

18 April 2018

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 10 to 18, inclusive, resubmitted.

Cúrsaí Gaeilge

19. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Taoiseach cén fáth nach bhfuil an Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh, a thugann faisnéis maidir le roghnú céadainmneacha cláraithe gasúr in Éirinn, ag áireamh ainmneacha ar nós Seán (John) faoina n-ainm ceart agus, ina ionad sin, go bhfuil siad á n-áireamh faoi ainm eile, Sean (old); agus an gceapann sé go bhfuil sé cothrom go gcaithfear le tuismitheoirí a roghnaíonn ainmneacha Gaeilge mar seo. [14205/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): I mo cháil mar Aire agus freagracht orm i ndáil leis an nGaeilge, ba mhaith liom a rá go dtuigim ábhar inní an Teachta maidir le stádas na Gaeilge agus ba mhaith liom freisin a chur ina luí ar an Teachta go bhfuil mé féin, agus go bhfuil an Rialtas, tiomanta i leith tacú leis an nGaeilge ar bhonn náisiúnta agus i leith úsáid na Gaeilge a neartú mar phríomhtheanga pobail sa Ghaeltacht. Sa chomhthéacs sin, leanann an Rialtas de thacú le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 agus de thacú le soláthar agus forbairt raoin leathain beart, scéimeanna agus tionscnamh atá dírithe ar thacú leis an nGaeilge agus leis an nGaeltacht.

Maidir leis an tsaincheist shonrach atá ardaithe ag an Teachta ina cheist, d'eisigh an Phríomh-Oifig Staidreamh an chéad fhoilseachán maidir le hainmneacha Babaithe ar an 28 Iúil 1999, ar foilseachán é inar cuireadh i láthair an 100 túsainm is coitianta, i gcás buachaillí agus cailíní, i gcomhréir leis an bhfaisnéis faoi bhreitheanna a cláraíodh sa bhliain 1998. Leanadh den fhaisnéis sin a fhoilsiú gach bliain ó shin i leith.

Sna blianta tosaigh, rinneadh na sonraí go léir a bhaint as deimhnithe páipéir agus thairfead an CSO iad, ar mhodh cléireachais, i mbunachar sonraí mór-ríomhaire lena bpróiseáil. Chomh maith le diaicriticí amhail an síneadh fada, bhí carachtair neamhábharta ann sna deimhnithe lámhscríofa amhail camóga, fleiscíní agus uaschamóga. Bhí diaicriticí eile ann amhail *umlaut* agus aicinn. Cinneadh carachtair den sórt sin a fhágáil ar lár i dtúsainmneacha ós rud é go raibh deacrachtaí teicniúla ann, an tráth sin, maidir le carachtair amhail sínte fada a ionchur go héifeachtach agus go héifeachtúil i dtimpeallacht ríomhaire.

Fuair an Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh comhad tástála le déanaí ón bPríomh-Oifig Chlárúcháin, ar comhad é ina bhfuil sínte fada san áireamh sa túsainm agus ar comhad é a dhéanfaidh an córas próiseáilte a leasú chun gabháil sonraí ina bhfuil sínte fada a éascú. Ach ní féidir an tsraith stairiúil a choigeartú go cúlghabhálach, siar go dtí an bhliain 1998, ós rud é, maidir leis

an bhfoilseachán, go ndírítear aird go príomha ar rangú agus ar líon túsainmneacha ar leith. Ar mhaithe le cúrsaí inchomparáideachta, is gá leanúint den tsraith láithreach, gan briseadh sna sonraí a thabhairt isteach. Tá anailís á déanamh ag an bPríomh-Oifig Staidrimh faoi láthair agus tá gealltanas tugtha aici breithniú a dhéanamh i dtaobh táblaí breise faoi ainmneacha Gaeilge a fhoilsiú ar táblaí iad a thabharfadh aghaidh ar an tsaincheist atá ardaithe ag an Teachta. Coimeádfaidh an Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh an Teachta ar an eolas faoi aon fhorbairtí maidir leis an ábhar seo.

Questions Nos. 20 to 29, inclusive, answered orally.

Brexit Supports

30. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of the Brexit loan scheme in view of the fact that Brexit is now a year away; her plans to ensure there is widespread information and take up of the scheme; if it is limited by an overall budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16176/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme was launched on 28 March 2018. The scheme leverages €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) using a guarantee structure to provide a €300 million fund for lending to eligible businesses. Participating finance providers are Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, with AIB to follow in June.

The scheme is open to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees, which can demonstrate that they are significantly exposed to the impact (or potential impact) of Brexit. They must be a viable business, doing business in Ireland, and they must have a business plan demonstrating that they plan to innovate, change or adapt in response to Brexit.

As part of the launch of the scheme, my Department developed a Brexit Loan Scheme Information Pack for state agencies, TDs and Local Enterprise Offices to ensure that information on the scheme is easily available. The Information Pack is also available through my Department’s website.

The scheme is operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). As such, the SBCI will promote the Brexit Loan Scheme as part of its overall marketing plan for 2018. This is likely to include a combination of radio, social media and business targeted press coverage.

The agencies of my Department are also fully engaged in preparing for Brexit. Enterprise Ireland’s (EI) #PrepareforBrexit communications campaign, featuring the ‘Brexit SME Scorecard’, was launched in March 2017. The Scorecard is an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit.

In terms of industry preparedness, 2,104 companies have engaged with the EI Brexit scorecard since April of last year, of whom 974 are non-clients. The majority are in construction, engineering or other manufacturing, Software and ICT or other services. The results indicate that the level of preparedness is ‘medium to low’ but improving. The Brexit Scorecard overall average scores (out of 10) from completed reports of the last 6 months is 4.91 for EI clients and 4.08 for non EI clients.

As part of awareness-raising activities, EI is rolling out regional Brexit Advisory clinics throughout the year and the Brexit Loan Scheme is being promoted through these events. To

date, clinics have been held in Letterkenny, Tralee, Portlaoise, Claremorris, Cootehill and Charleville. A Brexit two-day external consultancy support is also being rolled out to individual clients to help them develop a detailed sustainable growth plan.

EI has also introduced a 'Be Prepared Grant' which offers up to €5,000 for exporting client companies to conduct further research and use external expertise to develop a Brexit Action Plan.

The funding to the Local Enterprise Offices has been increased by 22% over the last two years and they, along with InterTrade Ireland, are offering a range of Brexit focused supports to companies, including those engaged in cross-border trade with Northern Ireland. InterTrade Ireland also provides vouchers to enable companies to get professional advice on Brexit, including likely tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues, and movement of labour, goods and services.

Local Enterprise Offices

31. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the way in which the local enterprise offices can be better utilised to support job creation in rural Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16190/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): My priority as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation is to drive the creation of high-quality and sustainable jobs around all the regions and counties of Ireland. The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) play a critical role in supporting micro-enterprises in the start-up and expansion phases in every part of the country.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to micro-enterprises, that is those with ten employees or fewer, in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. The LEOs also offer 'soft' supports in the form of training and mentoring for anyone interested in starting or growing a business. In addition, the LEOs provide a 'signposting' service for the micro-enterprise and SME sector in relation to other relevant State supports, for example: Enterprise Ireland, Revenue; the Department of Social Protection; Microfinance Ireland; Trading Online Vouchers, LEADER, and Education & Training Boards (ETBs).

A net total of 3,760 new jobs were delivered in 2017 by start-ups and small businesses from across the country that have been supported by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

This brings the total number of new jobs created by LEO-backed companies nationwide to 15,000 since the LEOs were set up in 2014.

That is an increase of 10% on 2016 - and the fourth straight year of employment growth.

Growth was evident in each area showing that each county has the potential to grow its own jobs if the right promotion, encouragement and supports are put in place.

The Capital allocation made available and maintained in 2018 to the 31 LEOs is €22.5m, which is an increase from €18.5 from 2016. This is being used to fund LEO clients by way of financial assistance and a range of soft supports, for example for mentoring, training and innovation and for entrepreneurship initiatives such as Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur Competition, known as the IBYE competition.

The latest assessment of IBYE run by the LEOs for my Department indicate that 348 entrepreneurs won IBYE investment funding of between €3,000 and €50,000 from their Local Enterprise Offices and they now in turn have current annual sales of €124 million and employ 2,217 people.

In addition, the LEOs have also delivered specific Brexit initiatives for micro-enterprises, including:

- LEO Competitive Fund for Innovative Micro Enterprises: this new competitive initiative incentivised LEO clients to engage in innovation to develop New Product, Process or Markets.

- Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Export: Financial assistance to support market diversification in qualifying businesses to develop new market opportunities.

- The LEO's developed a Lean4Micro offer for micro enterprise clients: Helping business clients adopt LEAN business practices to increase competitiveness.

A new client portfolio management model will be rolled out this year nationally to the LEOs by Enterprise Ireland, which will support portfolio performance and potential.

The LEOs also play a key role in the delivery nationally of four key objectives in the Action Plan for Rural Development including the 'Options Plus' programme for improving off-farm income generation of farmers and to link farm families with a variety of learning opportunities provided by other agencies including the ETBs, LDCs, third level institutions and the Department of Social Protection.

Insurance Costs

32. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to address the rising cost of doing business here, particularly regarding the cost of insurance for business. [16826/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): Despite intense competition, the trajectory of Ireland's competitiveness performance is positive. Improved competitiveness is reflected in strong employment growth across sectors and regions. On the major cost headings, such as labour, property and tax, the National Competitiveness Council has reported in recent years that Ireland is a relatively cost competitive location in which to do business.

However, there is no room for complacency. In the period prior to the financial crash we did not pay sufficient attention to our cost base and let our international competitiveness erode. Nobody wants to repeat that. As the economy continues to grow, there is a role for both the public and private sectors to proactively manage the controllable portion of costs. As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, my objective is to create the best possible environment for enterprise, entrepreneurship and investment across all regions. My colleague, the Minister for Finance, has responsibility for insurance regulation.

On the cost of insurance for business, price inflation for insurance, particularly motor insurance, increased significantly in the period 2014 to 2016. The rate of increase eased in 2017 and the most recent CSO data for March 2018 shows insurance prices are now 5% lower than last year with motor insurance prices 13% lower. The price of motor insurance has been falling every month since April 2017.

While the CSO data shows greater price stability, I appreciate the figures represent an average and there may be enterprises and consumers still seeing increases. The problem of rising insurance premiums for enterprise was the impetus for the establishment by the Minister for Finance of the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016. The ongoing implementation of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, in parallel with the implementation of the Working Group's Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, will make a difference to the pricing of insurance. I am confident that the implementation of all the recommendations cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from relevant stakeholders, will achieve the objectives of delivering fairer premiums for all and improving the cost of doing business.

