Children's University Hospital, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

143. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting more than four months for scoliosis surgery across Children's Health Ireland; and the steps being taken to ensure that the HSE-set four month surgery target is met for all children who require scoliosis surgery during 2019 and beyond. [15840/19]

144. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if children who are waiting for scoliosis surgery across Children's Health Ireland will be offered treatment under the NTPF if they are over the HSE-set four month target in view of the fact that this target is in line with international best practice and also one of the ten recommendations arising from the report *Waiting on Scoliosis Treatment - A Children's Rights Issue* from the Ombudsman for Children. [15841/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 143 and 144 together.

The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services is a priority for my Department and for the HSE, and the impact of investment and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan is now delivering results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded.

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advise that the total number of surgeries performed in 2018 was 418 compared with 371 in 2017. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 and an increase in activity of 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

CHI advise that as of the 29th March 2019 there were 174 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List (including suspensions). This is a reduction of 26% (61 patients) since the same period last year when there were 235 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List. Furthermore, the number of patients suspended has decreased by 77% in the same period, down from 64 at the end of March 2018 to 15 at the end of March 2019.

CHI is currently recruiting two additional general orthopaedic consultants which will further reduce waiting times for children for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment. More broadly, all patient referrals to the orthopaedic spinal service at CHI are reviewed and clinically prioritised by a consultant. These patients are seen in order of clinical priority. Most patients are seen within 12 months.

An additional 800 Outpatient appointments were given to patients in CHI at Crumlin in 2018 compared to 2017, which led to a 31% reduction in the overall orthopaedic outpatient

waiting list.

The Department of Health is working closely with CHI with the aim of supporting the further development of a sustainable scoliosis service and ensuring that the on-going demand for services is met.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy regarding patients waiting over four months, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Services

145. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of orthopaedic outpatient department clinics cancelled during 2019 in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; the way in which cancellations are managed; the way in which patients are informed of cancellations; the policy of the hospital in regard to cancelled OPD clinics; and the way in which children are safeguarded during clinic cancellations. [15842/19]

147. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of suspended scoliosis cases across Children's Health Ireland; and if these are managed in line with National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, guidelines. [15844/19]

148. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of TCI scoliosis cases across Children's Health Ireland; and if these are managed in line with National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, guidelines. [15845/19]

149. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for scoliosis surgery across Children's Health Ireland by hospital and category of wait list, in tabular form. [15846/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 and 147 to 149, inclusive, together.

The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services is a priority for my Department and for the HSE, and the impact of investment and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan is now delivering results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded.

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advise that the total number of surgeries performed in 2018 was 418 compared with 371 in 2017. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 and an increase in activity of 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

CHI advise that as of the 29th March 2019 there were 174 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List (including suspensions). This is a reduction of 26% (61 patients) since the same period last year when there were 235 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List. Furthermore, the number of patients suspended has decreased by 77% in the same period, down from 64 at the end of March 2018 to 15 at the end of March 2019.

CHI is currently recruiting two additional general orthopaedic consultants which will further reduce waiting times for children for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment. More broadly, all patient referrals to the orthopaedic spinal service at CHI are reviewed and clinically prioritised by a consultant. These patients are seen in order of clinical priority. Most patients are seen within 12 months.

An additional 800 Outpatient appointments were given to patients in CHI at Crumlin in

2018 compared to 2017, which led to a 31% reduction in the overall orthopaedic outpatient waiting list.

The Department of Health is working closely with CHI with the aim of supporting the further development of a sustainable scoliosis service and ensuring that the on-going demand for services is met.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy in relation to the number and management of cancellations at Our Lady's Hospital Crumlin, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Equipment

146. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the newly installed EOS scanner in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin will be available to all children across Children's Health Ireland (details supplied). [15843/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have referred your question to Children's Health Ireland for direct reply.

Questions Nos. 147 to 149, inclusive, answered with Question No. 145.

Hospital Admissions

150. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the admission of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15850/19]

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

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

151. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health when Spinraza will be made available for children with spinal muscular atrophy. [15851/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of

Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Minister for Health has no role or powers in relation to such matters.

Following detailed consideration of an application for the reimbursement of Spinraza and lengthy engagement with the company, the HSE recently decided that it was unable to reimburse Spinraza. The HSE concluded that the evidence for clinical effectiveness was still quite limited and that the price proposed by the manufacturer was not a cost-effective use of resources.

On the 21 February the HSE wrote to the company informing them of the HSE's proposal to refuse reimbursement of Spinraza at the current price offering. Under the terms of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 the company had 28 days to come back to the HSE with a new proposal.

I am advised by the HSE that the manufacturer, Biogen has been in contact with the HSE and has notified them that it intends to submit full and final representations, which will be carefully considered by the HSE.

To facilitate Biogen's request, the period for representations was temporarily extended to enable the company to submit their representations. This is in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Ambulance Service Data

152. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency department nationwide in March 2019; the number of such ambulances that waited longer than of 20 minutes to hand over patients, get their trolleys back and return to responding to calls; the number that waited longer than 40, 60 and 90 minutes for same; and the number that waited more than 120 and 180 minutes for same. [15858/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

153. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15866/19]

154. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15867/19]

155. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15868/19]

156. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15869/19]

157. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the Dublin

Midlands Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15870/19]

158. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15871/19]

159. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15872/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 to 159, inclusive, together.

The HSE advise that a pilot project was commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National NIMIS Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund for data collection and data management expertise.

The data requested by the Deputy is collected quarterly and will be provided by my Department to the Deputy, in the format requested, when the data for Quarter 1 2019 becomes available.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

160. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the South Southwest Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15873/19]

161. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the South Southwest Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15874/19]

162. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the South Southwest Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15875/19]

163. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the South Southwest Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15876/19]

164. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the South Southwest Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15877/19]

165. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a cholangiopancreatography in the South Southwest Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15878/19]

166. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the South Southwest Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15879/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 to 166,

inclusive, together.

The HSE advise that a pilot project was commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National NIMIS Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund for data collection and data management expertise.

The data requested by the Deputy is collected quarterly and will be provided by my Department to the Deputy, in the format requested, when the data for Quarter 1 2019 becomes available.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

167. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the Saolta Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15880/19]

168. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the Saolta Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15881/19]

169. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the Saolta Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15882/19]

170. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the Saolta Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15883/19]

171. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the Saolta Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15884/19]

172. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the Saolta Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15885/19]

173. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the Saolta Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15886/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 to 173, inclusive, together.

The HSE advise that a pilot project was commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National NIMIS Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund for data collection and data management expertise.

The data requested by the Deputy is collected quarterly and will be provided by my Department to the Deputy, in the format requested, when the data for Quarter 1 2019 becomes available.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

174. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the University of Limerick Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15887/19]

175. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the University of Limerick Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15888/19]

176. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the University of Limerick Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15889/19]

177. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the University of Limerick Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15890/19]

178. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the University of Limerick Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15891/19]

179. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the University of Limerick Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15892/19]

180. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the University of Limerick Hospital Group for waiting periods (details supplied), in tabular form. [15893/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 to 180, inclusive, together.

The HSE advise that a pilot project was commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National NIMIS Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund for data collection and data management expertise.

The data requested by the Deputy is collected quarterly and will be provided by my Department to the Deputy, in the format requested, when the data for Quarter 1 2019 becomes available.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

181. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a MRI scan in the RCSI Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15894/19]

182. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the RCSI Hospital Group

less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15895/19]

183. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the RCSI Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15896/19]

184. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the RCSI Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15897/19]

185. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the RCSI Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15898/19]

186. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a cholangiopancreatography in the RCSI Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15899/19]

187. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the RCSI Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15900/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 to 187, inclusive, together.

The HSE advise that a pilot project was commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National NIMIS Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund for data collection and data management expertise.

The data requested by the Deputy is collected quarterly and will be provided by my Department to the Deputy, in the format requested, when the data for Quarter 1 2019 becomes available.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

188. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a MRI scan in the Ireland East Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15901/19]

189. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the Ireland East Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15902/19]

190. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the Ireland East Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15903/19]

191. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the Ireland East Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15904/19]

192. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the Ireland East Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15905/19]

193. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for a cholangiopancreatography in the Ireland East Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15906/19]

194. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 March 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the Ireland East Hospital Group less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15907/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 to 194, inclusive, together.

The HSE advise that a pilot project was commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National NIMIS Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund for data collection and data management expertise.

The data requested by the Deputy is collected quarterly and will be provided by my Department to the Deputy, in the format requested, when the data for Quarter 1 2019 becomes available.

Disabilities Assessments

195. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available awaiting a first assessment from the HSE under the Disability Act 2005 by LHO area, in tabular form. [15909/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be

referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

196. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy assessment waiting list at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, by local health area, in tabular form. [15910/19]

197. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy initial treatment waiting list at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, by local health area in tabular form. [15911/19]

198. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy further treatment waiting list at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, by local health area, in tabular form. [15912/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 to 198, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

199. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy first time assessment waiting list at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 years of age plus, respectively, in tabular form. [15913/19]

200. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO1 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15914/19]

201. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO2 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15915/19]

202. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO3 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15916/19]

203. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of

persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO4 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15917/19]

204. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO5 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15918/19]

205. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO6 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15919/19]

206. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO7 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15920/19]

207. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO8 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 years and 65 plus of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15921/19]

208. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list in CHO9 at the end of March 2019 or the latest date available; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 plus years of age, respectively, in tabular form. [15922/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 199 to 208, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for these questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Beds Data

209. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds and wards in all public and voluntary acute hospitals that were closed on 29 March 2019 or the latest date on which data for validated bed closures at hospital and ward level are available, in tabular form. [15923/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): According to provisional data received from the HSE Acute Business Information Unit, there were on average 10,972 inpatient beds and 2,217 day case beds/places available nationally in February 2019.

Information relating to closed beds is collated at a particular date in time. The number of

beds closed can fluctuate greatly from day to day for a variety of reasons, including on-going refurbishment, maintenance work, and infection control measures.

In relation to the particular data requested, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Beds Data

210. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed days lost through delayed discharges in each public and voluntary hospital to 31 March 2019, in tabular form. [15924/19]

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

Ambulance Service Data

211. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of clinical status 1 ECHO incidents responded to by first responder in 7 minutes and 59 seconds or less; and the percentage of clinical status 1 DELTA incidents responded to by a patient carrying vehicle in seven minutes and 59 seconds or less in each ambulance station in each month to date in 2019, in tabular form. [15925/19]

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

Emergency Departments Data

212. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients aged 75 years of age or over that experienced an emergency department wait time more than 24 hours to 31 March 2019; and the hospitals in which the wait occurred. [15926/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year, with approximately 1.3 million attendances in 2018, up 3.5% on 2017. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group. Patients in this age group are the highest users of most health and social care services, have more complex needs and longer stays in our acute hospitals.

However, the National Service Plan 2019 includes an expected activity target that 99% of patients aged 75 and over are discharged or admitted within 24 hours of registration. Any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

With regard to the specific question the Deputy has asked, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly.

Home Help Service Data

213. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of home support

hours being provided in each LHO area to 31 March 2019; the number of persons on the waiting list for home support hours in each LHO area; and the number waiting zero-three, three to six, six to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [15927/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Ambulance Service Data

214. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency department nationwide in March 2018; and the number of such ambulances that waited longer than 20, 40, 60, 90, 120 and 180 minutes to hand over patients, get their trolleys back and return to responding to calls, in tabular form. [15928/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

215. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of spinal fusion patients currently waiting less than four, four to eight, and more than eight months for Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin and Temple Street Children's University Hospital at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available respectively in tabular form; and if he will provide the same information for other spinal patients. [15929/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services is a priority for my Department and for the HSE, and the impact of investment and the implementation of the Scoliosis 10 Point Action Plan is now delivering results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded.

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) advise that the total number of surgeries performed in 2018 was 418 compared with 371 in 2017. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 and an increase in activity of 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

CHI advise that as of the 29th March 2019 there were 174 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List (including suspensions). This is a reduction of 26% (61 patients) since the same period last year when there were 235 patients on the Total Spinal Waiting List. Furthermore, the number of patients suspended has decreased by 77% in the same period, down from 64 at the end of March 2018 to 15 at the end of March 2019.

CHI is currently recruiting two additional general orthopaedic consultants which will further reduce waiting times for children for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment. More broadly, all patient referrals to the orthopaedic spinal service at CHI are reviewed and clinically prioritised by a consultant. These patients are seen in order of clinical priority. Most patients are seen within 12 months.

An additional 800 Outpatient appointments were given to patients in CHI at Crumlin in 2018 compared to 2017, which led to a 31% reduction in the overall orthopaedic outpatient waiting list.

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The Department of Health is working closely with CHI with the aim of supporting the further development of a sustainable scoliosis service and ensuring that the on-going demand for services is met.

In relation to the specific breakdown of the waiting list requested by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

HSE Data

216. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a podiatry appointment in primary care at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15930/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

HSE Data

217. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an ophthalmology appointment in primary care at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15931/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

HSE Data

218. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an audiology appointment in primary care; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively, at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available. [15932/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

HSE Data

219. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a dietetics appointment in primary care; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively, at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available. [15933/19]

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.

HSE Data

220. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an oral health appointment in primary care at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15934/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

HSE Data

221. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a speech and language assessment in primary care at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15935/19]

222. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a speech and language therapy appointment in primary care at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15936/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 222 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

HSE Data

223. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an occupational therapy appointment in primary care at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15937/19]

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.

HSE Data

224. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a physiotherapy appointment in primary care at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting from zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [15938/19]

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.

Dental Services Provision

225. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost in the first year and a full year to provide free dental care for all children under six years of age; the estimated cost for free dental care for all children up to 16 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15944/19]

226. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost in the first year and a full year to provide free dental care for older persons and those living in residential facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15945/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 225 and 226 together.

On 3 April 2019, I published *Smile agus Sláinte*, the new National Oral Health together with my colleague Regina Doherty TD the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Research carried out by the ESRI, as part of the ESRI Research Programme in Healthcare Reform funded by the Department of Health, examined the potential cost implications of proposed changes to oral healthcare provision, and informed the new Policy.

The indicative estimate of the cost of providing the oral healthcare packages outlined in the Policy to children aged under 16 is approximately €33-€34 million, of which €10-12 million pertains to children aged under 6. This indicative estimate is based on current fees payable by the HSE under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) and an estimated take-up rate based on previous research. The final cost will be subject to further discussion with dentists.

Medical card holders currently receive dental services under the DTSS. The indicative cost for provision of the new packages of care for all adults ranges from €23-48 million. *Smile agus Sláinte* will prioritise vulnerable adults, including those in residential care, to access dental care. The cost of providing services for those in residential care will be informed by the planned assessment of oral healthcare need for high support care among that group of vulnerable adults. This assessment of need is one of the priority actions of the Policy.

In 2020 the introduction of packages of care for children under 6 years of age will be prioritised. In addition, there will be a focus on enabling vulnerable adults to access their local dentist as a first point of contact and ensuring that they are referred to the HSE community oral healthcare service or other appropriate service, if required.

Home Help Service Data

227. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of home support hours being provided in each local health area at the end of March 2019; and the number of hours being directly provided by the HSE and by contracted private health care companies, respectively. [15949/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service Data

228. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities in receipt of home support hours in each LHO area in tabular form at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; the number of persons on the waiting list for same in each LHO area, in tabular form; and the numbers waiting zero to three, three to six, six to 12 and more than 12 months. [15955/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Disability Services Data

229. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities in receipt of personal assistance hours in each local health office, LHO, area at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available, in tabular form; the number of persons on the waiting list for same in each LHO area, in tabular form; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to 12 and more than 12 months. [15956/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Disabilities Assessments

230. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each local health office, LHO, area in CHO1 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15957/19]

231. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO2 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15958/19]

232. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO3 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15959/19]

233. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO4 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15960/19]

234. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO5 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15961/19]

235. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO6 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15962/19]

236. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO7 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15963/19]

237. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO8 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15964/19]

238. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area in CHO9 at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [15965/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 to 238, respectively, together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Disability Services Data

239. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential places for persons with a disability being provided at 31 March 2019 or the latest date available, by community healthcare organisation, CHO, area, in tabular form. [15966/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Disability Services Data

240. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of new emergency places provided to persons with a disability to date in 2019 by community healthcare organisation, CHO, area, in tabular form. [15967/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

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

Disability Services Data

241. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of new home supports for emergency cases to date in 2019 by community healthcare organisation, CHO, area, in tabular form. [15968/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Respite Care Services Data

242. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of in-home respite supports for emergency cases to date in 2019, by CHO area, in tabular form. [15969/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

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

Congregated Settings Report

243. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons moved on from a congregated setting to date in 2019, by CHO area, in tabular form. [15970/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. The objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings.

By the end of this year, it is expected that under 2,100 people with a disability will remain living in congregated settings. I want to emphasise that the appropriate supports and resources are being put in place to ensure that people are supported as they move out of residential centres. The model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan (PCP). The PCP may change over time in line with an individual's needs and circumstances and the model of service delivery applicable at a particular time.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations on "Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion", I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

244. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with a disability in receipt of work-like activity services ID autism and physical and sensory disability to date in 2019, by CHO area, in tabular form. [15971/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and

plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Services for People with Disabilities

245. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities in receipt of rehabilitation training to date in 2019 by CHO area, in tabular form. [15972/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Services for People with Disabilities

246. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with a disability in receipt of other day services excluding rehabilitation training and work-like activities adult ID autism and physical and sensory disability to date in 2019 by CHO area, in tabular form. [15973/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Respite Care Services Data

247. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of day only respite sessions accessed by persons with a disability to date in 2019, by CHO area.

[15974/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

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

Respite Care Services Data

248. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of overnights with or without day respite accessed by persons with a disability to date in 2019, by CHO area, in tabular form. [15975/19]

249. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with a disability in receipt of respite services ID autism and physical and sensory disability to date in 2019 by CHO area, in tabular form. [15976/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 248 and 249 together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

250. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE is in receipt of an application from an organisation (details supplied) for assistance towards the purchase of a wheelchair for a person; the waiting list for wheelchair assistance; if this person will receive funding in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15995/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

251. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card has not issued in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15999/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

252. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card has not issued in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16013/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

GLAS Payments

253. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing same to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15683/19]

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 payments in respect of scheme years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

During prepayment validations for the 2018 advance payment, an issue presented which required further checking by Department staff. The Department has contacted the applicant's advisor in respect of the issue and has advised on what action is required to resolve the issue. Once all validations are passed, the payment will be processed. GLAS payments continue to issue weekly.

State Bodies Data

254. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15700/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The details requested by the Deputy are set out in the table. However, the Deputy should be aware that some members to these Boards are nominated by representative organisations rather than being made through Ministerial appointment.

4 April 2019

State Board		8 March 2016		8 March 2019
	Number of women on Board	%	Number of women on Board	%
Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board	1	14%	1	14%
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	1	17%	1	17%
The Marine Institute	2	22%	2	22%
The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority	1	33%	1	33%
Bord na gCon	1	14%	0	0%
Horse Racing Ireland	3	21%	3	21%
Irish National Stud	3	43%	2	29%
An Bord Bia	4	27%	4	27%
Coillte	2	22%	2*	22%
The National Milk Agency	0	0%	0	0%
Teagasc	2	18%	3	27%
Veterinary Council of Ireland	6	31%	8	42%

* Ms Bernie Gray was appointed to Coillte Chair on 13 March 2019 and therefore not included in above figures for position on 8 March 2019.

Veterinary Inspection Service

255. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties being experienced by farmers in County Donegal when trying to procure the services of vets, particularly with respect to out-of-hours farm visits; his views on whether the ongoing shortage of qualified vets is also leading to succession issues in rural veterinary practices; his plans to introduce a dedicated rural support scheme to incentivise practitioners to remain in rural practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15719/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In relation to Co. Donegal, I note that the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) last month granted a Certificate of Suitability to a new veterinary premises located in the county. This should assist in an increased availability of veterinary services in its catchment area.

My Department's National Farmed Animal Health Strategy noted a concern at the possible reduction of the availability of farmed animal veterinary services, particularly in certain rural areas. The Strategy recommended that my Department evaluate the availability of farmed animal veterinary services, and the Deputy should be aware that this study is currently underway.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

256. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the assistance that can be given to farmers who are in the suckler farming business who wish to opt-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15741/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In submitting an application to participate in the BDGP, applicants gave an undertaking to adhere to the terms and conditions that govern the Programme. Payments under BDGP are based on the full completion of specified actions over the course of six years which were designed to improve

the genetic merit of a beef farmer's herd. Section 13 of the scheme's Terms and Conditions refers to applicants who may withdraw from the scheme prematurely and it states that: 'Where a contract is terminated by an applicant all monies paid under the Programme shall be repaid to the Department except in cases of Force Majeure.'

Further sub-section (a) states: "Where a beneficiary is unable to continue complying with the requirements of the Programme for reasons beyond his or her control a case may be made under force majeure to terminate participation in the Programme".

In particular, applicants should make reference to sub-section (b) which states the various force majeure categories that may be recognised and applied without prejudice in individual cases.

Applicants wishing to avail of this mechanism should inform the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, in writing with relevant evidence pertinent to their particular case. All correspondence should be addressed to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Beef Schemes Section, Old Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, Co Laois.

Animal Culls

257. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for testing and culling of deer in view of another outbreak of tuberculosis in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15760/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The role played by deer in the spread of bovine TB is currently the subject of a detailed scientific investigation being carried out by my officials in collaboration with UCD, focusing on the genetic relationship between strains of bovine TB isolated from cattle, deer and badgers in Co. Wicklow. Previous work carried out by my officials in this area had demonstrated that the same strains were circulating in the three species in the Calary area of Wicklow. A related investigation, carried out by the Calary Deer Steering Group which involves my officials, NPWS, Coillte and the IFA, is continuing to conduct a survey of the level of TB in culled deer in that area.

In other parts of the country, there is no evidence of deer playing a significant role in the spread of TB in cattle, although they may be a spillover species. In any area where there are local concerns about deer and TB, my officials are willing to test culled deer for TB free of charge through the regional veterinary laboratories. In this way, if there are areas where deer may play a role locally, this can be detected.

Hare Coursing Regulation

258. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the minutes of the coursing monitoring committee for 2018 will be made available. [15765/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Monitoring Committee on Coursing meets annually and considers any issues arising from the previous season. Wildlife Rangers from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and veterinary inspectors from my Department attend these meetings and report on their findings. The Monitoring Committee also arranges to have any complaints or reported incidents investigated.

The report of the Monitoring Committee on Coursing for the meeting held on 18th December 2018 will be made available once adopted by the monitoring committee.

Transfer of Entitlements

259. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address the issues raised in correspondence (details supplied); if same will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15777/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was the transferee on a 2019 Transfer of Entitlements application to receive entitlements by way of inheritance. The entitlements in question are rightfully the property of those named in the will as beneficiaries of the rest and residue of the estate of the deceased person named.

The 2018 transfer of entitlements application could only be processed if these beneficiaries waived their rights to the entitlements in favour of the person named. In the absence of one waiver form, the transfer application was processed for 7/8th of the entitlements. If the outstanding waiver form is received, the remainder 1/8th of the entitlements can then be inherited.

Brexit Preparations

260. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has applied to the EU for the available financial assistance for training officials in performing sanitary and phytosanitary controls as indicated in an EU communication (details supplied); and if preparations are in place for a no-deal Brexit in view of the completion of preparations by the EU for a possible no-deal scenario on 12 April 2019. [15783/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have not, as yet, applied to the EU for the financial assistance for training officials in performing sanitary and phytosanitary controls as indicated in the EU Preparedness communication referred to by the Deputy.

This is because, in terms of the training of Department officials to carry out sanitary and phytosanitary controls at our ports and airports, officials in my Department have been availing of appropriate import control training on an ongoing basis since 2007 by participating in EU-led training initiatives such as the “Better Training for Safer Food” European Commission Training Initiative. This is EU-funded training and it is specifically targeted to training of Government officials carrying out all EU official controls in the food safety and animal health and plant health areas. It has direct applicability in terms of addressing Brexit contingencies. Consequently a significant cohort of staff in my Department is adequately qualified to carry out import SPS controls.

On preparedness, my Department, as part of the whole of Government approach, have been very active in this regard. Regarding import controls, we have been working with other departments and agencies to have the necessary arrangements in place at our ports and airports in order to allow the Department to fulfil its legal obligations as efficiently as possible, while also ensuring the minimum possible disruption to trading arrangements.

Beef Exports

261. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the barriers for beef exports to Iran in view of the fact that a veterinary health certificate for the export of beef was agreed in 2013. [15784/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Total Irish agrifood exports to Iran in 2017 were around €11.5 million, the majority of which (€10.25 million) was accounted for by dairy exports. According to the CSO, 26 tonnes of beef were exported to Iran in 2017.

The role of my Department is to open up markets for the industry and it is then up to the industry, with the support of my Department and Bord Bia, to avail of these opportunities. However, the actual levels of exports will depend on a range of factors, including global supply and demand dynamics, currency fluctuations and individual customer requirements.

A veterinary health certificate for the export of beef from Ireland to Iran was agreed in March 2013. DAFM officials participated in a successful trade mission to Iran and Turkey in April 2016. While the trade mission was primarily dairy-focused, DAFM officials had the opportunity to meet with their Iranian counterparts in order to progress and ultimately agree sheepmeat access to the Iranian market and also to explore other common areas of interest.

Limited exports to Iran can be explained by a combination of unfavourable trading conditions, cheaper supplies of beef from Brazil to the Iranian market, and financial barriers. Work is on-going within the EU to devise measures to overcome financial barriers to trade between the EU and Iran.

Transport of Animals

262. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on proposals by an organisation (details supplied) to expand lairage capacity at a location. [15785/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The relevant EU Council Regulation 1/2005 that deals with the transport of animals specifies that once Irish calves arrive in France, they must be rested at the port of unloading or in its immediate vicinity. The control post in Abbeville referred to in the article is over three and a half hours drive from Cherbourg and cannot therefore be considered in the immediate vicinity of the unloading point. I am supportive of the live trade and I am not prepared to undermine its future by failing to adhere to the relevant animal welfare regulations.

While the provision of additional lairage facilities remains a commercial decision for the private operators involved, my Department remains in close contact with the French authorities in these matters and I welcome the recent increase of 400 spaces approved by those authorities in respect of one of the lairages located in the vicinity of Cherbourg. This amounts to 1,200 additional spaces per week for calves.

The Deputy will also be aware that I reduced the inspection levy on calf exports from €4.80 to €1.20 in early 2017. I should also point out that calf exports in the first three months of this year are up 36% compared to same period in 2017.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

263. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a reduction to the minimum loan amount from €50,000 for primary agriculture under the future growth loan scheme will be considered in view of the fact that it will be in excess of many requirements for farmers according to a farm organisation (details supplied). [15786/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I was pleased to launch the Future Growth Loan Scheme last week. It has been developed by my Department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). It will be delivered through participating finance providers and make up to €300 million of investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agrifood & seafood sectors.

As I said in the announcement last week, this is a long-awaited source of finance for young and new entrant farmers, especially the cohort who do not have high levels of security. It will also serve smaller-scale farmers, who often do not have the leverage to negotiate for more favourable terms with their banking institution.

This type of long-term unsecured finance of 8 to 10 years is not currently available on the Irish market. Although the minimum loan amount for the Scheme is €100,000, I sought and agreed a minimum of €50,000 specifically for farmers. With a term of 8 to 10 years, I am advised that for smaller investment requirements, other types of finance may be more appropriate.