Brexit Supports

33. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the uptake of the Brexit loan scheme for businesses in the first two weeks since its launch on 28 March 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16173/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank with Allied Irish Bank following in June.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. This application process requires businesses to use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet the challenges posed by Brexit. The SBCI assess the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers.

The Brexit Loan Scheme is designed to assist Irish SMEs in the short-term to deal with the challenges of Brexit, which include the pressures of increased market instability and currency volatility. The scheme is available to businesses that are demonstrably exposed to negative impacts (or potential impacts) arising as a result of Brexit. Businesses must fully meet the eligibility requirements, which include being viable, having a business development strategy and demonstrable exposure to Brexit. The scheme is open to both State Agency clients and businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies. Sole traders may also apply.

The Scheme was launched on 28 March, and accordingly it is too early for businesses to have completed both application processes. Metrics detailing the uptake of the scheme will be available at the end of Quarter 2, 2018.

Brexit Supports

34. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innova-

tion her plans to minimise the impact of Brexit in County Donegal; the engagement she has had with the IDA to ensure it secures new investment in the county in view of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16353/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I fully appreciate the importance of ensuring that businesses, including those located in Donegal, are best able to withstand the pressures that Brexit may exert. That is why, for example, additional financial resources have been provided to support the strategic response by our enterprise agencies, including IDA Ireland, to Brexit. The Government has also taken forward a number of well documented Brexit-related initiatives to help businesses prepare for the future.

Brexit, or more particularly the response to the challenges it presents, has been especially significant in shaping IDA Ireland's strategy and operations. This includes the Agency's approach to regional development, finance, planning, marketing and promotional activities.

I am very much conscious of the particular difficulties that Brexit could have for border counties and the need to offset those, wherever possible, with increased investment. With regard to Donegal, there are already 12 IDA Ireland client companies based in the County, employing nearly 3,400 people. The level of employment by multinationals in Donegal has actually increased by 52% since 2012 and the IDA is working hard, with both its existing client base there and prospective investors, to create even more jobs there.

While foreign direct investment (FDI) is important to jobs growth in Donegal and elsewhere, we need to remember that it forms only one part of our efforts to generate economic growth in regional locations. Indigenous enterprise also, of course, plays a crucial role in creating employment opportunities. In 2017, for example, 3,552 people were employed in Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported companies in Donegal. In the period from 2015-2017 EI also paid €4 million to client companies in the County to support them to innovate, improve competitiveness and to diversify their global footprint. Like the IDA, EI engages constantly with its clients in Donegal to help support their growth and potential expansion.

Other bodies are working as well to help enterprises in Donegal both grow and plan for Brexit. The Local Enterprise Offices and InterTrade Ireland, for example, are both active in the border area.

Military Exports

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of export licenses issued to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with regard to the export of military and dual use items and with further regard to the latest figures in 2016 and 2017; if she has had consultations with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade regarding the export of military and dual use products to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates due to their role in the ongoing civil war in Yemen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16789/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is responsible for controls on the export of military and dual-use items from Ireland.

All export licence applications, whether for Dual-Use or Military Goods are subject to rigorous scrutiny, and are considered having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No. 428/2009, the 2008 EU Common Position on Arms Exports and EU sanctions regimes.

My officials are in regular contact with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on export licensing issues. They consulted with that Department in respect of all export licence applications in 2016 and 2017 where the destination of the items was Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. My officials seek observations on any foreign policy concerns that may arise in respect of a proposed export; such factors are subject to review in the light of developments in a given region. Any observations which may arise from this examination are considered in the final assessment of any licence application.

Proposed exports of military and dual-use products to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as with all other destinations, are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. My Department has safeguards built into the licensing system which enable robust checks and cross-checks to ensure, as far as possible, that the item to be exported will be used by the stated end-user for the stated end-use, and will not be used for illicit purposes.

The EU has a range of sanctions in place in respect of countries engaged in conflicts. All licence applications are considered having regard to these measures. Sanctions can include arms embargoes and various restrictive measures including prohibitions on the provision of targeted goods and services. There are currently no such sanctions in place in respect of Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates.

In 2016, twenty five individual licences were issued to export dual-use goods to Saudi Arabia. There were thirty six licences issued to export dual-use goods to the United Arab Emirates in 2016.

In 2017, twenty one individual licences were issued to export dual-use goods to Saudi Arabia. There were thirty six licences issued to export dual-use goods to the United Arab Emirates in 2017.

There were no licences issued for military classified goods in respect of Saudi Arabia or United Arab Emirates in 2016 or 2017.

Trade Missions

36. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans for trade mission visits to the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia in 2018 and 2019; her further plans to highlight human rights issues at these trade missions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16788/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland is the state agency under my aegis with responsibility for helping Irish companies to internationalise and scale. The manufacturing and internationally traded services companies that Enterprise Ireland works with are a critical source of existing employment and job creation in every county in Ireland and are spread across a wide range of sectors.

Enterprise Ireland's Trade Missions and Events promote the capabilities of client companies to potential business partners and customers in international markets; a central element of the agency's strategy for 2017 -2020: Build Scale, Expand Reach. In 2017 Enterprise Ireland ran 57 ministerial-led international trade events.

On an annual basis, Enterprise Ireland publishes its schedule for Trade Missions and Events. This schedule is comprised of:

- Trade Missions / Outward Missions;

- Trade Visits/Fairs;
- Client Knowledge Forums;
- Inward Mission Events;
- Market Study Visits

The annual list of Trade Missions and Events is communicated to all client companies and is publicly available, including on the Enterprise Ireland website.

On the 12th March 2018, Enterprise Ireland announced that it is set to undertake over 200 international and domestic trade events in 2018 to accelerate the number of Enterprise Ireland clients diversifying into new markets, beyond the UK and into the Eurozone and global markets. The number of trade events being undertaken represents a 50% increase on 2017, reflecting the challenge that Brexit poses for Irish businesses. 70 of these export focused trade events will be led by Government Ministers.

At present, I have no plans to lead a trade mission to the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia in 2018. Later in the year, my Departmental officials will begin discussions with Enterprise Ireland with regard to the proposed ministerial trade mission list for 2019, for my subsequent approval. As part of the implementation of the Agency's Trade Missions and Events Schedule for 2018, Enterprise Ireland is planning a trade mission to Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait in early November. This mission will focus on developing business opportunities for Irish companies in the ICT, Fintech, Food and Agritech and Engineering/Construction sectors. It has been timed to coincide with the Gulf Food Manufacturing Exhibition in Dubai where Enterprise Ireland will support clients exhibiting on an Ireland stand. Ministerial leadership of this Mission has yet to be determined.

Enterprise Ireland also ran an international trade event to the annual 'Arab Health' Exhibition in Dubai in January of this year, which was led by the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Jim Daly T.D. Arab Health is the largest healthcare exhibition and conference in the Middle East and North Africa region. The trade visit focused on maximising business opportunities for the 20 Enterprise Ireland clients exhibiting and participating.

The primary focus of all trade missions is to encourage business-to-business links and encourage investment and employment opportunities. To be effective in raising human rights issues with other countries we must do it in an appropriate way and at the right opportunity, so that our concerns are taken seriously and acted upon. Ireland has always been at the forefront internationally in raising human rights issues through bilateral contacts and especially through the European Union and the United Nations. We will continue to be a strong advocate for higher global standards that improve human rights, and encourage the highest standards of business conduct and corporate social responsibility.

Foreign Direct Investment

37. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which innovation continues to remain a feature and basis for both foreign direct and indigenous investment here; the degree to which such investment is likely to be spread evenly throughout the country in the future in line with Project Ireland 2040; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16787/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My

Department recognises the key role that innovation has played in Ireland's economic recovery to date. It contributes significantly to job creation, exports and investment, and the competitiveness of the indigenous enterprise base, and also to embedding the foreign direct investment base in Ireland.

It is clear that a strong interdependence exists therefore between science, technology and innovation policy and enterprise policy. My Department has developed its Innovation 2020 strategy and its Enterprise 2025 policy side by side. A critical objective for my Department and its agencies, including Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, is delivering on the actions and commitments set out in Innovation 2020.

Enterprise Ireland plays a particularly important role in supporting indigenous enterprises in Ireland. Between 2014 and 2016 employment in Enterprise Ireland backed companies reached 200,000. In its new strategy 2017 - 2020, Building Scale, Expanding Reach, Enterprise Ireland is aiming to increase this further with a new target to create an additional 60,000 new jobs by 2020. The Strategy also aims to drive innovation in Irish enterprise to unprecedented levels through new supports to reach the target of €1.25bn in R&D expenditure by its client companies per annum by 2020 (from €0.92bn in 2016).

My Department also recognises that innovation is a critical element of regional economic sustainability. In order to show growth regional firms must be enabled to achieve sales outside their region. Enterprise Ireland's innovation support programmes achieve a very strong regional balance. For example, 76% of Enterprise Ireland Innovation Partnership projects and 83% of Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateway Projects are delivered outside Dublin.

Furthermore, the Enterprise Ireland Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), launched in May 2017, is a €60 million competitive fund (over two Calls) aimed at supporting significant regional initiatives that will build on sectoral strengths and improve enterprise capability across the regions.

While the main objective of IDA Ireland is to encourage investment into Ireland by foreign-owned companies, the area of research, development and innovation (RDI) is of key importance to the agency. IDA Ireland's strategy Winning FDI 2015-2019 outlines a plan to support clients in creating 80,000 new jobs and increase employment in the client portfolio to 209,000 by 2019. Support for RDI will be key to achieving these targets.

Research, development and innovation investments not only embed existing FDI operations and employment but pave the way for future investment, job creation and export growth.

Project Ireland 2040 launched in February aims to provide balanced regional development through two strands – the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan.

The National Development Plan published in February contains a number of Strategic Investment Priorities linked to innovation aimed at supporting and growing competitive and innovative regional enterprises. These include:

- Strengthened SFI Research Centres and EI Technology Centres in higher education in all regions
- A €500 million Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund
- New regional "Technology and Innovation Poles", led through the Institutes of Technologies
- Expansion of Advanced Manufacturing Supports, linking centres and capacity across all

regions; and

- Expanding IDA Regional Property Programme, to attract investment to regions

These investment priorities will be progressed over the lifetime of the Plan, subject to detailed appraisal, value for money tests, consultation with relevant stakeholders and agreement on timeframes. As these aspects are developed further, details will be set out in the strategies of my Department and the enterprise agencies over the lifetime of the NDP.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

38. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in the north west under the regional action plan for jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16181/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average.

The North-East/North-West Regional Action Plan for Jobs has been a key policy response for supporting employment growth in the Border region. Local Authorities, enterprise agencies, and other key public and private sector stakeholders across counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth have been strongly involved in, and are key drivers of, the NE/NW Action Plan.