The Scheme will open for loan eligibility applications through the SBCI from 17 April. Three finance providers (AIB, Bank of Ireland and KBC) have agreed to participate in the Scheme and negotiations are ongoing with another two. The Government is urging all potential applicants to use the coming three weeks to start preparing their proposals for long-term capital investment. Further information including a FAQ document may be accessed on my Department's website at:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/agri-foodandtheeconomy/agri-foodbusiness/futuregrowthloanscheme/>

Agriculture Scheme Administration

264. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to make provision for working capital to farmers available in a new loan scheme in view of the fact that both the SME working capital Brexit loan scheme and the future growth loan scheme do not allow farmers to drawdown funds for working capital; and if farmers will be permitted to apply to the SME working capital loan scheme in view of the low drawdown of funds to date. [15787/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The €300 million "Brexit Loan Scheme" was developed in cooperation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), to provide working capital support to enable eligible Irish businesses to implement the necessary changes to address the challenges posed by Brexit. The Scheme opened for applications on 28th March 2018 and it will remain open until 31st March 2020.

At 29th March, there were 553 eligibility applications received, of which 497 are approved and 11 are ineligible. The total number of loans progressed to sanction at bank level is 99 to a value of €21.6m, 20 of which relate to food businesses with a total value of €6.4m. While the number of loans progressed to sanction level is relatively low, it reflects the current uncertainty regarding the outcome of Brexit. However, the number of eligibility applications approved indicates a good level of interest in the Scheme and is a good indicator of businesses engaging in Brexit preparedness. It was not possible to include primary agriculture because of the guarantee arrangements for the Scheme, which includes the EU/EIF InnovFin Programme.

I was pleased to launch the “Future Growth Loan Scheme” last week. It has been developed by my Department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). It will be delivered through participating finance providers and make up to €300 million of investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agrifood & seafood sectors.

As I said in the announcement last week, this is a long-awaited source of finance for young and new entrant farmers, especially the cohort who do not have high levels of security. It will also serve smaller-scale farmers, who often do not have the leverage to negotiate for more favourable terms with their banking institution.

I have had ongoing engagement with the banks with regard to access to finance needs in the agrifood sector. I am pleased to see that this engagement and the delivery of the 2017 “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme” has acted as a catalyst to encourage financial institutions to improve existing offerings and to develop new products for the sector which serve its working capital needs. A Spending Review of the Agriculture Cash Flow Loan Scheme, published in Budget 2019, concluded that this was one of its main impacts.

In this context, the focus of the Government has been to address market gaps, the most critical of which has been identified as unsecured longer-term investment finance and this will now be addressed through the Future Growth Loan Scheme.

Inshore Fisheries

265. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the annual budget allocation to the inshore fisheries conservation scheme in each year since it was established by county in tabular form; the actual annual breakdown of expenditure incurred for each year by county; the 2019 budget allocation; and the number of scheme participants in each year by county. [15788/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department’s €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme provides a broad range of supports to foster the sustainable development of our seafood sector. The EMFF Inshore Fisheries Conservation scheme provides supports to the inshore fisheries sector to support the management and sustainable development of inshore fisheries and the many small vessels that depend on them. The scheme is implemented on a national basis by Bord Iascaigh Mhara. The overall budget allocated to the scheme over the lifetime of the EMFF Programme is €6 million.

The following table sets out details of yearly allocations, spend and number of projects.

Year	Annual Budget	Annual Expenditure	Number of Operations
2016	€900,000	€431,960	65
2017	€900,000	€472,774	66
2018	€900,000	€515,007	71

An allocation of €600,000 has been requested from BIM for 2019.

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266. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the Marine Institute to carry out a study into the stock levels for each specific fishing stock species in territorial waters within zero to six nautical miles of the coast; and the estimated cost of such an exercise. [15789/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Marine Institute supported where relevant by Bord Iascaigh Mhara, both of which are State Bodies under the aegis of my Department, carry out research in relation to stock levels around the Irish coast.

The Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara pool their research to publish the Shellfish Stocks and Fisheries Review series on a biennial basis. The Review series sets out assessment and advice for a range of non-quota stocks. The series is published online by the Marine Institute at <https://oar.marine.ie>.

The Marine Institute also produces the Stock Book annually, which provides up to date scientific information on the state of the fisheries resources exploited by the Irish fleet. The Stock Book is available electronically on the Marine Institute's web site at <https://oar.marine.ie/handle/10793/1383> and this year an informatics interactive version of the Stock Book can be found at <https://shiny.marine.ie/stockbook/>.

I consider that these publications will provide a good level of information in relation to the state of stocks of interest to Ireland, including inside the 6 mile zone. Funding is provided for these agencies through my Department's vote on an annual basis.

The Deputy may wish to note the measures that I announced in December, excluding trawling by large vessels in coastal waters inside six nautical miles will provide ecosystem benefits, including nursery areas and juvenile fish stocks. In environmental terms, large vessels trawling can have a significant impact both on fish stocks and on important coastal marine environments. Following an extensive public consultation process, I announced in December that vessels over 18m will be excluded from trawling in inshore waters inside the six nautical mile zone and the baselines from 1 January 2020. Trawling for sprat by vessels over 18m will be phased out by 31 December 2021.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

267. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the issues discussed at the recent Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting regarding the CAP proposals published in June 2018; his views on the proposed convergence in payments to the national average by 2026; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15790/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Council held a public exchange of views on the CAP reform package on the basis of the Romanian Presidency's progress report, and revised drafting suggestions to the three Regulations, i.e. the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation, the Horizontal Regulation, and the Common Market Organisation Regulations. Agriculture Ministers were invited to comment on these documents and provide guidance to the Presidency on the next steps.

With regard to the proposed convergence in payments for the CAP post-2020, the draft regulations propose a mandatory requirement for Member States to ensure that, by 2026, a minimum convergence level of 75% for all payment entitlements is achieved. Member States will also be required to set a maximum value of individual payment entitlements. It is proposed that the funding mechanism will be similar to the current system where payment entitlements

with values above the average are reduced to fund the convergence.

This proposal builds on the current convergence path of the 2015-2020 CAP Regulations, under which all entitlements must reach a minimum value of 60% of the national average by 2019. I am open to some further convergence in payments.

Preliminary modelling exercises have been carried out and the results of these analyses are currently being reviewed and revised to take account of the most recently available data. As the draft regulations are developed further, more detailed analyses will be completed in order to fully assess the impact on farmers in Ireland of CAP post-2020. These analyses will, in turn, inform the decisions required at that time.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

268. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average support by hectare under pillar 1 direct payments by county based on the latest available data; the euro per farm holding in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15791/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

County	Average Payment Per Hectare	Average Payment Per Holding
CARLOW	€310.83	€13,707.36
CAVAN	€252.59	€7,266.68
CLARE	€238.55	€7,831.42
CORK	€288.13	€11,882.68
DONEGAL	€204.95	€6,921.69
DUBLIN	€244.58	€14,174.12
GALWAY	€235.95	€7,147.35
KERRY	€208.01	€8,740.97
KILDARE	€275.04	€14,245.39
KILKENNY	€308.51	€14,459.14
LAOIS	€306.93	€12,498.56
LEITRIM	€202.94	€6,111.74
LIMERICK	€255.45	€9,772.97
LONGFORD	€265.38	€7,981.53
LOUTH	€292.09	€12,166.70
MAYO	€210.11	€6,335.30
MEATH	€291.81	€13,325.94
MONAGHAN	€280.44	€6,868.08
OFFALY	€283.50	€11,213.90
ROSCOMMON	€250.64	€7,148.48
SLIGO	€211.63	€6,413.24
TIPPERARY	€291.07	€13,312.76
WATERFORD	€289.10	€15,137.68
WESTMEATH	€267.84	€10,552.81
WEXFORD	€307.21	€13,798.22
WICKLOW	€249.74	€13,188.16

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

269. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the national average payment in terms of euros per hectare for the basic payment and greening schemes in each year to date of the 2014 to 2020 CAP in tabular form. [15792/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is set out in the following tables. The average payment for each year was calculated

by dividing the total monies paid by the number of hectares declared for all paid applicants.

The average payment details for 2015 - 2018 include amounts under the greening scheme which started in 2015.

Year	Average Payment per Hectare
2014	€250

Year	Average Payment per Hectare (which includes Greening payment)
2015	€261
2016	€259
2017	€257
2018	€254

Basic Payment Scheme Data

270. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of recipients of the 2018 basic payment scheme with payment entitlements with an initial unit value less than 90% of the scheme national average by county; and the number in each county that have to date reached 60% or above of the scheme national average based on latest data. [15793/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the table.

County	Number of Farmers with Payment Entitlements with a 2015 Initial Unit Value less than 90% of the Basic Payment Scheme National Average by County	Number of Farmers that have Payment Entitlements greater than or equal to 60% of the Basic Payment Scheme National Average based on 2018 Payment Entitlement Values by County
CARLOW	432	311
CAVAN	2,302	1,358
CLARE	3,384	2,351
CORK	4,545	2,903
DONEGAL	6,184	2,550
DUBLIN	284	169
GALWAY	6,171	3,261
KERRY	4,856	2,570
KILDARE	769	462
KILKENNY	930	648
LAOIS	861	569

County	Number of Farmers with Payment Entitlements with a 2015 Initial Unit Value less than 90% of the Basic Payment Scheme National Average by County	Number of Farmers that have Payment Entitlements greater than or equal to 60% of the Basic Payment Scheme National Average based on 2018 Payment Entitlement Values by County
LEITRIM	2,684	1,584
LIMERICK	2,446	1,578
LONGFORD	1,036	704
LOUTH	537	342
MAYO	7,154	3,753
MEATH	1,313	807
MONAGHAN	1,553	984
OFFALY	1,313	799
ROSCOMMON	2,993	2,038
SLIGO	2,578	1,591
TIPPERARY	2,285	1,557
WATERFORD	766	500
WESTMEATH	1,336	837
WEXFORD	1,004	681
WICKLOW	938	576
TOTAL	60,654	35,483

Common Agricultural Policy

271. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an analysis has been carried out to date in terms of a higher payment per hectare for small and medium-sized farmers per the complementary redistributive income support, Article 26; the potential impact on applicants since the EU Commission published CAP regulation COM 2018 392 final on 1 June 2018; and if not, the reason therefor. [15794/19]

272. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an analysis has been carried out to date in terms of a higher payment per hectare for young farmers who have newly set up under the complementary redistributive income support, Article 26; the potential impact on applicants since the EU Commission published CAP regulation COM 2018 392 final on 1 June 2018; and if not, the reason therefor. [15795/19]

273. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an analysis has been carried out to date on the operability and impact on applicants in terms of introducing a voluntary scheme for the climate and the environment eco-schemes per Article 28 of CAP regulation COM 2018 392 final since published by the EU Commission on 1 June 2018; and if not, the reason therefor. [15796/19]

274. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an analysis has been carried out to date comparing the operability and the potential impact on applicants of a payments structure based on either the amount of support per hectare, Article 18, or continuation of payment entitlements, article 19, as provided under the mandatory basic income support for sustainability as outlined by the EU Commission in the proposed regulation COM 2018 392 final published on 1 June 2018. [15797/19]

275. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an analysis has been carried out including the impact on applicants to date with respect to the value of payment entitlements and convergence in which all payment entitlements must

have a value of at least 75% of the average planned unit amount for the basic income support for claim year 2026 as proposed under Article 20 of EU Commission published CAP regulation COM 2018 392 final published on 1 June 2018; if not, the reason therefor; and if analysis has been carried out to date on convergence of entitlements above 75% of the average planned unit amount. [15798/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 to 275, inclusive, together.

The draft legislative proposals for the CAP post-2020 were launched by Commissioner Hogan on 1 June 2018. The proposals, as drafted, involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments. There will be some additional discretion for Member States in configuring the measures available, within parameters laid down in Council Regulations.

The proposals outline significant changes to the direct payments system including:-

- Replacing the current Basic Payment Scheme with the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) payment;

- The capping of direct payments – this involves a graduated reduction of payments over €60,000 per annum. A 100% reduction is to be applied to the amount of the payment exceeding €100,000, at least 75% to payments between €90,000 and €100,000, at least 50% to payments between €75,000 and €90,000, and at least 25% to payments between €60,000 and €75,000. Member States will be required to subtract the salaries of the farmer including taxes and social contributions, before applying capping. The cost of regular and unpaid labour should also be taken into account.

- The Complementary Redistribution of Income Support for Sustainability (CRISS) - the funding released from capping is to be used for the mandatory redistributive income support i.e. moving support from large to small/medium farms. This is a mandatory requirement for Member States. Redistribution is not limited to the funding released by capping and it will be up to the Member State to set out what funding it intends to use and to who the additional funds will be made available.

- A complementary income support for Young Farmers (CISYF) which can be funded through surplus funds from capping. The CISYF is a top-up scheme for young farmers and is optional for Member States. However, in overall terms, at least 2% of all funding must be spent on young farmers either by the top-up mechanism or through a lump sum of up to €100,000.

- The introduction of Eco-schemes for the environment under Pillar I. This is a new requirement under the CAP legislative proposals. Member States are obliged to offer at least one eco-scheme, which would be optional for farmers. The eco-scheme can be applied for on an annual basis. Member States must draft a list of practices that are beneficial for agriculture and the environment. Payments are only provided in cases where the beneficiary goes beyond certain conditions and requirements.

- Continued convergence, where beneficiaries of direct payments must receive 75% of the average planned unit amount by 2026.

- Optional lump sum for small farmers.

- Coupled support continues and is available for more sectors including non-food fuel replacement. The available funding proposed for coupled support is reduced to 10% or 12% if

this includes protein crops.

My Department is a strong proponent of evidence-based policy making, and I can confirm that work is currently underway to analyse the impact of the various elements of direct payments in the draft regulations. Preliminary modelling exercises have been carried out and the results of these analyses are currently being reviewed and revised to take account of the most recently available data.

These direct payment measures (BISS, CRISS, CISYF and Eco-Schemes) are inextricably linked to each other. This means that each time one of the elements is changed, each of the other elements also must change. As a result, any analysis only remains current until one of the elements changes. This is likely to continue until the regulations are fully developed, at which time detailed analyses will be completed to fully address the impact on farmers in Ireland of CAP 2020. This methodology is congruent with the requirement for each Member State to prepare a Strategic Plan addressing all aspects of CAP expenditure and, consequently, all of these analyses remain at a drafting stage until the Regulations are resolved.

Bovine Disease Controls

276. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 224 of 27 March 2019, if there are circumstances by which the commence after date can be deferred for a short period (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15941/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The herd owner in question has a high risk herd and is due to complete a post-derestriction check test scheduled on 7th April 2019. They are free to trade until that date but, on that date, they are trade restricted until they complete a clear TB test. This is consistent with existing TB Eradication policy.

High Risk herds have to undergo 3 herd tests post-derestriction. The first test may take place at a time of the farmer's choosing between 3 - 8 months after derestriction. Herds are trade restricted when the scheduled date of the post-de-restriction test is reached (3 months), i.e. they may acquire cattle but may not dispatch cattle (other than calves under 6 weeks of age) except directly to slaughter from that date. After the post-derestriction test is completed, if clear, the herd must complete 2 more tests at 6 monthly intervals.

The scientific justification for selecting these herds for enhanced treatment resides in the fact that the herd incidence, on the post-derestriction test is approx. four times greater for these herds than that for the Round test. In addition, the number of reactors per thousand animals tested (the APT) for these herds is almost 3 times greater than that for the Round test.

Department officials have met with the herd owner regarding the current situation with the herd.

Aquaculture Licence Appeals

277. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the appeals process for aquaculture licences is taking so long; the expected timeframe for decisions on applications; and if the decisions will be expedited (details supplied). [15981/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Aqua-

culture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) is an independent body established by statute for the purpose of considering appeals of Ministerial decisions in respect of aquaculture.

The matters referred to by the Deputy are operational matters for ALAB and my Department has no function in that regard. The Deputy's question will therefore be referred to ALAB for attention and response directly to the Deputy.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Appeals

278. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a briefing request for a person (details supplied) will be accommodated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16026/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of the implementation of the redesignation of eligible lands for the 2019 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme, my Department has put in place a comprehensive communications strategy with farmers and other stakeholders. As part of this process, officials from my Department have recently met with Wexford representatives from the Irish Farmers Association to address their queries in relation to the independent appeals process which I have put in place.

Farmers who wish to appeal the eligibility status of a particular townland can, in the first instance, lodge an Appeal Notification Form to the Department. My Department will then write to the appellant setting out the relevant information in relation to the townland in question so that a full appeal can be made on full information. The April 8th deadline refers to the submission of the initial notification form.

Home Insulation Grants

279. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for grant funding to be provided to home dwellers to insulate their houses using Irish wool (details supplied) in view of the number of houses here that have poor BER ratings; the similar initiatives that could help to revive the prospects of the sheep and wool sector here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15693/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department funds a number of home energy efficiency schemes which are administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. These schemes aim to improve the energy efficiency of our homes, while also improving the comfort of the home and helping homeowners to save on their energy bills. Grants are available towards the cost of both attic and wall insulation. Homeowners must apply for a grant, either online or by post, and following receipt of grant approval use an SEAI registered contractor to carry out works in their home. Contractors installing insulation under any scheme supported by an SEAI grant must carry out the works in line with the SEAI's Domestic Technical Standards and Specifications. This document states under 6.4: "Materials to be used in the insulation of an attic at ceiling level must be manufactured to a relevant Irish, British or European Standard. Where novel insulating materials (e.g. Sheepswool, Hemp, Cellulosic Fibre) are being used, proof of quality control in product manufacture must be demonstrated in the Declaration of Works."

Further details, including information on targeted U-values, are available at <https://www.seai.ie/resources/publications/Domestic-Technical-Standards-and-Specifications.pdf>

Broadband Service Provision

280. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is planned to extend high-speed fibre broadband to a household (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15681/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I intend to bring a recommendation to Government in the coming weeks.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through Local Authority Broadband Officers is continuing. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

Postal Codes

281. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a person (details supplied) will be issued with an eircode; the reason for the delay in issuing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15688/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post collects information on new and existing buildings, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland provides the geo-locations for these buildings. An Post GeoDirectory issues a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, in accordance with its licence agreement.

Eircode has advised my officials that it will contact and liaise with the individual in question regarding an Eircode for their non-unique address as soon as they receive contact details. The next quarterly update of Eircodes will be in May 2019 when each new address assigned an Eircode is published on the free to use Eircode Finder website, a notification letter with their Eircode is issued to the occupant and an updated Eircode Database is provided to licensed businesses for their use.

Eircode has informed my Department that 26,823 new addresses were assigned an Eircode in 2018.

State Bodies Data

282. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

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Environment the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15703/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following tables.

Number and percentage of women on each State Board on 8 March 2016

Name of Board	Total no. positions	No. of Females	% of total Positions
EPA Advisory Committee	12	3	25%
An Post	15	3	20%
Bord na Móna	12	2	17%
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI)	9	4	44%
BAI Compliance Committee	8	4	50%
BAI Contract Awards Committee	8	4	50%
Digital Hub Development Agency	14	2	14%
EirGrid	10	3	30%
ESB	12	4	33%
Inland Fisheries Ireland	10	1	10%
Irish National Petroleum Corporation	5	1	20%
Loughs Agency	12	2	17%
National Oil Reserves Agency	6	0	0%
RTÉ	12	5	42%
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	12	5	42%
TG4	12	6	50%
The Mining Board	3	0	0%

Number and percentage of women on each State Board on 8 March 2019

Name of Board	Total no. positions	No. of Females	% of total Positions
EPA Advisory Committee	12	6	50%
An Post	15	4	27%
Bord na Móna	12	2	17%
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI)	9	5	56%
BAI Compliance Committee	8	4	50%
BAI Contract Awards Committee	8	4	50%
Digital Hub Development Agency	14	3	21%
EirGrid	10	3	30%
ESB	12	4	33%
Inland Fisheries Ireland	10	2	20%
Irish National Petroleum Corporation	3	0*	0%
Loughs Agency	12	3	25%
National Oil Reserves Agency	6	2	33%
RTÉ	12	6	50%
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	12	5	42%
TG4	12	6	50%
The Mining Board	3	0	0%

* One female member to be appointed in July 2019 which will bring the female percentage to 33%

Better Energy Homes Scheme Administration

283. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason SEAI will no longer deal with inquiries from Deputies on behalf of constituents regarding insulation grant applications. [15734/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy grant schemes on behalf of my Department. The SEAI has a robust process in place for dealing with all enquires in relation to grant applications. SEAI is currently reviewing these processes to ensure continued compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and adherence to relevant Guidelines on processing personal data.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

284. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his communication with the European Commission regarding the inclusion of the midlands region on the EU coal regions in transition platform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15754/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has met with the European Commission in relation to this issue and I have recently written to the Commission requesting the inclusion of the Midlands Region on the Coal Regions in Transition Platform in the context of a commitment to an accelerated transition out of producing milled peat for power generation in the Midlands Region.

The main objectives of the Platform are to enable multi-stakeholder dialogue on policy frameworks for successful transformation of carbon-intensive regions, and to facilitate the development of strategies and projects in areas such as investment for structural transformation, growth and jobs.

The inclusion of the Midlands Region on the Platform would mean that a team of European Commission and external experts would be assigned to assist the relevant State bodies with refining project ideas and implementation strategies, including feedback on relevant EU policies, programmes, funds and financing instruments.

I expect to receive a positive response from the European Commission to my request.

Bituminous Fuel Ban

285. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of plans to introduce a nationwide ban on smoky coal. [15811/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the reply to Question No. [Ref: 15328/19] of 2 April 2019. The position is unchanged.

[Ref No.: 15328/19]* To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter in relation to the nationwide ban on fossil fuels (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Michael Healy-Rae.

I have grave reservations about any proposal for a nationwide ban on fossil fuels. It is obvi-

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ous in built up areas that smoky fuels are not welcome, but in the countryside there is no reason in the world why fossil fuels cannot continue to be burned. Recent mixed messages are being sent out by the Government and many of the suppliers of solid fuels are having real trouble with regard to stocks and knowing what the market is going to be for the future. Clarity is needed around this whole issue and the Government's intention is needed to be made clearer for the general public also.* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 2nd April, 2019.(1009 Received on 27th March, 2019.)

The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or 'the smoky coal ban' as it is commonly known, was first introduced in Dublin in 1990, and subsequently extended to our major cities. Following a public consultation process, it was further extended in 2012, and now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide. The ban has proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels and has had the effect of significantly improving public health. Research indicates, for example, that the ban has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths in Dublin alone.

In light of its significant health and environmental benefits, it had been announced by a number of previous Ministers that the ban would be extended to the entire territory of the State. However, as the Deputy may be aware from recent press reports, a number of coal firms have indicated that they would legally challenge this decision.

I have discussed this issue with the Attorney General, my Department is now working to finalise a legally robust plan which will improve air quality by reducing particulate matter in the air.

However, pending the completion of this work I am aware of the need to provide clarity now to the public and to the trade to enable them adequately plan for purchases of stock for the 2019/20 heating season. I can confirm therefore that the current ban on bituminous coal will not be extended nationwide for the 2019/20 heating season.

Air Pollution

286. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if consideration has been given to introducing a certification system for wood, which could ensure that only suitable wood is sold for burning. [15812/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): All smoke, including smoke from wood burning, contains a range of toxic pollutants including fine particulate matter (PM2.5) that impact on health.

There can be a big variation in the quality of wood sold in Ireland. Purchasing cheap low quality wood as a home heating fuel may prove to be a false economy as much of the energy is needed to burn off excess moisture in the wood rather than providing heat output to the consumer. The resulting reduced combustion temperature can, therefore, result in the increased generation and release of toxic and carcinogenic air pollutants including Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) as well as dioxins which are promoted by the high chlorine levels in the fuel. While there are no statutory regulations for biomass quality, a voluntary Wood Fuel Quality Assurance scheme is in place.

In relation to air pollution more generally, recent scientific evidence indicates that it is more damaging at lower concentrations than was previously understood. With this in mind, I am committed to bringing forward Ireland's first ever National Clean Air Strategy. The Strategy, which I intend to publish this year, will provide the policy framework necessary to identify and

promote integrated measures across Government that are required to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner air, while delivering on wider national objectives. Domestic solid fuel use will be addressed in the context of the strategy.

National Broadband Plan

287. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to revalidate the business case for the national broadband plan to ensure that it will deliver good value for money in view of the fact that the evaluation of the State intervention area is out of date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15825/19]

289. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has engaged with providers (details supplied) and discussed these technologies and their advancements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15827/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 287 and 289 together.

I welcome recent announcements of further commercial investment in high speed broadband infrastructure by telecommunications operators. While I have not had direct engagement with either company, officials from my Department have met with representatives of these operators and have received high level presentations from both with regard to their commercial deployment plans. To date, neither operator has published, or provided my Department with, detailed commercial or technical plans identifying individual premises to be served.

My Department monitors deployment of high speed broadband on an ongoing basis as part of the NBP and this monitoring continues in parallel with the NBP procurement process. The NBP High Speed Broadband Map can be updated during the procurement, or following award of an NBP contract, to reflect new commercial plans, or to update areas where previous plans have failed to fully materialise.

The State Intervention area for the NBP procurement process, contains approximately 540,000 premises. This remains as set out on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie.

The NBP procurement process is in its final stage. My Department has undertaken additional detailed analysis to inform its consideration of whether the final tender submitted by the bidder could be recommended as an acceptable outcome for Government. This analysis has been undertaken with input from technical, commercial and telecommunications experts. I intend to make a recommendation to Government in the coming weeks.

Broadband Service Provision

288. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has clarified with a company (details supplied) the number of properties now connected to fibre rather than passed in view of the removal of 300,000 properties from the national broadband plan as part of the fibre roll-out plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15826/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017, eir is

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in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. According to data for Q4 2018 submitted by eir to my Department the company has passed almost 225,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment.

Information on eir's rural deployment is available on that company's website, <http://fibre-rollout.ie/Eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website, www.dccae.gov.ie.

In accordance with the Commitment Agreement, officials from my Department engage regularly with eir in relation its ongoing reporting requirements under its deployment. As part of this engagement eir provides my Department with detailed information on premises connected on a monthly and quarterly basis. While the company does not publish this information and considers it commercially sensitive, it has stated publicly that take up on the network is in line with the trajectory anticipated when the company planned this investment.

Question No. 289 answered with Question No. 287.

Broadband Service Provision

290. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has engaged with hotels and large businesses in rural areas that have chosen to keep their business with their local provider rather than switching to fibre even though it may run past their front doors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15828/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of all 2.4 million Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. Today, 74% of premises can access high speed broadband.

The aim of the NBP is to provide every premises with access to a high speed broadband service on a future proofed basis. While the NBP sets the minimum download speed at 30 megabits per second, the NBP recognises that higher speeds and quality of service are likely to be required as the digital society develops and progresses. This is supported by data from the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) whose Quarter 4 2018 Key Data report noted that subscriptions to a fibre service stood at 90,500, a 128% increase when compared with the same period the previous year. The increase in subscriptions is considered to be likely as a result of the recent network build of fibre across the country by the telecoms sector, with further fibre investments announced.

There can be a range of reasons why businesses may choose not to switch to a fibre broadband service at the point of it becoming available, including, for example, the length of time remaining on their current contract. The choices that businesses or hotels make at a point in time in relation to the selection of a broadband retail service, is very much a matter for individual consumers and businesses.

National Broadband Plan

291. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale regarding the approval of the move from a company (details supplied) to an organisation; if the organisation can be invited to the Oireachtas Committee of Public Accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15829/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

The bidder in the NBP procurement process is led by Granahan McCourt. The bidder has also named a number of key sub-contractors which include the first company referenced by the Deputy. In the event a contract is awarded, the bidder will set up a new company to deliver and operate the State Intervention network. The principle of a separate wholesale company to be established by a successful bidder in the NBP procurement was set out in the 2015 Intervention Strategy. This was in order to ensure safeguards around transparency and governance of public money. The second company referenced by the Deputy in his question is that company.

The business of the Committee of Public Accounts is a matter for that Committee.