The core objective of the NE/NW Action Plan is to have a further 28,000 at work in the region by 2020. In terms of impact, 12,000 more people are in employment in the Border region from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, representing good progress towards the target of 28,000 jobs by 2020 as set out in the Regional Action Plan.

Achievements in the North West under the Action Plan since 2015 include Bord Iascaigh Mhara developing a virtual R&D centre to link research institutes with the seafood sector; the award of INTERREG funding to the North West Greenways Network, and the selection of 12 participants from the North West for Enterprise Ireland's New Frontiers programme in 2017.

In December last year I announced €30.5 million in funding to support enterprise capability in the regions, with 21 projects from all over the country receiving funding. This Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) totalling €60 million is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. On Monday 16th April last I launched the second Call under the fund, making available the remainder of the €60 million.

Three projects from the Border region were successful under Call 1 of the Fund collectively securing over €2 million : a network of three Digital and Innovation Hubs (incl. in Co. Leitrim); a new Digital Innovation Hub and enterprise capacity building programme in Co. Donegal; and a Regional Food Centre of Excellence in Co. Monaghan.

The enterprise agencies continue their work to contribute towards the ambitious targets set out in the Regional Action Plan. Enterprise Ireland recently announced a 4% employment growth in its client companies for the Border region, which now employ almost 11,500 people. On the FDI front, the number of IDA-backed jobs grew by 4% as a whole last year, with almost 12,500 people employed in IDA companies in the region.

Through partnership between Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have supported 586 companies in the North West with 2,616 employees and last year LEO client companies in the North West added 190 new employees in total.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans is my priority. On Monday the 16th April last I met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all the Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders in the North-West to ensure we deliver to the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

39. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in the south east under the regional action plan for jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16184/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average.

The South East Action Plan for Jobs has been a key policy response for supporting employment growth in the South East, with public and private stakeholders currently engaged in driving the range of innovative and practical actions set out in the Plan.

The South East Action Plan for Jobs has been embraced within the region and the efforts by stakeholders and businesses in the region are paying off: 16,200 more people are in employment in the South East from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, representing significant progress towards the 25,000 target for 2020 as set out in the plan. However, at Q4 2017, the unemployment rate in the South East was 7.3%; which is still too high when compared with the State rate of 6.1%. We will maintain a focus on the South East to ensure that the employment environment continues to improve.

Amongst the achievements in the South East under the Action Plan since 2015 are: the establishment of the South East Creative Corridor; the South East Micro Food Clustering Project; and enterprise networking through the BizFest initiative.

In 2017, both Enterprise Ireland and IDA reported job increases in the South East of 4% and 9% respectively, the IDA figure being the largest increase of all regions in the State in this period. Through partnership between Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) support just under 1,300 micro and small enterprises in the South

East with over 7,000 employees. Last year LEO client companies in the South East (incl. Co. Tipperary) added over 700 new employees in total.

To support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, last May my Department launched the competitive €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund delivered through Enterprise Ireland. A total of 21 collaborative projects were successful under the first call, securing up to €30.5 million in total. Two projects in the South East, InsurTech Network Centre at IT Carlow and the ThreeD additive manufacturing initiative at WIT, received funding under the first funding call. On Monday 16th April last I announced the opening of Call 2 under the Fund, which will allocate the remainder of the €60 million, and I hope to see more successful projects coming through from the South East region.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans is my priority. On Monday last I also met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ implementation committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders in the South East to ensure we deliver to the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Ticket Touting

40. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to tackle ticket touting and the secondary selling of tickets. [16825/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since receipt of the submissions to the public consultation on the resale of tickets, officials of my Department have engaged in follow-up discussions with sporting bodies, event promoters, consumer bodies, primary ticketing service providers and secondary ticket marketplaces. My officials have also liaised with public authorities in EU and EFTA member states with laws that prohibit or restrict ticket resale on the experience with, and effectiveness of, these laws. I am currently finalising a range of proposals aimed at helping ensure that ticket markets work better for consumers in the light of these discussions and enquiries and of the responses to the public consultation.

Brexit Supports

41. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to introduce a scheme such as the Enterprise Stabilisation Fund that was introduced in 2009 to assist businesses that face particular difficulties due to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16795/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department has undertaken significant research and consultation to better understand the challenges posed by Brexit for businesses in Ireland, and based on this work has designed a suite of supports for impacted businesses. I recently launched a €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme. This scheme is designed to assist eligible businesses exposed to negative impacts resulting from Brexit in adjusting, changing, or adapting to mitigate these effects. The finance offered under the scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced, and at more favourable terms than other current offerings.

A Technical Working Group on State Aid comprising representatives from DG Competi-

tion, DBEI, EI and DAFM was established in November 2017. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with current applicable State Aid rules. Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing State Aid rules, this will be raised as part of the Working Group discussions.

A notified Rescue and Restructuring (R&R) scheme was approved by the Commission in late November 2017. This scheme has been put in place as it is considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that we can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary. Under the scheme, which will run until 2020, Enterprise Ireland can provide restructuring support to SMEs in severe financial difficulties.

As part of the deliberations of the Working Group on State Aid, it was agreed that my officials should extend the R&R scheme to include temporary restructuring support for those SMEs who experience acute liquidity needs. This extension, which has been notified to the Commission, will be a welcome addition to our suite of supports for businesses impacted by Brexit. The temporary restructuring support, together with the rescue aid and the capital support under the Brexit Loan scheme should provide support to those SMEs who require stabilisation during transition.

Regional Development Funding

42. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which the Regional Enterprise Development Fund 2017-2020 will help drive job creation in County Galway and Connaught; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16186/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) was launched in May 2017. It is a €60 million competitive fund aimed at supporting significant regional initiatives that will build on sectoral strengths and improve enterprise capability across the regions. The REDF is intended to support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs.

The REDF is aimed at accelerating economic recovery in all regions of the country by delivering on the potential of local and regional enterprise strengths. The Fund will support significant collaborative and innovative regional initiatives to build on specific industry sectoral strengths and improve enterprise capability, thereby driving job creation. This will be achieved by co-financing the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. The Fund will help to ensure the benefits of our growing economy are felt in all regions.

REDF funding is being made available over the period 2017-2020 under two competitive calls. I have committed to ensuring that each region will benefit by at least €2 million from the Fund once the required standard for projects is met under the evaluation criteria.

The first call under the REDF concluded in August last year and in December 2017, I announced an allocation of €30.5 million in funding across 21 successful projects from all over the country.

On Monday 16th April, at a regional stakeholder event in Farmleigh, I announced the second competitive call under the Fund for the remainder of the €60 million.

Under the first call, one project from the West region received funding under Stream One of the Fund which was for major regional, multi-regional or national sectoral initiatives, attracting

grants of €2m up to €5m per project. The project, BIA Innovator Campus, is a Galway based initiative to encourage food entrepreneurship and innovation. The centre is expected to create 360 jobs within 3 years in over 40 businesses while unlocking far reaching innovation ecosystem benefits.

Under the Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017 for the West region, good progress is being made on job creation towards the target of 25,000 by 2020. There are 15,500 more people in employment in the region from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017. The unemployment rate in the West at Q4 2017 stands at 5.9 percent, which is slightly lower than the national average for that period. My Department and enterprise agencies will maintain a continued focus on enterprise development and job creation in the region. The Second call under the REDF is an important initiative in this respect, and in addition, this year I am commencing a process in each of the regions including the West to refresh and refocus the Regional Action Plans for Jobs for the period to 2020.

IDA Ireland Data

43. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the regional IDA site visits in addition to vacant IDA properties nationwide to the end of 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16814/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland's primary regional development goal, as set out in its current strategy, is to increase investment by 30% to 40% in every region of Ireland. Real progress has been made towards that target over the first three years of this strategy, with half of all jobs created by IDA client companies since 2015 based outside Dublin.

Site visits do represent an important tool through which investors can be encouraged to invest in regional areas and the IDA always does its utmost to ensure that investors consider all potential locations when visiting Ireland. The Agency's staff will continue to bring potential sites, that are located outside the city's main urban areas, to the attention of prospective investors in 2018.

Ensuring that there are properties available for potential multinational investors is also key to increasing regional investment. If there were no available properties in the regions, IDA-owned or otherwise, it would significantly diminish the Agency's capacity to attract and win new investments there. That is why the IDA tries to ensure that there is always a supply of suitable properties that can be matched with new or expanding investors.

Table (A) outlines the number of site visits by county in 2017 and Table (B) outlines the number of IDA owned properties available for marketing.

Table (A) Site Visits by County 2017

County	2017
Carlow	8
Cavan	2
Clare	22
Cork	51
Donegal	2
Dublin	327
Galway	62

County	2017
Kerry	9
Kildare	10
Kilkenny	6
Laois	4
Leitrim	5
Limerick	42
Longford	7
Louth	22
Mayo	7
Meath	3
Monaghan	1
Offaly	5
Roscommon	3
Sligo	18
Tipperary	8
Waterford	11
Westmeath	42
Wexford	3
Wicklow	2

Table (B) IDA Owned Properties Available for Marketing

Address	Building	Owned	Square meters/acreage
Cork (Ballygallen)	Buildings x 3	IDA owned.	1157.00
Galway (Roundstone)	Buildings x 2	IDA owned.	185.80
Kerry (Killarney)	Buildings x 2	IDA owned.	597.36
Kerry (Tralee)	Building	IDA owned.	2363.90
Mayo (Ballina)	Building	IDA owned.	321.00
Sligo (Finisklin)	Building	IDA owned.	2086.00
Tipperary (Nenagh)	Building	IDA owned.	2972.90
Waterford (Waterford)	Building x 3	IDA owned.	5890.40
Westmeath (Athlone)	Building	IDA owned.	4393.30
Wicklow (Arklow)	Building x 1	IDA owned.	2932.60

Economic Competitiveness

44. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps being taken to reverse business competitiveness deficiencies and making Ireland an attractive location for businesses to locate in; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16811/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Despite intense competition, Ireland's competitiveness performance remains positive. Ireland moved from 16th to 6th in 2017 in the Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Yearbook. In addition, the World Bank's most recent "Doing Business 2018" report shows Ireland is now ranked 17th out of 190 countries, an improvement of one place on

last year.

Our improved performance is reflected in strong employment growth across sectors and regions. We have over 2.2 million people at work and our unemployment rate is down to 6.1%. Agency supported companies now employ over 400,000 people throughout Ireland. The strong performance of clients supported by the enterprise agencies in winning exports and investment, market share and job creation in the face of intense global competition is impressive and reflects the competitiveness of the environment in which to do business in Ireland.