Departmental Expenditure

292. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding provided to projects by his Department or agencies under the aegis of his Department in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, respectively, in tabular form; if the funding has been allocated; and if it has been drawn down in each case. [15852/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested is currently being compiled.

I will forward this information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Road Safety

293. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider funding all proposed safety improvement locations in County Limerick as proposed by Limerick City and County Council; and the proposed date of sanctioning funding for such projects. [15682/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the maintenance, improvement and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

With regard to regional and local roads, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, in accordance with the provisions

of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. It is a matter for each Council to determine its priorities and decide its work programme taking available grant funding and its own resources into account. I always stress to Councils the importance of prioritising roads when allocating their own resources.

Under the 2019 Safety Improvement Works programme for regional and local roads, Limerick City and County Council submitted applications for 11 safety projects at a cost of €485,000. Funding has been allocated to the Council to complete 9 of these projects at a cost of €358,000 in 2019.

State Bodies Data

294. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15715/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/state-board-membership-and-approved-fees>.

My Department is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards to promote greater gender balance in this area and continues to appoint persons to the State Boards under its aegis in line with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Guidelines on appointments to State Boards.

Departmental Reports

295. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the report on the maritime transport forum 2008 can be accessed on the website of his Department; if not, if it will be made available; and if there are developments or public documents on the issues persons with disabilities experience at ports here since 2008. [15736/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The 2008 Report of the Maritime Passenger Transport Forum can be accessed on my Department's website under Publications and at the following link:

<http://www.dttas.ie/maritime/english/maritime-passenger-transport-forum-0>.

The Forum was established to oversee the implementation and review of the Maritime Passenger Transport section of the Department's Sectoral Plan prepared under the Disability Act 2005. The 2008 Report made a number of recommendations which have since been implemented, including access audits on a range of domestic passenger ships and the harbours/landing places from which they operate, the provision of disability awareness training for passenger vessel owners/operators, and the preparation of "Guidelines for Accessible Maritime Passenger Transport" in conjunction with the National Disability Authority, which were launched in March 2010. The Guidelines contain a range of practical advice and information for all those involved in providing maritime transport services including passenger vessel owners and operators, port operators and local authorities.

A review of the Department's Sectoral Plan for Accessible Transport under the Disability Act 2005, Transport Access for All, was published in 2012 and is available to view on the Department's website, covering all modes of transport including Maritime:

<http://www.dttas.ie/public-transport/publications/english/sectoral-plan-accessible-transport-transport-access-all>. The Plan contains some user feedback on the experience of travelling by passenger vessel or ferry as reported by persons with disabilities.

A web page for the provision of travel information to people with reduced mobility, launched in June 2012, brings together information on a range of transport modes including Ferries and Ferry ports. It is located on the National Transport Authority's (NTA) website "Transport for Ireland" and can be viewed via the following link: <http://www.transportforireland.ie/accessible-travel/>.

The European Union (Rights of Passengers when Travelling By Sea and Inland Waterway) Regulations 2012 [S.I. No. 394 of 2012], which apply from 18 December 2012, give full effect to Regulation (EU) No 1177/2010 of 24 November 2010 concerning the rights of passengers when travelling by sea and inland waterway. The NTA is the national enforcement body for the purposes of the EU Regulation in Ireland. Further information is available on the NTA website and the Department has also published Information Notes containing general information on the Regulation including a document for passengers:

<http://www.dttas.ie/maritime/maritimetrans/passenger-rights>.

In recent years the Department has pursued a number of initiatives in an effort to support improvements in maritime passenger transport accessibility, including a Monitoring Programme during 2012 and 2013 to inform the Department about the extent of voluntary accessibility improvements that have been made to passenger boats and ships and related services. Arising from the findings, further disability awareness training for passenger vessel owners, operators and crew was provided, most recently in 2016.

The Department does not have current information regarding recent developments or experiences at individual ports. It is suggested that any queries in relation to a particular port might be directed to the port authority concerned.

There are three international ferry ports in the State: Cork, Dublin and Rosslare. The passenger facilities in these ports are either operated by state owned companies or in the case of Dublin Port by the Ferry Terminal Operators. These companies recognise the importance of delivering a high quality service to all passengers including those with disabilities.

The Department's Accessibility Consultative Committee continues to provide a forum for engagement between Departmental officials and representatives of the Disability Stakeholders Group, the National Disability Authority and other relevant Agencies. No particular issues in relation to ports have been raised at recent meetings of the Committee.

Cycling Facilities Data

296. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of bicycle lockers available at public transport stations here; the cost of providing such lockers, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15762/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public

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transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including cycling infrastructure.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my private office if he does not receive a reply within 10 days.

Public Transport

297. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if cost estimates have been provided for replacing trees that will be removed as part of the BusConnects plan. [15763/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including BusConnects.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my private office if he does not receive a reply within 10 days.

Railway Stations

298. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to support the expansion of the public piano initiative in public transport stations nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15799/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is primarily a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if she does not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Signage

299. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the rules governing warning signage for speed check vans will be clarified; and if under European law there is a necessity to have three warning signs on the approach road to a speed check van. [15979/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. Matters relating to the management, including signage, of national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local authority. The Traffic Signs Manual, which my Department has issued, contains all information on which Warning Signs are necessary. There are no provisions of EU law as it stands that apply to this matter.

I would note that traffic signs generally follow international conventions, which of

course should not be confused with EU or other law.

In relation to the operation of road traffic law enforcement, this is a matter for the Garda Síochána, as with law enforcement generally.

Bus Éireann Fleet

300. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the Bus Éireann fleet nationally by depot; and the average age profile of the Bus Éireann fleet by coach, city and town bus fleet by depot. [15985/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the company for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Éireann Fleet

301. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that the National Transport Authority has failed to supply new double decker coaches to Bus Éireann at Capwell, County Cork (details supplied). [15986/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure including the provision of national bus fleet.

Noting the NTA’s responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the NTA for a direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my private office if he does receive a reply within 10 days.

Bus Éireann Staff

302. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the work of both Bus Éireann management and staff in County Cork in attempting to provide a reliable bus service despite the failure of the National Transport Authority to supply adequate resources will be acknowledged. [15987/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport but I am not involved in its day-to-day operations. As the Deputy is aware, my Department has allocated €287 million in funding this year towards the delivery of public service obligation (PSO) services, which are overseen by the National Transport Authority (NTA).

The precise allocations to the companies (including Bus Éireann) to operate these services is decided by the NTA, in accordance with the various contract arrangements that it has in place with the PSO service providers. I am advised that the NTA has invested in a significant improvement to subsidised bus services in Cork City and is currently reviewing bus services in the Greater Cork area. PSO services and rural transport services that respond to local needs are continuing to grow throughout the country, and some further expansion is also being facilitated.

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In view of the NTA's statutory responsibility in relation to arranging for the provision of public transport, I am forwarding the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct response. I ask the Deputy to contact my Office if he does not receive a response within 10 working days.

Services for People with Disabilities

303. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the most recent time the National Transport Authority and Bus Éireann undertook a review of the accessible routes on the Bus Éireann network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15988/19]

304. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of the NTA in supplying Bus Éireann with the audio files to facilitate audio announcements on Bus Éireann services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15989/19]

305. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Transport Authority has supplied him with evidence of consultation with disabled persons on the future purchase of buses that are accessible to all in order to prevent a repeat of events (details supplied). [15990/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 303 to 305, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have forwarded the questions to the NTA for direct reply to the Deputy. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Services

306. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of a bus shelter for south-bound passengers in a location (details supplied) in County Cork. [15991/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the provision of bus stops, bus shelters and bus stations throughout the State.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my private office if he does not receive a reply within 10 days.

Airport Security

307. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an executive summary of the key findings made by a recent external oversight audit conducted on the role of the Irish Aviation Authority as competent authority for aviation security here will be made publicly available; if he has been provided with a briefing on the matter; his views on the matter; when the summary will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15993/19]

308. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the newly enhanced security arrangements introduced at airports on 30 January 2019 in relation to the requirement of airport police and officials of the Revenue Commissioners to be screened each time while passing between landside to airside also apply equally to members of the US transportation security staff stationed at airports here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15994/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 307 and 308 together.

The principal regulation in Europe for setting out the standards for civil aviation security is Regulation (EC) 300/2008, and Ireland is required to adhere to the baseline requirements laid out in this Regulation, including a requirement that: *“All persons other than passengers, together with their items carried, shall be screened upon entering critical parts of security restricted areas in order to prevent prohibited articles from being introduced into these parts.”*

As such, all categories of persons are subject to security screening. Exemptions from screening are limited, and they do not apply to personnel from the US Transportation Administration stationed at airports in Ireland.

As regards the reference to audit findings, I assume the Deputy is referring to a recent European Commission inspection of the Irish Aviation Authority, which is the Appropriate Authority in the State under EC Regulation No 300/2008 on common rules in the field of civil aviation security. The Deputy will understand that this report is classified and available only to relevant parties who have the appropriate security clearance. I am not able to comment any further on the contents of that report or its findings.

State Bodies Data

309. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of her Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15702/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of my Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019 is set out in the following table.

	No. of Women March 8th 2016	%	No. of women March 8th 2019	%
Adoption Authority Ireland	4	57%	4	57%
Oberstown	4	36%	6	46%
Gaisce	5	55%	7	50%
Tusla	4	44%	4	44%

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the female representation level on these boards is in line with Government policy.

Early Childhood Care and Education

310. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an overage exemption will be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15782/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) overage exemptions were introduced at the onset of the ECCE programme in 2010. At that time ECCE operated for a 38 week period, or one programme year. For some children with special/additional needs, attending preschool five days a week was not feasible and therefore an allowance was made. Their ECCE place was split over two years, e.g. a child may have availed of three days ECCE provision in year one and two days in year two. In order to facilitate this, in the cases where the child would have been overage for ECCE in the latter year, an overage exemption was granted.

Overage Exemptions currently provided by the Department are governed by three guiding principles as follows:

- A Letter of Recommendation supplied from a specialist (NB: Not a GP/Public Health Nurse)
- The child not reaching 6 years of age during the exemption year to comply with the school starting age (as per Educational Welfare Act, 2000)
- ECCE Allocation taken -i.e. if a child has already availed of the full two years they will not be eligible.

In the case of the child named, the application was declined on the basis that their ECCE entitlement will have been utilised in full by the end of June.

It is important to note that this provision of an overage exemption by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) for the ECCE programme was never intended as a mechanism to delay a child's entry to primary education before the age of 6 years which is the statutory requirement or to address any issue of non-availability of a school place.

It should also be noted that the application process for an exemption from the upper age limit for the ECCE programme was introduced within a context where:

- The ECCE programme was for one year only; and
- The Access and Inclusions Model (AIM) did not exist.

Given the extension of the ECCE programme in 2016/2017, the further extension of the programme to two full years from September 2018, and the introduction of AIM in June 2016, the rationale underpinning the policy intent of the system of overage exemption came under review as the initial premise for the provision of an exemption might have been considered to be no longer valid, i.e. an overage exemption as originally designed allowed for a child to avail of one programme year of ECCE over two years, whereas the standard provision is now a full two programme years.

Therefore, the overage exemption process has recently been the subject of a consultation

process and report by the National Disability Authority (NDA). Officials from the Department are now considering policy options following on from the recent publication of this report. The new policy will consider the future of the system of exemptions and how best to support parents and children in the important transition from pre-school to primary school. It is worth stressing that the only rationale underpinning these considerations is what is in the best interests of the child.

The current system will continue until such time as any new policy proposals are in place.

A key finding of the NDA report, which was published recently, is that generally it is in children's best interest to enrol in primary school with their peers and to transition to becoming a teenager with their peers.

The report also seeks to ensure that schools offer all the assistance necessary to meet the child's needs, with the assistance of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

My Department will be happy to assist the family, if requested, to make contact with the NCSE to ensure that adequate preparations are in place for the child to start school in September 2019. The family should make immediate contact with their local school to make sure it has appropriate arrangements in place to support this child from September 2019.

Illegal Adoptions

311. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the final report on illegal birth registrations will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15803/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I had expected that the final report of the review of a sample of adoption records being overseen by the Independent Reviewer Marion Reynolds would be submitted to me by Easter. I have just received a third interim report from Ms. Reynolds dated 1 April informing me that this will now be delayed to end May. I understand that the reason for the delay is that the fieldwork being carried out by both Tusla and the Adoption Authority of Ireland, which is now reaching a conclusion, is complex, forensic and resource intensive, and has taken longer than anticipated.

The two previous interim reports from the Reviewer have been published on my Department's website. The purpose of this review, which I initiated following the discovery of cases of illegal registrations in the St. Patrick's Guild records, is to determine if similar evidence of illegal birth registrations can be identified from the records of other former adoption agencies and other relevant bodies.

The final report and its findings will provide information to assist me in identifying any necessary next steps.

Foster Care

312. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which supervision of the arrangement is managed in relation to the 13 children in foster care outside the country and by whom with particular reference to facilitating contact with their family of origin. [15856/19]

313. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in

which children are kept in contact with their families when they are placed in residential units in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15857/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 and 313 together.

Any decision by a Tusla social work team to place a child outside the State must be approved by the Agency's Chief Operations Officer. In addition to this, each child placed out of state has a care order in place in Ireland and as such consent must also be provided by the District Court and in some instances the High Court, depending on the nature of the care order.

Out of State placements, in keeping with placements made within the State, are supervised by allocated social workers and the local management of social work team leaders and Principal Social Workers. National oversight of these placements is maintained through a reporting and tracking system in place in the office of the Chief Operations Officer. Tusla Social Workers supervising out of state placements visit at intervals agreed and set out in the child's care plan. Frequency of social work visits range from once every two weeks for some children to once every twelve weeks for children in more settled placements. In some cases, support is also provided by local social services in the country where the child is placed, which may involve placement visits.

The frequency of family contact is determined through the care planning process for each child, taking into account the views of the child, their family, their carers, other professionals involved and Guardians Ad Litem. Family access with the child in an out of state placement is supported by Tusla and this includes booking and paying for flights. The majority of children in out of state placements have regular family contact, including face to face meetings, trips back to Ireland and contact by telephone or through social media. In a very small number of cases there may be no family contact, which can arise as a result of the wishes of the child and/or a social work decision relating to child protection risks.

Education and Training Boards Staff

314. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the purpose and function of the City of Dublin Youth Services Board; the number of staff employed by job title and grade; the number of staff on secondment or career break by title and grade; and the number of staff that are bilocated. [15942/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy may wish to be aware that the City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB) is a statutory sub-committee of City of Dublin Education and Training Board which comes under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills. Consequently, this matter is more appropriate to my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills.

Youth Services Data

315. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of groups (details supplied) registered with the City of Dublin Youth Services Board; and the number of new groups registered in 2018. [15943/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme (LYCGS) supports youth work activities at a local level. In 2019,

my Department provided an additional 12% in overall funding for this scheme, bringing the total allocation to over €2m. The increased funding will provide small volunteer-led youth clubs with greater capacity to reach more young people during 2019. The allocation for 2019 under the LYCGS for CDETB is €341,000.

Although under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) act as grant administering bodies for the disbursement of funding under the various youth funding schemes. My officials have been advised by the City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB) of the following:

Groups registered with CDYSB in 2018

Number of groups registered with CDYSB - 149

Number of new groups registered with CDYSB - 7

Analysis:

Number of Voluntary youth clubs registered with CDYSB - 104

Number of Scouting groups registered with CDYSB - 42

Number of other groups registered with CDYSB - 3

Voluntary Sector

316. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a series of matters in relation to the impositions being placed on voluntary community organisations (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15764/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department's community and voluntary supports and programmes unit provides a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. €3.5 million is being provided in 2019 under this programme to support 21 volunteer centres, eight volunteering information services and a number of volunteer-supporting organisations such as Volunteer Ireland.

My Department is currently collating information received following a recent Call for Input exercise that was designed as a first step towards developing a draft national volunteering strategy. The submission referred to in the question has been logged and will be considered by my Department alongside other submissions received. I would like to express my appreciation to all who took the time to respond to this exercise.

These submissions will inform a draft strategy on volunteering. It is anticipated that the draft strategy will be completed later this year, following which there will be a further opportunity for the public to input on the matter before the strategy is presented to Government for approval.

Voluntary Sector Funding

317. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the options he is considering for 12 volunteer centres that are funded below €121,016

which is the recommended amount identified by the report Developing Funding Criteria for Volunteer Centres in Ireland; and the timeline for considering and delivering on those options. [15696/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department's Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes unit provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. €3.5 million is being provided in 2019 under this programme to support 21 Volunteer Centres, eight Volunteering Information Services and a number of volunteer-supporting organisations, such as Volunteer Ireland.

Following the publication in 2017 of a report by Dermot McLaughlin entitled "Developing Funding Criteria for Volunteer Centres in Ireland", my Department secured additional funding of €300,000 which was allocated to all Volunteer Centres in 2017 on a proportionate basis. This increased funding level has been maintained in 2018 and 2019.

The Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2018 included the provision of €1.2 million to upgrade the eight Volunteering Information Services to full Volunteer Centres in order to provide a consistent level of volunteering service nationwide. My Department is currently engaging with stakeholders in the roll-out of this initiative. As part of this exercise, my Department is also examining options with regard to a number of existing Volunteer Centres which are currently receiving less funding than the minimum amount recommended in the McLaughlin report.

My Department is also currently collating information received from a recent call for input exercise that was designed as a first step towards developing a draft national volunteering strategy. Among the topics under consideration in this context is the issue of volunteering support infrastructure and how best this can be structured to support volunteering.

State Bodies Data

318. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15714/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The following table provides the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of my Department on the date of its establishment, 19 July 2017, and on 8 March 2019.

State board under the remit of Department of Rural and Community Development	Male	Female	Female Percentage
Charities Regulator 19 July 2017	8	6	42.9%
Charities Regulator 8 March 2019	7	5	41.7%
Water Safety Ireland 19 July 2017	8	5	38.5%
Water Safety Ireland 8 March 2019	8	5	38.5%
Pobal 19 July 2017	8	7	47%
Pobal 8 March 2019	7	10	59%
There was no Board in place in the Western Development Commission on 19 July 2017	n/a	n/a	n/a
Western Development Commission 8 March 2019	7	4	36.4%

Jobseeker's Benefit Appeals

319. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a jobseeker's benefit appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15686/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned together with the relevant Departmental papers were received by that office on 29th March 2019. An appeal was subsequently registered on 2nd April 2019. The case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Appeals

320. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a response will issue in the case of a back to education allowance for a person (details supplied). [15691/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): This case has been reviewed by the Intreo Centre concerned and they have confirmed that the qualification referred to in this case, a Professional Masters in Adult and Community Education, is not one of the courses covered under the BTEA as it is not a pre-requisite for employment in adult education services. Further to this, according to Department information, it does not serve as an alternative to the Professional Masters in Education required to qualify for a general teaching role. On foot of this review I understand from my Department that the decision to disallow the back to education application for the person concerned has been upheld.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

State Bodies Data

321. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of her Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15707/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The statutory bodies with boards operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Low Pay Commission and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

The following table sets out the number and percentage of women on each of the above bodies on both dates in question:

4 April 2019

State Board	Number and percentage of women on 8 March 2016		Number and percentage of women on 8 March 2019	
	Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
Citizens Information Board	4	50%*	8	53%
Pensions Authority	2	66%	1	33%
Pensions Council	6	50%	5	50%**
Low Pay Commission	4	44%	4	44%
Social Welfare Tribunal	2	40%	2	40%

* The full complement of the CIB is 15 members. On this date they were carrying 7 vacancies.

** The Pensions Council have two vacancies at the current time.

Invalidity Pension Payments

322. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all arrears have issued in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15752/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to was awarded invalidity pension with effect from 15 November 2018 and his first payment issued to his nominated bank account on 21 February 2019. Arrears due from 15 November 2018 to 20 February 2019, less any overlapping social welfare payment, issued to the gentleman concerned on 21 March 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

323. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is not receiving one full payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15758/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently in receipt of Illness Benefit at a rate of €277 per week. She is currently paid up to date and is medically certified as unfit for work until the 30 June 2019.

Prior to the most recent medical certificate which certifies her as unfit for work until the 30 June, the person concerned had been submitting medical certificates covering periods of 8 days which gave rise to instances where she received two part payments in a week.

Under the closed certification model introduced in March, general practitioners can give a medical certificate to cover the full period the person is expected to be unfit for work. Such a certificate facilitates a payment to be made to the person each week over the period of certification without the need for the person to attend her general practitioner to obtain a medical certificate each week.

An official from the Department contacted the person concerned and explained the situation

to her.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Ministerial Dialogue

324. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of her engagements with stakeholders as committed to in the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Act 2018 in relation to adequacy of social welfare payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15759/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Deputy will be aware that the issue of benchmarking and indexation of social welfare rates is not new. For example, previous studies were conducted by the Commission on Social Welfare in 1986 and the Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group in 2001.

The Roadmap for Pensions Reform, published last year, commits the Government to examine and develop proposals to set a formal benchmark target of 34% of average earnings for the state pension (contributory) and to institute a process whereby future changes in pension rates of payment are explicitly linked to changes in consumer prices and average wages.

My Department is currently considering options to implement this commitment, by examining previous studies on benchmarking and indexation, international experience and examination of a range of potential benchmarks and indices. It is worthy of note that the current rates of payment already closely mirror the benchmark levels proposed in previous reports including those proposed by the Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group 2001 which is usually relied on by advocacy and other groups.

In terms of the wider application of indexation of social welfare payments generally, Section 19 of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Act 2018 provides that I, as Minister, will arrange to “consult with stakeholders on examining ways in which social welfare rates are increased with the aim of ensuring adequacy for all recipients and shall do so in quarter 1 of 2019”.

In this context my Department met with numerous interested stakeholders during quarter 1 2019 to solicit views on how the adoption of a benchmark, and a system of indexation, might work for social welfare rates more generally. The feedback from this consultation is currently being considered and will help to inform the development of our approach to benchmarking/indexation.

In addition I expect that the issue will be considered at my Department’s Pre-Budget Forum in July. The Pre-Budget Forum includes representatives from the Community and Voluntary Sector, ICTU and IBEC among others. I would also welcome views from all political parties who are interested in this area and submissions should be made to my office.

Any change to the current process of setting social welfare rates of payment would require Government approval and would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context. This would include taking account of stakeholder views, as well as considerations of cost, work incentives, poverty alleviation, policy alignment and the administration of any proposed system.

State Pension (Contributory)

4 April 2019

325. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) is entitled to a review of their pension payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15761/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement based on post Budget 2012 rate-bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) pension calculation which includes provision for HomeCaring periods.

Where possible, my Department will use information already held to assist in these reviews. Additional information will be requested in writing from pensioners in relation to unexplained gaps in their social insurance record where required to complete their review.

An examination of the person's social insurance record has found some unexplained gaps in their social insurance record. A request for information about time spend out of the workforce for parenting or caring reasons has been sent to the person concerned. Included in the letter are details of how to return the required information using the Department's online services. This is the quickest and easiest way to provide the information required to complete the person's review. The letter also provides a dedicated telephone number for assistance submitting the online application, or to request a paper form if the person has difficulties submitting their application online.

On receipt of the requested information, the person's state pension (contributory) pension rate will be reviewed and they will be informed of the outcome in writing. If an increase is due, it will be backdated to 30 March 2018. If no increase is due following the review, the person will continue to receive their existing rate of payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Gender Recognition

326. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of the 92 written submissions that emerged from the public consultation of the Gender Recognition Review group the report of which was published in June 2018; if the written submissions were from persons or organisations; the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15773/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A central part of the review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 was a consultation process that sought to have the broadest possible level of input in relation to the operation of the Act since its commencement. A public call for submissions was announced in early January 2018 with a closing date for receipt of submissions of 5 February 2018.

The responses received were from a mix of private individuals, members of the Oireachtas, individual professionals, advocacy groups, and other organisations.

Full details of the written submissions are available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Review-of-the-Gender-Recognition-Act-2015.aspx>

Social Welfare Appeals Status

327. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision in respect of an appeal will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15778/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that the department was notified by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the appeal for the person in question was successful.

Her case is currently with a deciding officer to implement the appeals officer's decision and the person concerned will be notified in writing as soon as possible.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

328. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if proposals (details supplied) will be considered for 2020 for contributory pension requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15810/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The State pension (contributory) is a PRSI-based pension, financed by contributions made by current workers and their employers, and paid to pensioners, at a rate based upon their PRSI record when working. Those with few or no PRSI contributions paid over the years may alternatively qualify for the State pension (non-contributory), which is a means-tested pension, financed by the Exchequer, and paid at up to 95% the maximum rate of the State pension (contributory). There are significant disregards in the household means test for the State pension (non-contributory), and about 70% of those in receipt of it are paid at the maximum rate. Alternatively, if their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult (based on their own means), amounting up to 90% of a full rate State pension (contributory). The most advantageous payment for a pensioner will depend upon their individual circumstances.

It should be noted that while 10 years paid contributions is the minimum requirement needed to qualify for the contributory state pension, this does not qualify someone for the maximum rate. The rate of payment is decided using either the Yearly Average (YA) method, or the Total Contributions Approach (TCA). With both methods, the large majority of those with only 10 years' worth of contributions would not be eligible for the full state pension.

The farm assist scheme was introduced in 1999 to provide income support for low income farmers. It replaced the former smallholders' unemployment assistance payment. In line with the then existing arrangements for unemployment assistance (including smallholders) and pre-retirement allowance, the income of farm assist recipients was exempt from class S PRSI for self-employed workers, and so they did not have to pay into the Social Insurance Fund at that time. Recipients of farm assist who had previously paid class S social insurance had the option of paying voluntary contributions to maintain their social insurance record, including their entitlement to State pension contributory, provided they satisfied the qualifying conditions.

PRSI credited contributions (credits) are only awarded to former employees, to cover gaps in social insurance where they are not in a position to pay PRSI such as during periods of unemployment, illness, etc. Self-employed workers, whether farmers or self-employed in other

sectors, do not qualify for credits.

The design of the new Total Contributions Approach to determining the rate of contributory pension to be paid for new pensioners from 2020, including the level of paid contributions required and the availability or otherwise of credits, has not been finalised. In any event, as at present, where a person does not qualify for a maximum rate of the State pension (contributory), the existing alternatives set out above will continue to be available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

329. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding budget increases. [15863/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On Budget Day, I announced a general increase in the weekly rates of payment, building on similar increases introduced in Budget 2017 and Budget 2018. A €5 increase in the weekly rates of payment for all social welfare recipients was announced, with proportionate increases for qualified adults and those on reduced rates of payment.

On Budget Day the Department advised that this general increase would come into effect on the week beginning 25 March 2019. This means increases for payments due on Friday of that week were applied on Friday 29 March in line with payment due dates.

Carer's Benefit Applications

330. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15978/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on 23 October 2018.

While the Department accepts that the care recipient in this case requires full-time care and attention, the evidence submitted in support of this application fails to show that the level of care and attention provided by the person concerned is full-time. Accordingly, her application was disallowed.

The person concerned was notified on 28 January 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was sought on 4 February 2019. The outcome of the review was that the original decision remained unchanged. The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 6 February 2019.

The person concerned requested a further review of her claim.

Additional information was requested from her on 29 March 2019 in order to estab-

lish her hours of employment which impact on whether she can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention.

Once this information is received, the review will be further examined and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

331. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if eligibility for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter [16000/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that the above named person was in receipt of disability allowance (DA) from my Department.

On 27 February 2019 this gentleman was advised that his DA claim had been terminated and he was also notified of his right to seek a review of this decision or appeal directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. To date there has been no request for an appeal or review.

The person in question can apply to the Community Welfare Officer for the means tested Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) if he is in need of financial assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

332. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) will be offered disability allowance until their health has improved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16002/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability Allowance is a weekly allowance paid to people with a specified disability who are aged over 16 and under 66. The disability must be expected to last for at least one year and the allowance is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test.