However, there is no room for complacency. We need to continue to improve our competitiveness and remain vigilant to the very significant challenges in the external environment, particularly, Brexit. In addition, the productivity performance of many of our Irish owned enterprises is weak and there are not enough enterprises engaging in innovation.

Competition for FDI remains intense. Ireland has many strengths when it comes to attracting FDI scoring highly in terms of criteria including investment incentives, labour productivity and the adaptability and ability of talent. While we have a proven track record in attracting and sustaining FDI, continued success cannot be taken for granted. Our capacity to continue winning such new investment, despite geopolitical changes and intense competition, will be aided by the underlying strengths of our FDI offering.

As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, my objective is to create the best possible environment for enterprise, entrepreneurship, innovation and investment across all regions. The immediate challenge for Ireland is to ensure growth is sustainable, that enterprises are resilient and we continue to grow Irish enterprises and attract foreign direct investment. We are taking steps to ensure the economy is resilient at sectoral and firm level to deal with imminent competitiveness challenges and to build further on the progress we have made. That is why we are continually examining how we can improve on factors that are crucial to fostering further investment here, including our cost base, infrastructure, the availability of talent and innovation.

Enterprise 2025 Renewed - which I launched last month - placed an increased emphasis on developing our Irish owned enterprises. There is a strong focus on taking action that will embed resilience in our enterprise base. We are placing a spotlight on innovation and on skills. Enterprise Ireland places a strong emphasis on competitiveness. It supports exporting enterprises with initiatives in Lean, RD&I, and management development. The Agency helps enterprises to take a strategic approach to understanding and responding to potential implications arising from Brexit and assists them to enter into new markets and diversify their export base. The Local Enterprise Offices offer a suite of supports to enhance the competitiveness of small and micro enterprises. Initiatives include mentoring, innovation vouchers, Lean Start and access to a Brexit diagnostic and guidance.

My officials and I, as well as the National Competitiveness Council, remain focused on competitiveness - an agenda that requires cross Government commitment to continue to develop and implement actions to enhance national competitiveness.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

45. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in Galway city and county under the regional action plan for jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16187/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since

becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average.

The West Regional Action Plan for Jobs has been a key policy response for supporting employment growth across Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, with public and private stakeholders currently engaged in driving the range of innovative and practical actions set out in the Plan.

The West Action Plan for Jobs has been embraced within the region and the efforts by stakeholders and businesses in the region are paying off: 15,500 more people are in employment in the West from Q1 2015 to Q2 2017, representing significant progress towards the 25,000 target for 2020 as set out in the plan. At the end of 2017, the unemployment rate for the West was 5.9% - below the State average of 6.1%.

Actions under the Plan that have benefitted Galway City and County include the launch of a Women's Entrepreneurship project driven by GMIT; NUIG's new Springboard postgrad in Tech Innovation; and the delivery of a Business Plan to develop a Film Fund for the region.

In 2017, both Enterprise Ireland and IDA reported job increases in Galway, with increases in the West at 7% and 5% respectively. The LEO in Galway supported 254 client companies in 2017, with 1,039 in employment, and recorded a net increase of 95 new jobs in micro-enterprises during the year.

To support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, last May my Department launched the competitive €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund delivered through Enterprise Ireland. One project in the West secured funding under Stream One of the Fund which was for major regional, multi-regional or national sectoral initiatives, attracting grants of €2m up to €5m per project. The project, BIA Innovator Campus, is a Galway based initiative to encourage food entrepreneurship and innovation. The centre is expected to create 360 jobs within 3 years in over 40 businesses while unlocking far reaching innovation ecosystem benefits.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans is my priority. On Monday the 16th April last I met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all the Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. At the same event, I also announced the opening of the Second Call under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund which will make a further €30 million in funding available for successful regional project proposals under a competitive process.

I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders in the West to ensure we deliver the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Brexit Issues

46. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the level of ongoing contacts between her Department and its counterpart in Northern Ireland and with the industrial development agencies North and South in regard to dealing with Brexit

related issues that are common to all of the island; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16796/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department works closely with its counterpart in Northern Ireland - the Department for the Economy - regarding the operation of InterTrade Ireland (ITI), the cross-border body that assists SMEs all across the island in growing North-South trade.

ITI has been very active in working to assist businesses in Ireland address the particular challenges that Brexit may present for cross-border commerce. My Department has provided additional funding to ITI, in both 2017 and 2018, to allow it to undertake a range of initiatives aimed at better preparing Irish SMEs for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. This work includes the provision of specialist advice and support for capability building. Major flagship awareness events have been held in both Belfast and Dublin, attracting several hundred companies each. In addition, an extensive series of information events have been held in other locations on both sides of the border.

My Department is also funding a research project being undertaken for ITI by the Economic and Social Research Institute. This research has already improved our collective understanding of the impact of different trade and tariff regimes which may be imposed following Brexit and supply chain links between our two jurisdictions. Further research on other aspects of cross border trade is underway.

We will continue to support ITI's work as it takes steps to help clients deal with the challenges associated with Brexit.

Brexit Supports

47. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports available to SMEs in County Limerick to help them prepare for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16192/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is continuing to work hard to help Irish businesses across the country to withstand the challenges and avail of the opportunities posed by Brexit. The long-term response to Brexit is for companies to become more competitive, more innovative, and to diversify their export footprint into more markets.

In 2017, 8,269 people were employed across 94 Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported plants in Limerick representing a 9% increase on 2016's employment figures.

In the period 2015 - 2017 EI paid €9 million to client companies in Limerick to support them innovate, improve competitiveness and to diversify their global footprint.

In response to Brexit, EI has introduced a range of new supports, streamlined others, and launched a *Global Ambition* communications campaign.

For client companies in Limerick, being prepared is crucial to ensuring resilience to emerging challenges. To promote awareness, and supported by a national *Prepare For Brexit* campaign, EI has:

- Developed and launched the Brexit SME Scorecard, an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business

pillars. To date over 2,000 companies have utilised this Scorecard.

- Designed and launched a €5,000 Be Prepared Grant that helps to support the costs of SME clients to prepare a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit.

- Held a number of Brexit Advisory Clinics to encourage companies to examine their potential exposure to Brexit.

In 2018 EI is:

- Continuing to run regional Brexit Advisory Clinics to support companies to take immediate action to address their potential exposure.

- Providing an independent consultant to companies through “the Act On” Initiative. This consultant will assist companies to identify specific actions they can take over a short period to address some of the risks and opportunities caused by Brexit.

The second round of the €60 million Regional Enterprise Development Fund was launched this week. The Fund will support collaborative projects that will boost the regions by supporting enterprise and creating jobs.

In addition, the Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs was launched in October 2015, and covers Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary. Implementation of the Plan is overseen by a Regional Implementation Committee made up of representatives from the public and private sector. From Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, 16,600 more people are in employment in the Mid-West. This represents good progress towards the target of 23,000 by 2020.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission Reports

48. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has reported on the operation of the household waste collection market; if so, her plans to publish this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16780/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Policy responsibility for the waste sector lies with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. On 4 July 2017, a motion was passed by Dáil Éireann which called on the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to ask the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to report on the operation of the household waste collection market.

Following a formal request on 25 September from the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the then Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, in accordance with section 10(4) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014, requested the CCPC to carry out a study on the operation of the household waste collection market.

The study will assess the household waste collection market and make recommendations, as appropriate. It will assess the nature and scale of consumer and operator issues in the household waste collection market and consider if the introduction of an enhanced regulatory regime could efficiently address these issues, in the short and long term. It will include the following elements:

1. Research on current issues in the waste sector.

2. An economic assessment of the household waste collection market.
3. An overview of waste collection in other countries.

I understand that the study is well advanced and it is anticipated that the report will be finalised over the Summer. The issue of publication will be considered at that stage.

Military Exports

49. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications for a licence to export military or dual use items denied by her Department in 2017. [16605/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is responsible for controls on the export of these military and dual use items from Ireland.

Under Irish law, military export licences must be sought in respect of the goods and technology, and any components thereof, listed in the Annex to the Control of Exports (Goods and Technology) Order, S.I. 216 of 2012 which reflects the 2008 EU Common Position on Arms Exports and EU sanctions regimes.

My Department is also responsible for licensing the export of dual-use items outside the EU pursuant to Council Regulation (EC) No. 428/2009 setting up a Community regime for the control of exports, transfer, brokering and transit of dual-use items.

All export licence applications, whether for Dual-Use or Military Goods are subject to rigorous scrutiny. My officials seek observations on any foreign policy concerns that may arise in respect of a proposed export; such factors are subject to review in the light of developments in a given region and having regard to the 2008 EU Common Position on Arms Exports. Any observations which may arise from this examination are considered in the final assessment of any licence application.

My Department may refuse an export licence, following consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other EU and Non-EU export licensing authorities, as appropriate.

In 2017 four export licence applications were refused. These refusals were made on the grounds of considerations about the intended end-use, the risk of diversion and EU sanctions.

IDA Ireland Jobs Data

50. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps being taken by the IDA to support job creation in the regions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16723/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government is strongly committed to regional development and my Department and its agencies - including IDA Ireland - are working towards ambitious targets to ensure that employment and investment are as evenly distributed as possible across the country.

IDA Ireland's primary regional development goal, as set out in its current strategy, is to

increase investment by 30% to 40% in every region of Ireland. Real progress has been made towards that target over the first three years of this strategy, with half of all jobs created by IDA client companies since 2015 based outside Dublin.

An important factor in attracting potential overseas investors to the regions is the availability of suitable commercial property across Ireland. That is because firms need to identify - before investing in an area - a site or facility in which they can operate from. A shortage of such sites and facilities in the regions has, however, arisen on account of a number of factors. The IDA therefore launched its Regional Property Programme (RPP) in 2015 to ensure there is a better supply of commercial properties outside of Dublin that could accommodate investment. As well as upgrading existing buildings and acquiring strategic sites suitable for FDI, this programme also includes the construction of nine new advance facilities around the country. Two such facilities were constructed and completed in Athlone and Waterford in 2014 and early 2015. Further buildings were completed last year in Sligo, Tralee and Castlebar, with more planned for Galway, Dundalk, Limerick, Athlone, Carlow and Waterford. I am confident that the RPP, which has already helped generate employment in the regions, will help secure further investment in the years ahead.

More generally, the IDA always does its utmost to encourage its clients to invest in regional area. This includes through bringing firms on site visits outside of our main cities and highlighting to them the particular strengths or attributes of different parts of the country. The decision on where to locate, however, always rests with the business concerned. It is sometimes the case as well that these companies will only consider - because of a range of reasons - urban areas of scale for their investment.