A decision as to whether or not a person is eligible to receive a DA payment can only be considered on receipt of a completed application form for that payment.

To date no application for DA has been received from the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

333. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of rent support payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16005/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of the correct Rent Supplement payable, i.e. the rate applicable

4 April 2019

for a single person resident in the Kilcock area of County Kildare.

The Rent Supplement claim is currently being reviewed and the Community Welfare Officer has requested supporting documentation from the person concerned in order to maintain the correct Rent Supplement payable.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Eligibility

334. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16009/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Community Welfare Officer (CWO) with responsibility for the area in which the person concerned resides advises that no application for an exceptional needs payment (ENP) has been received from the person concerned.

An application form has issued to the person concerned this week.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

335. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level of jobseeker's allowance being paid in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16011/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to departmental records the person concerned has not made an application for Jobseeker's Allowance and therefore no allowance is being paid. It is open to them to submit an application to their local Intreo Centre .

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

International Agreements

336. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which she has direct contact with other jurisdictions with which a bilateral arrangement for social welfare exists with particular reference to the need to ensure a smooth and expeditious process in dealing with claims, particularly in circumstances in which contributions in two or more jurisdictions arise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16014/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland has negotiated Bilateral Social Security Agreements with a number of countries. The main purpose of these Agreements is to protect the pension rights of people who have worked and paid social security contributions in Ireland and the countries with which Ireland has such agreements. This is achieved by allowing reckonable social security contributions paid in one or more of these countries to be aggregated with Irish full-rate social insurance contributions

for the purposes of qualifying for certain contributory payments in Ireland or in these countries.

Liaison arrangements are in place with the relevant authorities of the countries with which Ireland has Social Security Agreements in order to facilitate the operation of these arrangements.

If the Deputy has a particular case in mind where there have been difficulties or delays and provides my office with details of it, I will have the matter examined.

Social Welfare Appeals

337. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she can take to ensure the minimum waiting time for dealing with appeals having particular regard to the hardship caused to those awaiting decisions over long periods resulting in some cases homelessness and desperation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16015/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

All claim decisions taken by the Department's Deciding Officers and Designated Persons are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded by the Department and just 1% are appealed. Nevertheless, the Department is concerned that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Accordingly, significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times in respect of all schemes improved between 2011 and 2017 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 26.4 weeks in 2017 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 19.8 weeks in 2017. The corresponding processing times for the year 2018 were 30 weeks for an oral hearing and 24.8 weeks for a summary decision. There has been some improvement for the first three months of 2019 with an oral hearing decision taking on average 28 weeks and a summary decision taking 23.8 weeks.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects a number of factors including that the appeals process is a quasi-judicial process with appeals officers being required to decide all appeals on a 'de-novo' basis. In addition, appeals decisions are themselves subject to review by the High Court and decisions have to be formally written up to quasi-judicial standards. Other factors that influence appeals processing times include the quality of the initial decision – in this respect the Department has changed the decisions process in respect of medical schemes, in order to provide more information to the claimant. I expect that this will help to reduce the number of appeals over time.

In addition, a number of new Appeals Officers have joined the Appeals Office over the past 12-18 months, to replace staff leaving on retirement. Given the complexity of the appeals process it takes some time for new staff to be trained up and develop expertise and this has led to somewhat longer processing times during this period. The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times continue to be a priority for her Office.

Finally, where a claimant has been refused a social welfare payment, regardless of the scheme involved, and is appealing that decision, if their means are insufficient to meet their needs it is open to them to apply for supplementary welfare allowance in the interim.

If their application for supplementary welfare allowance is refused, they can also appeal that decision. The supplementary welfare allowance appeal will be prioritised for attention within the Appeals Office as soon as the appeal file and submission is received from my Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Unemployment Levels

338. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent of long-term unemployment here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16016/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Government policy to reduce unemployment is twofold. The policies set out in the Action Plan for Jobs have created an environment in which business can succeed and has led to the creation of almost 400,000 jobs in Ireland since the economic low point of 2012. Secondly, through the Pathways To Work strategy, my Department ensures that as many new jobs as possible are filled by people taken from the live register, particularly the long-term unemployed.

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing long-term unemployment. For example, most recent data from the Labour Force Survey shows that the rate of long-term unemployment in Ireland has fallen from a peak of 9.5% in 2012 to 2.1% by the fourth quarter of 2018. Ireland has therefore already brought the long term unemployment rate below 2.5%, a target set out in Pathways to Work 2016-2020. This downward trend is welcome and reflects the impact of government policy to create more jobs and reduce unemployment.

Activation policy continues to focus on support measures for the long-term unemployed. The Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy prioritises long-term unemployed people, most notably through the roll-out of JobPath to engage more systematically with this group; targeted wage subsidies under JobsPlus; and through reserved places for long-term unemployed job-seekers on employment and training programmes.

The following table shows the most recent end of month statistics on the number of people availing of a range of activation programmes targeted primarily at the long-term unemployed. Statistics for February 2019 are compared with those for February 2018. Demand for places has fallen in line with a reduction in overall unemployment levels.

Activation Programmes (February 2018 and February 2019)

Activation Schemes	Feb-18	Feb-19
Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme – self-employed strand.	9,188	6,075
Short-term Enterprise Allowance	344	286
Total - Back to Work schemes	9,532	6,361
Part-time Job Incentive	414	287
TÚS - Community Work Placement Initiative	6,347	6,373
Gateway (2013) (This programme closed in December 2018)	38	0
Other Activation Programmes	6,799	6,660
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)	3,309	3,019

Activation Schemes	Feb-18	Feb-19
Back to Education Allowance	10,704	8,665
Total - Back to Education Courses:	14,013	11,684
Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors)	21,717	21,388
FAS (SOLAS) full time training for the unemployed	5,823	5,545
TOTAL	57,884	51,638

Over the coming years, we must make sure that our citizens are equipped with the skills to take up jobs of the future and avail of the opportunities arising from a modern economy. Future Jobs Ireland 2019 has been launched by Government replacing the Action Plan for Jobs to deliver the required policy reforms to build a resilient workforce and innovative and competitive economy in a changing world of work.

The policies being pursued by Government to create jobs and reduce unemployment have been effective and they will support further reductions in long-term unemployment and add to the substantial improvements in the labour market that have been seen over the last few years.

Social Welfare Appeals

339. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which due process and natural justice remains paramount in the context of dealing with social welfare recipients whose cases come under review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16017/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is committed to ensuring that the principles of due process and natural justice are followed in all claim decisions. This applies equally to decisions at initial claim stage and when claims are subsequently reviewed. The Department's guidelines on Decision Making and Natural Justice are published on the website - www.welfare.ie. This message is reinforced through guidelines, bulletins and staff training.

As part of the process of finalising a decision, the deciding officer or designated person (in the case of the administration of payments under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance provisions), is required to engage with the person concerned and offer them the opportunity to provide additional information in support of their claim. In addition, the customer may seek a review or may appeal any decision made under the Social Welfare Acts to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

If there is a particular case that the Deputy is concerned about, he should bring it to my attention and I will ask my officials to examine it.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Cessation

340. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an extension of employment will be facilitated for participants in community employment schemes in which sponsors are anxious that they continue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16018/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) is a positive initiative that enables the long-term unemployed to make a contribution to their communities whilst up-skilling themselves for prospective future employment. It helps to break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market.

The CE scheme has a budget to support around 21,600 participant places in 2019. At the end of March, there was a total of 21,470 participants on the scheme. This leaves a total of 130 budgeted vacancies this year.

CE schemes are typically sponsored by groups wishing to benefit the local community. My Department agrees participant numbers annually with each CE sponsor organisation who are responsible for the recruitment of participants and for identifying suitable work placements.

CE sponsors can promote their scheme vacancies within their local communities. Various methods of promoting CE have also been arranged between my Department and local schemes, including targeting potentially eligible jobseekers to attend CE Job-fairs, where details of CE vacancies and employment opportunities are provided. In addition, CE sponsors can advertise their vacancies free of charge on the Department's JobsIreland website, www.jobsireland.ie. The process of posting vacancies is relatively straightforward and a tailored video is available online to assist sponsors.

A number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on CE was introduced in 2017. The main purpose of these changes was to broaden the availability to a greater number of people on the Live Register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on a programme.

The general qualifying age for CE for those on the Live Register was reduced from 25 to 21 years. Participants between 21 and 55 years on CE are entitled to one year on the programme, this can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment. All CE participants age 55 and over can avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE scheme. Since 1st June 2018, I am also facilitating persons to take up a placement on CE while also attending their JobPath provider. The overall limit of participation on CE is 6 years from 1st January 2007 (7 years if on a disability payment).

Participants over age 62 are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age on the CE Service Support Stream (SSS), subject to availability of places on the SSS, satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme are subject to limitation criteria.

While participation on CE is a stepping stone back to employment, these positions are not full-time sustainable jobs. Nevertheless, I am fully committed to the future of community employment schemes, and I want to see them sustained.

The Government agreed to establish an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) to explore the most appropriate organisational arrangements, in particular in respect of CE schemes whose primary focus is social inclusion and the delivery of social services. The first meeting of the IDG was held last week and it is expected that the Group will report to Cabinet by end of Q2 2019.

Any CE sponsor organisation who has recruitment concerns should contact their nearest Intreo Centre who will provide assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

341. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she continues to take to ensure against the occurrence of overpayments that result in recovery and consequent hardship with particular reference to cases in which the overpayment was not as a result of an oversight or negligence on the part of the applicant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16019/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Overpayments of social welfare assistance and/or benefit payments arise as a consequence of decisions made under the relevant sections of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005 (as amended).

Official or departmental error overpayments arise where a Deciding Officer has incorrectly applied legislation, or incorrectly calculated the rate payable, or failed to act on information received from a claimant that disqualifies or reduces the value of the claim.

Recovery of any sum overpaid as a result of official or departmental error is assessed on a case specific basis. In general, recovery will be sought where the customer is expected to have an awareness that the sum being paid is in excess of an entitlement.

As part of the process of finalising a decision and assessing an overpayment, the Deciding Officer is required to engage with the person concerned to clarify any matters relevant to the determination of entitlements. Any person dissatisfied with a decision on an entitlement may seek a review and can appeal any decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office. A customer may also seek to review the terms of any recovery arrangement(s) they have in place with the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

342. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which progress continues to be made in addressing the issue by which women have been deprived of contributory pensions having retired from the workplace while raising their families due to the marriage ban and who have made a major contribution to society in the course of their working lives; if their cases are being re-examined with a view to crediting them with sufficient contributions to enable them qualify for the State or retirement pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16020/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement based on post Budget 2012 rate bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation which includes provision for home-caring periods.

Reviews commenced from 13 February 2019, the day after I signed the necessary regulations which together with provisions in the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Act 2018, which allows the increased payments to be made. As of 28 March 2019, 11,646 of reviews have been completed. Of these, over 8,850 resulted in an increase in payment for the pensioners concerned. The pensioners who did not qualify for an increase in payments will

continue to receive their existing weekly rate.

I have stated from the outset that it will take a number of months to complete all of the reviews due to the numbers involved and the individual nature of social insurance records. In some cases it is necessary to engage in correspondence with the pensioner in order to clarify periods of caring, work and contribution histories. To date, over 34,000 requests for information have issued to pensioners. In order to process these reviews one hundred temporary staff have been recruited to the Departments offices in the north- west.

Regardless of when a review is conducted, where an increase in payment is due, the person's rate of payment will be adjusted without delay and arrears issued backdated to 30 March 2018, or the pensioner's 66th birthday if later. Where a person's rate does not increase following a review, the person will continue to receive their existing rate of payment.

Given the scale (90,000 pensioners) involved, the fact that each case requires close individual examination and that some cases are more complex than others, it would not be reasonable to expect all to be processed immediately. While this work will take a number of months to complete, it will continue until all pensioners have been notified of the outcome of their review in writing.

I would urge anyone who has yet to provide additional requested information to the Department to do so as soon as possible so that their review can be processed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

343. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which she continues to ensure that undue hardship is not caused to recipients of social welfare payments in cases in which payments have been suspended while under review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16021/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Basic weekly supplementary welfare allowance, or SWA, may be paid to customers awaiting the outcome of a claim or an appeal for a primary social welfare payment. In certain circumstances, if a person is not eligible for other social welfare payments and their weekly income is below the SWA rate for their family size, a payment may be made to bring their income up to the appropriate SWA rate. The Community Welfare Service officer will engage with a claimant to establish eligibility as quickly as possible and limit any delay to payments.

Staff in the Department are engaged with customers throughout the entire lifecycle of their claim, including on regular reviews for all schemes on an ongoing basis. A person's entitlement to a social welfare payment is reviewed on a continuing basis to ensure that they continue to satisfy the conditions of the scheme. A person's means may also be reviewed from time to time. A customer may also request a review of their means in the light of changed circumstances at any time.

Review decisions are not delayed unnecessarily once all the information requested from the customer at the time of review is made available to my Department. Payments are not suspended unless there is a valid reason for doing so, for example the provision of insufficient information by the customer in response to a query, or where there is no reply from the customer. Undue hardship for customers should not arise if there is ongoing co-operation from the customer with the Deciding Officer or Designated Person in my Department.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

344. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for jobseeker's allowance received in each of the past five years to date; the number approved and rejected, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16022/19]

345. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for a State pension (non-contributory) received in each of the past five years to date; the number approved and rejected, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16023/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 344 and 345 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is provided in tabular form. The figures for 2019 refer to January and February.

State Pension Non-contributory

Year	Registered	Awarded	Rejected
2013	9,429	7,445	2,351
2014	8,998	7,750	2,350
2015	9,732	7,675	2,188
2016	9,213	8,132	2,332
2017	9,187	7,577	2,139
2018	9,053	8,040	2,253
2019	1,602	1,391	394

Jobseeker's Allowance

Year	Registered	Awarded	Rejected
2013	227,722	180,009	18,952
2014	209,444	166,048	16,185
2015	191,781	152,807	13,255
2016	171,243	136,003	11,979
2017	155,854	124,790	10,238
2018	137,770	111,006	9,563
2019	22,772	18,231	1,597

Quarrying Sector

346. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the maximum depth allowable for excavation of a quarry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15983/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department issued Guidelines to Planning Authorities on Quarrying and Ancillary Activities in April 2004, offering guidance on planning for the quarrying industry, both in the adoption of development plans and in determining individual applications for planning permission for

quarrying and ancillary activities. The Guidelines recommend that applications for planning permission for quarries should be accompanied by, amongst other things, information on the proposed maximum extent and depth of excavation and extraction.

Under the guidelines, there is no maximum depth suggested in relation to the excavation of quarries. Decisions on whether to grant planning permission for a quarry is a matter for the relevant planning authority or An Bord Pleanála, as the case may be, having regard to the particular local circumstances of the proposed development and potential impacts on the local environment, landscape, water sources, nature etc. When granting planning permission for a quarry, it is open to the local planning authority or An Bord Pleanála to attach appropriate conditions to such permissions on a case by case basis. Such conditions may relate to the implementation of environmental mitigation measures; times of operation; control of noise, blasting, dust, water pollution and waste; environmental monitoring; special contributions; extraction limits and site restoration.

In this connection, it should be noted that a person is not entitled solely by reasons of a planning permission to carry out development and that other specific requirements relating to the quarrying sector may apply, such as under the Health and Safety code - e.g. Guidance from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Quarries) Regulations 2008 (S.I. No. 28 of 2008) - which falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Legislative Reviews

347. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the legislative review process regarding the holding of plebiscites by certain local authorities; when the associated regulations will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas for consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15687/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Local Government Act 2019 was enacted in January 2019. The Regulations to prescribe how plebiscites on place-names are to be conducted by a local authority or municipal district are at an advanced stage of preparation.

State Bodies Data

348. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of his Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15711/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The following table outlines the number and percentage of women on each State board, under the remit of my Department, as of 8 March 2016 and again at 8 March 2019. The table identifies boards that were not established or not under the remit of my Department on 08/03/2016 and those that were no longer under its remit on 8 March 2019.

The Government is committed to meeting the 40% gender balance target on all its State Boards. In March 2019, the Government approved the Report of the Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) on Gender Balance on State Boards. My Department was represented on the IDG. The Department of Justice and Equality is now developing an implementation plan for the Report

and will liaise bi-laterally with my Department in this regard.

Board	Number of Women 08/03/2016	Number of Women 08/03/2019	Percentage of Women on board 08/03/2016	Percentage of Women on board 08/03/2019
An Bord Pleanála (1)	2	3	22%	30%
Environmental Protection Agency	2	*	33%	*
Ervia (2)	2	2	29%	18%
Gas Networks Ireland (2)	0	0	0%	0%
Housing Finance Agency	4	6	40%	50%
Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency	2	2	25%	25%
Irish Water (2)	0	0	0%	0%
Irish Water Safety	2	*	18%	*
Local Government Management Agency (3)	1	1	9%	11%
National Oversight and Audit Commission	4	5	36%	50%
National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	3	3	30%	30%
Pobal	5	*	38%	*
Residential Tenancies Board	4	4	33%	44%
Pyrite Resolution Board	1	1	25%	20%
Western Development Commission	3	*	38%	*
Land Development Agency	**	3	**	33%
Ordnance Survey Ireland	**	2	**	22%
Property Registration Authority	**	4	**	44%
Valuation Tribunal	**	14	**	44%
Water Advisory Board	**	2	**	40%

* This board was no longer under the remit of the Department on 08/03/2019

** This board was either not established or not under the remit of the Department on 08/03/2016

(1) Appointments to An Bord Pleanála are of a full-time executive nature and are governed by statutory competitive or nomination processes.

(2) “A “unitary board structure” is in place for Ervia and its subsidiaries, Irish Water and Gas Networks Ireland. An overarching non-executive board at Ervia level has overall responsibility and accountability for the performance of the Ervia Group, including Irish Water and Gas Networks Ireland. The boards of the two principal Ervia subsidiaries, Irish Water and Gas Networks Ireland, are executive-only boards comprising the holders of certain executive positions.

(3) The board of the Local Government Management Agency comprises eight Chief Executives of Local Authorities elected to the Board by the sector; the balance of members are nominees of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Water Meters

349. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

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ernment if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a meter swap out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15720/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Water metering is an operational issue for Irish Water and I have no function in relation to the matter.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Housing Issues

350. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason Ireland has not signed up to Article 31 of the European Social Charter; the work being undertaken to ensure that ratification of this article is being progressed; and when Ireland will be in a position to ratify the article. [15739/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Ireland ratified the Revised European Social Charter on 4 November 2000. At that time Ireland accepted 92 of the 98 paragraphs of the Revised Charter. Three of those paragraphs not accepted by Ireland make up Article 31, which relates to the right to housing.

The issue of the right to housing was debated in Dáil Eireann and Seanad Éireann in September 2017. Arising from this, a motion to refer the Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution, which dealt with economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to housing, to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach was passed by the Dáil on 28 September 2017 and by the Seanad on 11 October 2017.

The matter of ratifying Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter will be considered further after the Joint Committee has considered the matter.

Housing Issues

351. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the recent report of the UN special rapporteur (details supplied) on the right to adequate housing; his views on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15769/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I assume the Deputy is referring to the Joint Communication from the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council dated 22 March 2019, which has been received by my Department.

A response to this communication is currently being prepared in my Department in coordination with the Department of Finance and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Traveller Accommodation

352. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the funding provided for the Traveller accommodation programme to Tipperary County Council in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15770/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs. Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in April 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for Traveller accommodation. Preparations are underway for the fifth TAP programme, 2019-2024.

The following table sets out allocations and drawdowns for Tipperary County Council for each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019 (note that the period 2011 to 2014 includes the combined allocations and drawdown for North Tipperary and South Tipperary).

	Allocation	Drawdown
2011*	€750,000	€619,946
2012*	€167,149	€236,947
2013*	€126,600	€245,621
2014	€353,656	€291,874
2015	€800,000	€23,142
2016	€900,000	€1,399,370
2017	€327,492	€399,337
2018	€25,655	€42,002
2019	€25,655	Nil to date

Rent Pressure Zones

353. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to extend the rent pressure zone designation periods beyond three years in Dublin and Cork from December 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15800/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 2 April 2019, Government approved committee stage amendments to the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (No 2) Bill 2018, which will, among other measures, see the designation of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) extended to the end of 2021.

This Bill is scheduled for Dáil Committee Stage on 11 April 2019 and I will be working to have it complete its passage through both Houses as quickly as possible thereafter.

Homeless Accommodation Funding

354. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to publish the annual breakdown of expenditure on homeless services for 2018; and the reason for the delay in the publication of this report. [15802/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not provide funding for services directly but provides funding to housing authorities towards operational costs for homeless accommodation and related services. Under funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources. Housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of the funding arrangement with my Department.

Exchequer funding for homeless services is provided through my Department to housing authorities on a regional basis. The following table summarises Exchequer funding recouped to housing authorities in 2018.

Exchequer funding for homeless services in 2018 under the Housing Act, 1988

Region	Amount
Dublin	€106,267,187
Mid-East	€3,738,000
Midlands	€2,177,128
Mid-West	€5,044,000
North-East	€3,007,520
North-West	€541,522
South-East	€3,815,000
South-West	€9,687,741
West	€4,721,895

Financial reports setting out expenditure on homeless services on a regional basis are published on my Department's website at the following link; <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>. Detailed financial reports for each of the regions for 2018 are being collated and will be published on my Department's website shortly.

Homeless Persons Data

355. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless children here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14604/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The report captures details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.

The most recent report is for February 2019 and showed that there were 1,707 families in emergency accommodation in that month, with a total of 3,784 dependants associated with those families. The February 2019 monthly report is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/homeless-report-february-2019>.

Local Authority Housing Funding

356. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding is available to local authorities in respect of extensions to local authority houses based on medical circumstances and overcrowding; if so, the percentage at which the funding is provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15864/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides funding under the Disabled Persons Grants (DPG) scheme to local authorities for adaptations and extensions to their existing social housing stock to meet the needs of local authority tenants. The scheme applies to adaptations that are necessary to address the needs of older people or people with a disability who may require stair-lifts, grab-rails, showers, wet-rooms, ramps, etc. It also provides the funding of extensions such as the installation of a downstairs bedroom or bathroom or in the case of overcrowding.

My Department provides 90% funding towards the cost of the eligible works per property with the remaining 10% being provided by the local authorities. The local authority can carry out works up to a maximum level of €75,000 per property without the prior approval of the Department. Applications in excess of this can be submitted to the Department and will be considered for funding on a case by case basis.

My Department is currently finalising the funding requirements for all local authorities under the scheme in 2019; in the meantime they have been advised to continue with the programme pending their 2019 allocation. It is a matter for all local authorities to prioritise the works required under this scheme and to assess individual applications in that context.

State Bodies Data

357. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number and percentage of women on each State board under the remit of her Department on 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15704/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am committed to achieving the target, set out in the Government's Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, of at least 40% representation of each gender on Boards. The gender balance on each of the State boards under my remit as of 8 March 2016 and 8 March 2019, respectively, is outlined in the following table.

I am pleased to confirm that an additional three of the State boards have exceeded the gender ratio target in respect of female participation since 8 March 2016. As such, 12 of the 14 State boards under my remit now exceed the gender ratio target in respect of female participation.

Overall, as of 8 March 2019, the gender balance on the State boards under my remit stands at 50% male and 50% female. Vacancies on the Board of the Arts Council, the Crawford Art Gallery and the National Museum of Ireland are currently at various points of the appointment process. I will continue to actively seek to meet the target of at least 40% representation of each gender on the State boards under my remit.

4 April 2019

	Gender Balance on 08 March 2016				
State Agency	Female	Male	Total	Female %	Male %
Arts Council	3	5	8	38%	63%
Chester Beatty Library ²	4	7	11	36%	64%
Crawford Art Gallery	3	2	5	60%	40%
Foras na Gaeilge ¹	3	8	11	27%	73%
Heritage Council	6	6	12	50%	50%
IMMA	6	6	12	50%	50%
Irish Manuscripts Commission	7	13	20	35%	65%
Screen Ireland	3	3	6	50%	50%
National Archives Advisory Council	4	2	6	67%	33%
National Concert Hall -	4	5	9	44%	56%
National Gallery of Ireland	7	4	11	64%	36%
National Library of Ireland	6	6	12	50%	50%
National Museum of Ireland	10	6	16	63%	38%
Údarás na Gaeltachta	4	8	12	33%	67%
Ulster Scots Agency ¹	3	5	8	38%	63%
Total	73	86	159	46%	54%

	Gender Balance on 08 March 2019				
State Agency	Female	Male	Total	Female %	Male %
Arts Council	4	5	9	44%	56%
Chester Beatty Library ²					
Crawford Art Gallery	7	3	10	70%	30%
Foras na Gaeilge ¹	6	7	13	46%	54%
Heritage Council	6	5	11	55%	45%
IMMA	6	6	12	50%	50%
Irish Manuscripts Commission	9	11	20	45%	55%
Screen Ireland	5	2	7	71%	29%
National Archives Advisory Council	5	7	12	42%	58%

	Gender Balance on 08 March 2019				
State Agency	Female	Male	Total	Female %	Male %
National Concert Hall -	4	5	9	44%	56%
National Gallery of Ireland	10	7	17	59%	41%
National Library of Ireland	6	6	12	50%	50%
National Museum of Ireland	9	6	15	60%	40%
Údarás na Gaeltachta	4	8	12	33%	67%
Ulster Scots Agency ¹	3	5	8	38%	63%
Total	84	83	167	50%	50%

1. Appointments to North South Bodies are made by the North South Ministerial Council, arising from nominations on a 50:50 basis from each jurisdiction.

2. Following a review on the position of the Chester Beatty Library in 2017, on balance, it was considered that the Chester Beatty Library should not be deemed a State Board.

Wildlife Conservation

358. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the report by Ireland on the conservation status of listed species as required by EU Directive 92/43/EEC due in 2019; if work on this report has commenced; when it will be available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15756/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Under Article 17 of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), each member state is obliged to report on the conservation status of habitats and species, listed in the Annexes to the Directive, every six years. The deadline for submission of assessments for the current reporting period (2013 to 2018) is 30 April 2019.

My Department has carried out substantial work on this report, with the aim of submission to the European Commission by the deadline. The report will be considered by the Commission and, based on previous experience, may be referred back to the Department with queries, which will then be answered as soon as possible.

A final version of individual scientific assessments for the habitats and species will be uploaded to the website of my Department's National Parks and Wildlife Service (www.npws.ie) in due course. These assessments will run to over 2000 pages. It is planned to publish an overview summary document in more readable form before the end of 2019.

Hedge Cutting Season

359. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gael-

tacht if the burning season will be extended (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15819/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August.

Following a review of Section 40, which included consideration of submissions from interested parties, proposals were announced in December 2015 to introduce legislation to allow for managed hedge cutting and burning at certain times within the existing closed period on a pilot two year basis. The relevant legislation was included in the Heritage Bill 2016, which was enacted in July last year.

Section 7(1) of the Heritage Act 2018 provides that I may make Regulations to allow the burning of vegetation during such periods in the month of March and in such parts of the country as specified in the Regulations.

I recently made a decision not to make Regulations to extend the season for the burning of vegetation into March. This decision was taken as there would have been no basis for me to do so given the fact that the relatively dry weather during the six month period when the burning of vegetation could have been undertaken under the law (September to February inclusive) would not have precluded landowners from burning vegetation. Therefore, the existing provisions in the Wildlife Acts on burning remain in force.

I therefore cannot agree that my decision not to extend burning into March has any relevance to fires in the countryside outside the closed period. The burning which the Deputy refers to in his question which occurred last weekend in Killarney National Park took place a month after the burning season had ended and was illegal and it caused significant damage to Park. I absolutely reject the Deputy's assertion that this burning was somehow linked to my sensible, correct and responsible decision not to extend that burning season.