I want to nevertheless emphasise that the IDA will continue to do its utmost to encourage clients to locate in areas that are most in need of investment. I am determined that this approach will continue so that the positive benefits of FDI are increasingly felt all across Ireland.

Regional Development Funding

51. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the next round of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund 2017-2020 will open for applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16178/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I launched the Second Call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund on Monday in Farmleigh. This call will fund projects with the balance of the €60m remaining under the fund.

The first call under the Fund was announced in May 2017, with the results released in December. Twenty-one applicants representing all regions of the country secured a total of up to €30.5m in financial support for a range of enterprise and capability development projects.

The REDF is aimed at accelerating economic recovery in every part of the country by delivering on the potential of local and regional strengths. The funding is provided by my Department, through Enterprise Ireland under the National Development Plan. It is a key action to support the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

A maximum of up to 80% is available for projects, with the balance to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector.

The Fund will support major new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions or nationally to build

the unique USP capabilities to grow the regions. Projects must be impactful, with the impact being jobs.

Further information is available on the Enterprise Ireland website.

Brexit Supports

52. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports available to SMEs in counties Sligo and Leitrim to help them prepare for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16180/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is continuing to work hard to help Irish businesses across the country to withstand the challenges and avail of the opportunities posed by Brexit. The long-term response to Brexit is for companies to become more competitive, more innovative, and to diversify their export footprint into more markets.

In 2017 Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported 1,733 jobs across 69 businesses in Sligo, and 559 jobs across 25 businesses in Leitrim.

In the period 2015 - 2017 EI paid €3.6 million to client companies in Sligo and Leitrim to support them to innovate, improve competitiveness and to diversify their global footprint.

In response to Brexit, EI has introduced a range of new supports, streamlined others, and launched a Global Ambition communications campaign.

For client companies in Sligo and Leitrim, being prepared is crucial to ensuring resilience to emerging challenges. To promote awareness, and supported by a national Prepare For Brexit campaign, EI has:

- Developed and launched the Brexit SME Scorecard, an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars. To date over 2,000 companies have utilised this Scorecard.

- Designed and launched a €5k Be Prepared Grant that helps to support the costs of SME clients to prepare a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit.

- Held a number of Brexit Advisory Clinics to encourage companies to examine their potential exposure to Brexit.

In 2018 EI is:

- Continuing to run regional Brexit Advisory Clinics to support companies to take immediate action to address their potential exposure.

- Providing an independent consultant to companies through the Act On Programme Initiative. This consultant will assist companies to identify specific actions they can take over a short period to address some of the risks and opportunities caused by Brexit.

I launched the second round of the €60 million Regional Enterprise Development Fund. The Fund will support collaborative projects that will boost the regions by supporting enterprise and creating jobs.

In addition, the North East/North West Action Plan for Jobs was launched in November 2015, and covers Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth. Implementation of the

Plan is overseen by a Regional Implementation Committee made up of representatives from the public and private sector. There are 12,000 more people in employment in the Border region from Q1 2015, the baseline year, to Q2 2017. This represents good progress towards the target of 28,000 more jobs by 2020.

Brexit supports from LEOs in every county include the LEO Brexit Mentor Programme which is supporting Owner/Managers identify key Brexit exposures and develop robust strategies to address issues and maximise potential opportunities. The LEOs are also providing Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters (TAME), which is financial assistance to support market diversification in qualifying businesses to develop new and export market opportunities. The LEOs are also helping businesses adopt LEAN business practices to increase competitiveness and providing support for innovative developments in micro-enterprises by getting them investor ready.

InterTrade Ireland (ITI) is offering Brexit 'Start to Plan' Vouchers and has established a Brexit Advisory Service to help businesses with practical advice, support and information on Brexit related issues. ITI also provides vouchers to enable companies to get professional advice on Brexit, including likely tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services.

Brexit Issues

53. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a recent Brexit survey result by a bank (details supplied) showing that just 6% of SMEs here have a Brexit plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14214/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Extensive work has been ongoing in my Department to prepare for all Brexit eventualities. This includes research and the development of supports to help ensure that businesses are prepared for potential difficulties arising as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

Research conducted on behalf of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in October of 2017 by B&A found that 16% of SMEs surveyed had formal contingency plans in place for Brexit. However, an additional 20% indicate that they have done some informal Brexit planning. The B&A survey found that formal planning for Brexit was lowest among small businesses, while medium-sized businesses were better prepared. Among food businesses, one of the sectors most exposed to Brexit-related uncertainty, the proportion of businesses who indicate that they have a formal Brexit plan is closer to 26%.

The Brexit Loan Scheme, launched on 28 March, encourages eligible businesses affected or potentially affected by Brexit to engage in formal planning. To this end, one of the requirements for applications for loans under the scheme is that businesses provide a business development plan, demonstrating that they plan to innovate, change or adapt in response to Brexit.

The agencies of my Department are also fully engaged in preparing for Brexit. Enterprise Ireland's (EI) #PrepareforBrexit communications campaign, featuring the 'Brexit SME Scorecard', was launched last March. The Scorecard is an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit.

As part of awareness-raising activities, EI is rolling out regional Brexit Advisory clinics throughout the year. To date, clinics have been held in Letterkenny, Tralee, Portlaoise, Clarendon, Cootehill and Charleville. A Brexit two-day external consultancy support is also being rolled out to individual clients to help them develop a detailed sustainable growth plan.

EI has also introduced a 'Be Prepared Grant' which offers up to €5,000 for exporting client companies to conduct further research and use external expertise to develop a Brexit Action Plan.

The funding to the Local Enterprise Offices has been increased by 22% and they, along with InterTrade Ireland, are offering a range of Brexit focused supports to companies, including those engaged in cross-border trade with Northern Ireland.

Job Initiatives

54. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to support quality job creation in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16171/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, through its enterprise agencies, is committed to supporting businesses to grow, innovate and perform strongly in global markets.

I am delighted to say that 2017 was a particularly good year for job numbers and job creation in agency supported companies. In Co. Wexford, 4,670 people were employed in the 122 Enterprise Ireland supported companies, 2,948 people were employed in the 18 IDA Ireland clients and the Local Enterprise Office supported 213 clients with 1,348 total jobs, a gross increase of 238 jobs on 2016.

The South East Action Plan for Jobs which launched in September 2015, aims to increase employment in the region by 10-15% over the period to 2020, resulting in the delivery of 25,000 jobs. The most recent comparable data shows that there are now over 16,000 more people in employment in the region from Q1 2015 to Q2 2017.

On Monday, I launched the second call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund. The first call under the Fund was announced in May 2017, with the results released in December. Twenty-one applicants representing all regions of the country secured a total of up to €30.5m in financial support for a range of enterprise and capability development projects. The second call will fund projects with the balance of the €60m remaining under the fund.

Enterprise Ireland is committed to developing regional employment growth – a fact reflected in the fact that 64% of jobs created by the agency in 2017 were outside Dublin. Enterprise Ireland's focus for 2018 is to help clients, including those located in Wexford, to build on the strength of their 2017 performance by supporting them to innovate, be competitive and to diversify their global footprint - key attributes required to be resilient to economic shocks, such as those emerging from any kind of Brexit.

In the period 2015 - 2017 Enterprise Ireland paid €5.3 million to client companies in Wexford to support companies to be innovative, improve competitiveness and to diversify their global footprint.

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) located in Wexford town is the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports for anyone that intends to start or grow a business in the county. LEO Wexford provides a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant state supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland.

IDA Ireland's strategy, Winning Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019, sets out challenging targets in respect of the FDI sector for the period. Under the programme, IDA is targeting a minimum increase in investment of 30% to 40% in each region outside Dublin.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

55. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in the eastern part of the midlands region under the regional action plan for jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16738/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average.

The eastern part of the Midlands is included under the Midlands Region Action Plan for Jobs. The Midlands Action Plan has been a key policy response for supporting employment growth in the Midlands, with public and private stakeholders currently engaged in driving the range of innovative and practical actions set out in the Plan.

The Plan has been embraced within the region and the efforts by stakeholders and businesses in the region are paying off: 9,500 more people are in employment in the Midlands from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, representing significant progress towards the 14,000 target for 2020 as set out in the plan. However, at Q4 2017, the unemployment rate in the Midlands was 7.7%; which is still too high when compared with the State rate of 6.1%. We will maintain a focus on the Midlands to ensure that the employment environment continues to improve.

The Midlands Action Plan for Jobs has been embraced within the region and the efforts by stakeholders and businesses in the region are paying off: 9,500 more people are in employment in the Midlands from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, representing significant progress towards the 14,000 target for 2020 as set out in the plan. However, at Q4 2017, the unemployment rate in the Midlands was 7.7%; which is still too high when compared with the State rate of 6.1%. We will maintain a focus on the Midlands to ensure that the employment environment continues to improve.

In 2017, both Enterprise Ireland and IDA reported job increases in the Midlands of 6% and 1% respectively. Through partnership between Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have 819 client companies in the Midlands employing 4,214 people; and last year those companies added 387 new employees in total.

To support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, last May my Department launched the €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund. This competitive Fund is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. In December last year I announced an allocation of €30.5 million under the first call under the Fund, with 21 projects from all over the country approved for funding.

One project in the Midlands, Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) CLG, was approved fund-

ing under Stream One of the first funding call, which supports major regional, multi-regional or national sectoral initiatives with grants of €2 million up to €5 million per project. The award of funding to the IMR in Mullingar will develop a significant and important applied research and development capability in the areas of Collaborative Robotics and Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, in partnership with manufacturing industries in the Midlands and elsewhere.

I launched the second call under the REDF on Monday 16th April, which will allocate the remainder of the €60 million, and I hope to see more successful projects coming through from the Midlands region.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans is my priority. On Monday last I also met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders in the Midlands to ensure we deliver to the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Enterprise 2025

56. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the priority actions for persons with disabilities in the Enterprise 2025 renewed strategy. [16815/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As an open economy, our openness to trade and investment has contributed to our success over past decades, and will continue to do so. However, we face challenges in the form of Brexit, international tax developments, the unrelenting pace of technological advances and changes being introduced under the current US administration all of which have implications for Ireland's economy, and will impact on businesses.

It was against this backdrop that Enterprise 2025, published in November 2015, was recently reviewed across Government. The emphasis is now to deepen resilience in our enterprise base, and put supports and policies in place so that our enterprises can adapt to change.

In looking forward, and in line with "Enterprise 2025", Government will offer supports by investing in our people so that Ireland is internationally renowned for its talent and entrepreneurial culture. We aim to improve participation rates in the labour force through various initiatives targeted at unemployed, youth, females, older people and people with disabilities, all of which will be informed by analysis.

We will take action to improve labour market participation rates by extending labour market activation services to other working age groups, reform rules for disability schemes to encourage take up of part-time employment, and continue to increase access to quality and affordable childcare and to make changes in the marginal tax rate.

Pathways to Work is the main Government initiative encouraging access to the labour market and ultimately participation in employment. It is complemented by the Action Plan for Jobless Households, the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

A commitment under APJ 2018 by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will ensure that the number of people out of work continues to fall as the economy recovers, that the labour market responds flexibly and efficiently to employment growth, and that

the expansion and active promotion of services to currently inactive working age adults with a capacity and a desire to work, continues. This will include lone parents, qualified adults and people with a disability.

Action 25 of APJ 2018 commits to increase awareness amongst jobseekers of the portfolio of services and supports in order to maximise take-up by developing online ready-reckoner tools for people in receipt of disability benefits and lone parent payments to assess the net benefits of returning to work.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

57. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions her Department has had regarding the development of a mid-west conference and exhibition centre as envisaged in the action plan for Jobs in the mid-west region for 2015 to 2017. [16828/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average.

The Plans are being monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the business community, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. Eight of the nine Implementation Committees, including the Mid-West, are industry led.

Progress across the eight regions has been very positive since the launch of the initiative, with an increase in employment of 8.5% or 118,600 jobs in the regions outside of Dublin and 166,800 additional jobs nationwide, from Q1 2015 to Q2 2017.

Good progress has been made in the Mid-West, and from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, 16,600 more people are in employment in the region, as against the 2020 target of 23,000. Over the year to Q2 2017, 7,000 more people in employment in the Mid-West region. As of Q4 2017, the Mid West has a Q4 2017 unemployment rate of 6.6% which is 0.5 percentage points above the average for the State.

As outlined in the Mid-West Regional Action Plan, the region has a strong product in the MICE (meetings, incentive, conference and exhibition), or business tourism sector, providing opportunities to capitalise on global growth in this sector. Limerick has a growing reputation as an option for international associations to meet, while the Mid West region as a whole has a strong corporate base which will help to attract more corporate meetings, in addition to experiences and products that lend themselves to securing a much larger part of the incentive business. The Shannon Region Conference & Sports Bureau is a very successful public / private partnership focused on the MICE sector and will aim to attract such events to the counties across the Mid West Region, using the strength and reputation of the aviation and aerospace, pharma, and MedTech sectors and academics at University of Limerick.

The development of a mid-west conference and exhibition centre for the Mid-West is identi-

fied as a 'potential strategic area for job creation' in the Regional Action Plan. While my Department has not had any discussions in relation to this, given the potential in the sector it is an area the Regional Action Plan Committee may wish to revisit in the context of their forthcoming review of their Regional Plan.

To support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, last May my Department launched the €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund. This competitive Fund is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. In December last year I announced an allocation of €30.5 million under the first call under the Fund, with 21 projects from all over the country approved for funding. Two projects in the Mid-West region secured funding under the first call: the development of a state-of-the-art National Bio-economy Innovation & Piloting Facility at the former Lisheen Mine site in Tipperary; and Emerald Aero Cluster, comprising 14 indigenous manufacturing companies, brought together with the specific purpose of increasing Aerospace manufacturing export revenues for members and aerospace business.

I launched the second call under the REDF on Monday 16th April, which will allocate the remainder of the €60 million and I hope to see more successful projects coming through from the Mid-West.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans is my priority. On Monday last I also met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders in the Mid-West to ensure we deliver the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Brexit Supports

58. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the contingencies and supports in place to safeguard SMEs and export businesses from a hard Brexit scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16810/18]

59. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports in place to safeguard SMEs and export businesses from a hard Brexit scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16781/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 and 59 together.

My Department is continuing to work hard to help Irish businesses to both withstand the challenges and avail of the opportunities posed by Brexit. The long-term response to Brexit is for companies to become more competitive, more innovative and to diversify their export footprint into more markets.

I am confident that the agencies under my Department have the supports available to enable companies to consolidate market share within the UK, and also to become more resilient by broadening their sales to other international markets. Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are actively supporting their clients to achieve this. My Department provided for additional monies in 2017 to enable EI and the LEOs to ramp up supports in light of Brexit to drive improvements in:

- productivity,
- innovation,
- management capability and leadership skills.

Enterprise Ireland has launched several initiatives in response to Brexit, including:

- Brexit Scorecard: This interactive online platform can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars. Based on answers supplied by the user, the Scorecard generates an immediate report which contains suggested actions and resources, and information on events for companies to attend, to prepare for Brexit.

- Be Prepared Grant: This grant offers SMEs a grant of up to €5,000 to assist them in preparing an action plan for economic shocks such as Brexit. The grant can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and travel expenses associated with researching the direction of their action plan.

- Brexit Advisory Clinics: Enterprise Ireland held four Brexit Advisory Clinics over the past few months in Portlaoise, Mayo, Cavan and Cork. The purpose of these Clinics is to support companies affected by Brexit to take immediate action to address their exposure. More dates will be announced soon.

- Brexit 'Act On' Programme : A consultant spends time with EI client companies to discuss specific challenges and draw up a report with tailored recommendations that will help them address weaknesses and become more resilient.

In addition, EI is implementing extensive trade mission and event schedules focussed on global and sectoral opportunities, further developing in-market expertise and networks, placing greater focus on identifying new sectoral opportunities and stimulating demand for Irish products and services through international marketing campaigns. In 2017, EI launched a new Eurozone Strategy to increase exports to Eurozone countries by 50% by 2020.

The LEOs are supporting their clients by providing information, training and mentoring on Brexit related issues as well as advice on other sources of support. The suite of LEO Brexit supports available to micro and small businesses through the 31 LEOs nationwide include.

InterTrade Ireland (ITI), has also been very active in assisting businesses address the challenges that Brexit may present for future cross-border commerce. A series of information and awareness raising events have been underway in towns across both North and South over recent months. ITI is also rolling out a 'Start to Plan' readiness voucher scheme, which enables companies to purchase specialist advice in areas such as customs, tax, tariff and non-tariff barriers, legal and labour mobility issues.

Other initiatives that my Department are advancing include the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme, under which accessible finance is made available to businesses at favourable terms. In addition, this past Monday saw the launch of the second call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, which is aimed at supporting the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. Twenty-one successful applicants representing all regions of the country have secured up to €30.5m for their projects in the first competitive call.

The work of my Department is focused on supporting businesses throughout the country to withstand current challenges and succeed into the future, therefore I feel that all our efforts will put Ireland in a strong position in case of a hard Brexit scenario.

IDA Ireland

60. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the IDA's plans for its regional property programme for Drogheda and Dundalk in view of the recent announcement in Project Ireland 2040; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16182/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): This Government is fully committed to the creation of high-quality and sustainable employment across Ireland, including in County Louth. The new National Development Plan recognises the importance of Dundalk and Drogheda as key centres in the context of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor. Both towns are attractive destinations for foreign direct investment (FDI) given their track record in attracting multinational companies, the quality of their local infrastructure and their proximity to Dublin and the capital's transport hubs. I am therefore confident that we will be able to sustain and grow investment levels in the area.

There is already a strong base of investment in Louth with 24 IDA client companies employing a total of 3,702 people. The Agency's client base has added 295 FDI further jobs there over the last year alone. The IDA itself is working hard to increase the number of multinational companies with operations in the County.

The IDA's Regional Property Programme (RPP) remains an important tool through which investors can be encouraged to locate in areas outside of Dublin, including Louth. This programme includes the construction of nine new advance facilities around the country, one of which will be located in Dundalk. The Agency is currently selecting a contractor to commence this project, with completion of the building expected in 2019.

Another element of the RPP involves upgrades to existing business parks and I understand that the IDA has secured advance planning permission for a facility at Dundalk Science and Technology Park. This should help to attract further investment to the area.

Company Sale

61. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if reports that €7 million of debt was written off by the State in the sale of the State's stake in a studio (details supplied) and that the sale price was €6 million are correct; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16803/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In 2016 Ardmore Studios International Limited (ASIL), engaged IBI Corporate Finance to investigate selling the company as a going concern. (ASIL), the majority shareholders in Ardmore Studios Ltd, were seeking to exit, having been running the company for over 30 years.

An extensive process was undertaken by IBI Corporate Finance to find a suitable buyer, with over 100 potential parties contacted.

Ion Equity emerged as the successful bidder from that process and its acquisition vehicle, Olcott Entertainment Limited, which was recently incorporated by Ion Equity for this purpose, is now the new owner of Ardmore Studios.

In relation to the sale price and other specific financial details, I am unable to reveal what are confidential details of Enterprise Ireland's minority shareholding disposal transaction in what is a privately held company. This applies to the Ardmore transaction as it would to any other

individual investment or share disposal of Enterprise Ireland where it is a minority shareholder in a privately held company.

This principle of confidentiality reflects a statutory duty of confidentiality set out in section 16 of the Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998. In this case, the parties also understood, at the time of the sale by Enterprise Ireland and other majority shareholder vendors, that, due to section 16 of the 1998 Act, the consideration and other financial aspects of the sale would not be revealed. Disclosing such information, would be in breach of the high standards of confidentiality adhered to by Enterprise Ireland.

What I can however confirm is that Enterprise Ireland negotiated the sale of its shareholding with the benefit of comprehensive due diligence undertaken by independent consultants and is satisfied that it realised full market value, and on a par with the other majority shareholders parties.

The Government had committed that the company would be sold as a going concern and that is what has happened while realising full commercial value for the shareholders selling the company, including Enterprise Ireland.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

62. Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in the midlands region under the regional action plan for jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16722/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average.

The Midlands Action Plan for Jobs has been a key policy response for supporting employment growth in the Midlands, with public and private stakeholders currently engaged in driving the range of innovative and practical actions set out in the Plan.

The Midlands Action Plan for Jobs has been embraced within the region and the efforts by stakeholders and businesses in the region are paying off: 9,500 more people are in employment in the Midlands from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, representing significant progress towards the 14,000 target for 2020 as set out in the plan. However, at Q4 2017, the unemployment rate in the Midlands was 7.7%; which is still too high when compared with the State rate of 6.1%. We will maintain a focus on the Midlands to ensure that the employment environment continues to improve.

In 2017, both Enterprise Ireland and IDA reported job increases in the Midlands of 6% and 1% respectively. Through partnership between Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have 819 client companies in the Midlands employing 4,214 people; and last year those companies added 387 new employees in total.

To support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs,

last May my Department launched the €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund. This competitive Fund is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. In December last year I announced €30.5 million under the first call under the Fund, with 21 projects from all over the country receiving funding.

One project in the Midlands, Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) CLG, was approved funding under Stream One of the first funding call, which supports major regional, multi-regional or national sectoral initiatives with grants of €2 million up to €5 million per project. The award of funding to the IMR in Mullingar will develop a significant and important applied research and development capability in the areas of Collaborative Robotics and Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, in partnership with manufacturing industries in the Midlands and elsewhere.

I launched the second call under the REDF on Monday 16th April, which will allocate the remainder of the €60 million, and I hope to see more successful projects coming through from the Midlands region.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans is my priority. On Monday last I also met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders in the Midlands to ensure we deliver to the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Military Exports

63. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of licences issued for military exports in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16604/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is responsible for controls on the export of military items from Ireland. Under Irish law, military export licences must be sought in respect of the export from Ireland of military goods and technology, and any components thereof, listed in the EU Common Military List.

I publish an annual report under the Control of Exports Act 2008 which includes information on military exports. The objective of publishing such a report is to provide the public with a continuing enhanced level of transparency about exports of controlled goods and services.

Export controls are of particular importance to my Department in ensuring compliance with the highest international standards in accordance with international law. Our policy of free trade and open markets must conform with the core principles of security, regional stability and human rights which underpin export controls.

In 2017, 118 licences with a value of €25m were issued to export goods with a military classification.

These licences were in respect of:

- components which have a military rating
- explosives for commercial mining and quarrying
- firearms for hunting, sporting and recreational activities, and personal use.

All export licence applications to export goods with a military classification are subject to rigorous scrutiny. My officials seek observations on any foreign policy concerns that may arise in respect of a proposed export; such factors are subject to review in the light of developments in a given region and having regard to the 2008 EU Common Position on Arms Exports. Any observations which may arise from this examination are considered in the final assessment of any licence application.

Foreign Direct Investment

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which Ireland continues to be an attractive location for foreign direct investment; the extent to which the State continues to compete with other locations both within and without Europe and the eurozone; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16786/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland remains a global leader in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and competes with a range of jurisdictions across Europe, Asia and the Americas. Whilst this competition is increasingly intense, our country has a number of key strengths that continue to make us a highly attractive destination for FDI. These include our highly skilled workers, first-class education system and positive demographics. Our membership of the EU and Eurozone, pro-enterprise policy environment, and competitive corporation tax regime are other significant selling points.

Taken together, these strengths help the IDA make a compelling case to prospective investors about the merits of investing in Ireland. They also help to explain our strong national performance in terms of FDI-driven investment and job creation. In 2017, for example, the IDA's client companies created over 19,500 new jobs across a range of sectors, bringing total employment at FDI firms to 210,000.

Ireland clearly therefore does remain an attractive location for FDI. The Government is nevertheless conscious of our need to remain as competitive as possible. That is why it will continue to explore how to both reinforce existing strengths and find new ways of attracting job-rich investment to the country.

Jobs Data

65. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the number of new jobs created here in each of the past two years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17071/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the official source of estimates of labour force (ILO) in the State. This survey replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) from Q3 2017. The most recent figures available are for Q4 2017.

The LFS does not record whether a job is newly created. Instead the LFS records the overall stock of persons employed at given points in time. The annual changes which are calculated using these stock figures depend both on the number of jobs lost and jobs created over the period in question.

The data prior to Q3 2017 includes adjustments to the historic QNHS data series to take account of revisions to population estimates arising from the 2016 Census of Population. In ad-

dition, adjustments have been made to this historic data to enable comparability with the new LFS for key headline indicators – ILO employment status, NACE Rev2 Industrial classification, age and gender.

However as a result of changes to the questionnaire, the interview mode, the introduction of a new sample, data processing changes and other methodological enhancements there are changes in the levels of some series outside of these key indicators from Q3 2017 onwards. As a consequence, the series before and after the introduction of the new survey may not be directly comparable and this should be noted when examining annual and quarterly changes.

The table below shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment in Q4 2015 - 2017 and the annual change in the years to Q4 2016 and Q4 2017.

Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) Q4 2015 - 2017 and annual changes to Q4 2016 and Q4 2017

‘000

	Q4 15	Q4 16	Q4 17
In employment	2,085.0	2,164.2	2,231.0
Annual change to Q4 2016 and Q4 2017	n/a	79.2	66.8

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland.

n/a - Not applicable.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: q4=Oct-Dec.

Note: A new Labour Force Survey (LFS) replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) in Q3 2017 and, as a result, care should be taken when comparing data from before and after this period. Please see background notes of the LFS release for additional information.

Bioenergy Strategy

66. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the role of his Department in the preparation of the National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy. [16666/18]

The Taoiseach: The Government recognises the contribution that the bioeconomy can make in promoting the more efficient use of renewable resources and supporting sustainable economic development and employment in rural Ireland.

In order to fully realise this potential, an Interdepartmental Group, bringing together the departments involved in the bioeconomy and chaired by my Department, was established in November 2016.

The Interdepartmental Group carried out a detailed scoping exercise to identify current and potential activities in the area, as well as stakeholder workshops and a public consultation.

This analysis and stakeholder consultation informed the National Policy Statement on the

18 April 2018

Bioeconomy which was approved by Government and published on 12 March.

This National Policy Statement sets out a vision, common principles, strategic objectives, and a framework for implementation to deliver on this vision for the bioeconomy in Ireland.

An Implementation Group, jointly chaired by D/AFM and D/CCAIE, has been established to progress the key actions identified in this Statement and the Group is to report back to Government by end 2018.

The Policy Statement and the relevant accompanying documentation are available on my Department's website, *www.taoiseach.gov.ie*.

Strategic Communications Unit

67. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach his views on the report on matters relating to the Strategic Communications Unit and Project Ireland 2040 that was published on 27 March 2018 and its conclusions. [16896/18]

The Taoiseach: On 1st March last, I requested that the Secretary General of my Department conduct a review into the operations of the SCU. The report from this review was accepted by Government on 27th March last and published on the same date. This is now being implemented.

In accordance with the report, there will be a managed reversion to the more traditional GIS model, with a transition period until July 2018.

Strategic Communications Unit

68. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on matters relating to the Strategic Communications Unit and Project Ireland 2040 which outlines that the estimated cost of the media spend on the campaign was estimated to be €1,427,608 excluding VAT; if there are a number of planned media arrangements on hold; if these are still on hold; his plans to lift the hold on spending additional funds; and the amount outstanding. [16897/18]

69. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the alternative campaigns' funds that were on hold from the media campaign on Project Ireland 2040 as outlined in the report of 26 March 2018 on the Strategic Communications Unit. [16898/18]

70. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if he has received communication from a company (details supplied) regarding the discrepancy referred to on page ten of the report in relation to the Strategic Communications Unit. [16899/18]

71. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if the GIS has been re-established in his Department. [16902/18]

72. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach his plans to develop and deliver major cross Government communications campaigns; and the way in which they will be coordinated. [16903/18]

73. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach when he will publish the research that was undertaken by the Strategic Communications Unit and his Department. [16904/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 68 to 73, inclusive, together.

A number of the planned media arrangements for Project Ireland 2040 had been paused pending the outcome of the review into the operation of the Strategic Communications Unit (SCU) by the Secretary General of my Department. This included additional media content partnership arrangements and national and regional radio campaigns. As articulated in the Secretary General's report, where expenditure has been committed but not yet spent by the SCU (e.g. pre booked local radio slots), it will be redirected to other campaigns, such as Healthy Ireland or Brexit preparation.

The newly structured Government Information Service (GIS) will continue to have a coordinating and supporting role for national, cross-Government communications, as has always been the case, but such campaigns will be led and funded by the relevant line Department - in that context, the communication of Project Ireland 2040 will be the responsibility of the new Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board which will be led by the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Housing, Planning and Local Government.

As the Deputy will be aware, the matter in relation to Mediaforce was raised at the Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on the 29th of March last. At that point it was confirmed that communication had been received from the company involved following completion of and submission of the Report to Government on the 27th of March. Correspondence from the company provided after that date included clarification in respect of the matters raised by the Report. It was indicated to the Select Committee that the response would be made available to it when it had been considered by the Department.

The correspondence clarifies the matter in respect of two separate emails but makes no material difference to the Report provided by the Secretary General or to the Government's decisions in respect of this matter. I intend to provide the documentation to the Select Committee and publish it in the coming days.

The Research referred to has not yet commenced. It is intended to run a Citizen survey to assess public awareness and understanding of Government services. The opposition parties will be given an opportunity to review the proposed material for the survey prior to it being issued. Once the survey has been run and results collected and analysed, it is intended to publish it.

On 1st March last, I requested that the Secretary General of my Department conduct a review into the operations of the SCU. The report from this review was accepted by Government on 27th March last and published on the same date. This is now being implemented.

In accordance with the report, there will be a managed reversion to the more traditional GIS model, with a transition period until July 2018.

Army Barracks

74. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of civilian positions which have become vacant in 2017 at Custume Barracks, Athlone; if these positions will be filled; if so, the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16987/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Two civilian posts became vacant at Custume Barracks, Athlone in 2017. Following the lifting of the embargo on recruitment to the Public Service, the military authorities have been identifying posts to be filled at various locations throughout the country on a prioritised basis. Competitions to fill posts identified by the military authorities are initiated following assessment of the business

requirement for the posts. Posts in Custume Barracks, Athlone, as is the case with posts at other military installations, are currently the subject of this ongoing assessment process.

Foreign Conflicts

75. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the ongoing violence in the Central African Republic; the steps that have been taken to address this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16876/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is deeply concerned by the ongoing reports of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR). CAR is the world's third most fragile state, with very significant humanitarian needs. The United Nations estimates that 2.5 million people - more than half the population - require humanitarian assistance, 1.1 million people are moderately or severely food insecure. More than 690,000 people are internally displaced, and over 546,000 people are seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. In line with our long standing support to neglected and forgotten crises, Ireland has consistently contributed to the humanitarian response in CAR and has provided over €25 million in humanitarian assistance since 2012, including over €5.2m in 2017.

Ireland also provides support to underfunded and forgotten crises through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), a large UN fund that is used for immediate humanitarian response at the onset of emergencies, in rapidly deteriorating situations, and in protracted crises that fail to attract sufficient resources. Ireland is the eighth largest donor to the CERF.

Ireland allocates an additional €1 million per year to Concern for their work in CAR. Concern is one of the few organisations still present in these communities offering multi-sectoral support to internally displaced people, returnees and vulnerable people.

Ireland supports the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) which has been operational since 2014. Ireland also supports the EU Military Training Mission (EUTM) CAR to implement security sector reform with the Central African Armed Forces (FACA). The goal is to support the build-up of a modernised, effective, ethnically balanced and civilian controlled FACA.

In March this year, Ireland's representative to the Political and Security Committee of the European Union (EU PSC), Ambassador Noel White, travelled with other EU PSC Ambassadors for a joint field visit to CAR with the Ambassadors' Peace and Security Council of the African Union (PSC AU). The EU and AU Ambassadors conveyed common messages on continued engagement and support to the efforts for reconciliation, state building, justice and peace and solidarity with the people of CAR. The mission reconfirmed the need for close EU-AU-UN cooperation in the country.

The EU and AU Ambassadors met with the President and the cabinet of ministers of CAR; they also met with the National Assembly, with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in CAR, as well as with the Force Commander of the UN mission - MINUSCA. In addition, they also met with the panel of facilitators of the African Union's initiative for peace and reconciliation in CAR and had an informal meeting with representatives of civil society.

Ireland will continue to monitor the situation and will ensure, with our EU and multilateral partners, to maintain the focus on preventing violence and addressing the humanitarian crisis.

Overseas Development Aid

76. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to develop a roadmap to reach the 0.7% ODA/GNI target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16877/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas development cooperation programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. For 2018, we have allocated just over €707 million for Official Development Assistance (ODA), representing a significant investment on behalf of the Irish tax payer and a clear demonstration of our continued strong commitment to Ireland's aid programme. 2018 is also the third consecutive year we have increased allocations to the aid budget. Based on estimates in Budget 2018, it is anticipated this level of allocation will see ODA amount to approximately 0.3% of GNI in 2018.

The current Programme for Government sets out our ambition to meet the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) to ODA, as resources permit. Our goal is to reach the target by 2030, within the timeframe for delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Progress towards the 0.7% target will need to be made through sustained, managed increments, building on Ireland's recognised role as a reliable and effective partner in combating global poverty and hunger, and providing humanitarian assistance to those most in need. In order to prepare for the managed progression towards the UN target, a new White Paper on Irish overseas development assistance will be produced and published later this year. Reaching the 0.7% target will involve significant increases to the ODA budget over the next decade and more. These increases will focus on delivering real and sustainable results, be managed prudentially and effectively, and will require careful planning and consultation across a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including Government Departments, Irish Development NGOs and the public. The White Paper process will give direction in this regard, as will the recent report by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence on Irish Aid.

The table sets out an indicative stepped scenario for meeting the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2030, with interim targets of 0.4% in 2022, 0.5% in 2026 and 0.6% in 2028 and delivering on the UN Target by 2030.

Year	Total ODA - In € millions	ODA as a % of Projected GNI
2018	707.10	0.30%
2022	1,109.29	0.40%
2026	1,560.65	0.50%
2028	1,986.83	0.60%
2030	2,459.13	0.70%

Ministerial Meetings

77. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting with the Foreign Minister of Germany; his plans to improve German-Irish relations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16878/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I was delighted to welcome Heiko Maas, the new German Minister for Foreign Affairs to Dublin on 12 April, less than a month after his appointment as foreign minister. We had a warm and constructive meeting. Germany is a hugely influential EU member state. It is Ireland's fourth

largest goods trading partner and our third most important tourism market. Having excellent working relations with Germany is a priority for us. Germany has been a consistent supporter of Ireland in the Brexit negotiations, something we greatly appreciate. Minister Maas and I discussed Brexit at some length and we had a very useful exchange on a number of international issues, including the Middle East Peace Process and EU relations with Africa, priority areas for both our countries.

To coincide with the visit I published a Comprehensive Review of our bilateral relations with Germany. I commissioned the review last year. The review process included our Embassy in Berlin, a number of Government Departments and State agencies, as well as the German authorities themselves, and the report, “Ireland in Germany: A Wider and Deeper Footprint” , makes 23 recommendations, including a proposal to open a new Consulate next year in Frankfurt.

The overarching message of the review is that notwithstanding the strength of our bilateral relationship, there is still scope to develop it further. I have, therefore, asked officials to start work immediately on the implementation of the recommendations.

Minister Maas and I agreed that formal consultations at State Secretary and Secretary General level should be held on a regular basis. While highly desirable in themselves, I see this formalised engagement as part of a wider, ongoing process of strengthening existing alliances in the European Union and building new ones.

Brexit Issues

78. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to establish new formal structures for dialogue between the UK and Ireland in view of the impact that Brexit will have; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16879/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): While the UK’s decision to leave the EU has serious implications for Ireland, we maintain a strong and constructive bilateral relationship with the UK. We are fully committed to developing and enhancing this relationship over the coming years. Additionally, we will work to secure the closest possible positive relationship between the UK and the European Union. There are already a number of channels for ongoing dialogue and cooperation between the Irish and British Governments, which will continue after the UK leaves the European Union. In this regard, the Good Friday Agreement provides for important institutional cooperation on an east-west basis through the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference (BIIGC) and the British Irish Council (BIC). In addition, the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) brings together elected representatives from the Oireachtas, Westminster, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Scottish and Welsh devolved assemblies. Additionally, in 2012, a process was established involving summits between the Taoiseach and the UK Prime Minister, supported by a Joint Work Programme managed at official level by the heads of all government departments in both London and Dublin.

These structures have shown their value and will continue to evolve in response to the changing circumstances. In addition, we will also explore other avenues to maintain the “habit of cooperation” that currently exists where Ministers regularly meet their counterparts and work together in Brussels. This deeper working relationship should allow for cooperation across a broad range of issues of shared interest.

The Embassy of Ireland in London remains our largest bilateral Embassy globally, and, in

2017, two additional diplomatic officers have been assigned to the Embassy. The Consulate General in Edinburgh was also assigned an additional diplomat in 2015. ‘Team Ireland’ also enjoys a significant footprint in Britain with our trade, tourism, and investment agencies continuing to make a positive impact.

Banking Sector

79. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter regarding a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17004/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): AIB has provided me with the following response:

“ One of AIB’s core objectives in restructuring customers in financial difficulty has been keeping viable businesses operating and supporting associated employment. Once a customer is meeting its commitments under a restructure agreement including fully cooperating with the Bank, assessment of advancing additional money would be subject to the Bank’s credit approval process and commercial terms. As is the case with all of our customers, AIB would be happy to engage directly with any customer in this regard.”

Garda Stations

80. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Garda stations in the Donegal division that underwent refurbishments in 2017 and to date in 2018; and the works carried out at each station. [16867/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I can confirm that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has managed and progressed works to the value of €775,276 on maintenance and refurbishment of Garda Stations in the Donegal Divisional area in 2017 and 2018 to date. The table lists the Garda Stations concerned together with a brief description of works.

Building	Description
Buncrana GS	Refurbishment of Cells
Milford GS	Refurbishment of Cells (currently on site)
Ballyshannon GS	Refurbishment of Cells
Bunbeg GS	Exterior Painting
Convoy GS	Interior & Exterior Painting
Cresslough GS	Interior & Exterior Painting
Moville GS	Interior & Exterior Painting
Newtowncunningham GS	Interior & Exterior Painting
Mountcharles GS	Drainage maintenance
Carrick GS	Fencing works
Dunfanaghy GS	New public counter
Letterkenny GS	New toilet in gym lobby
Carndonagh GS	Refit of kitchen
Letterkenny GS	Works to Letterkenny IT to provide Garda continuous professional development facilities

Building	Description
Ballyshannon GS	Works to traffic office
Falcarragh GS	Conversion of a room to a file store & provision of a security screen in public office
Letterkenny GS	Provision of 4 No. storage facilities with shelving

In addition, OPW is progressing a project to deliver a full upgrade and refurbishment of the Garda Station in Donegal Town. This project is currently at tender stage.

Freedom of Information Legislation

81. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to include the Dublin Airport Authority, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus under the freedom of information legislation in view of the fact Irish Rail is included under the legislation. [16869/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Freedom of Information Act 2014 provides a very broad definition of public bodies at Section 6(1) and further provides that all new public bodies comprehended by this definition will automatically come under freedom of information (FOI) legislation, unless specifically exempted by order. This reversed the system under previous legislation whereby new bodies would have to be brought into the scope of the legislation by order. The 2014 Act extended the remit of the legislation, bringing the overall total to some 600 bodies comprehended by the Act.

Government policy has been that commercial state bodies should not, in general, be subject to Freedom of Information requirements, in view of their commercial role, mandate and responsibilities. There is a serious concern that an uneven competitive playing field would be created in circumstances that commercial state bodies operating in a competitive market were subject to Freedom of Information but their privately-owned market competitors were not. This could lead to a situation where FOI requests could be used to access information to disadvantage and erode the competitive position of the commercial State Body in the marketplace. Such a move would be expected to have an adverse impact on the commercial position of the State Body in question, which would not be in the public interest or consistent with the need to safeguard the State's economic and financial interests.

However, during the progression of the FOI Bill 2014 through the Oireachtas the Government decided that certain State Companies which operate in a monopoly market should be no longer exempt from Freedom of information. The relevant State Companies which were subsequently comprehended by the Freedom of Information Act 2014 were:

- Irish Rail,
- ESB Networks,
- Gas Networks Ireland,
- EirGrid.

Schools Building Projects Status

82. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date towards securing a permanent location for a school (details supplied); the expected timeframe for this to be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16860/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a site to accommodate a permanent school building for the school to which he refers has been acquired.

Officials from my Department will be in contact with the school shortly regarding the progression of the project.

School Accommodation

83. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) has not received confirmation that it will have the necessary space to hold all new students for the coming school term; the contingency plans in place if this occurs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16861/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Patron has advised my Department that the school in question has recently corresponded with parents offering junior infant enrolment places in September 2018. I understand that the Patron has also provided update directly to the Deputy during a meeting last week.

Schools Site Acquisitions

84. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a short review of the process through which the land for the new site of a school (details supplied) was selected will be conducted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16862/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The site for the school to which the Deputy refers was purchased by my Department in accordance with its standard site acquisition procedures with a view to achieving optimum value for money while ensuring the provision of suitable accommodation.

The Department has the support of the patron and management of the school in respect of the building project being provided on the site. There are no grounds for reviewing the site acquisition process and no proposals to do so at this time.

Schools Building Contractors

85. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the potential impact of the examinership of a company (details supplied) for schools impacted by the collapse of a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16863/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The schools referred to by the Deputy form part of Schools Bundle 5, the PPP project which has been impacted by the liquidation of Carillion Construction Ltd and Carillion AMBS Ltd.

Sammon Contracting Ireland Ltd (SCIL) was the sub-contractor to Carillion Construction Ltd on the Schools Bundle 5 PPP Project. This encompasses five school buildings and one fur-

ther education college, across four sites in Bray, Wexford, Carlow and Kells.

As Carillion Construction Ltd is now in liquidation, that contract has been terminated and a retendering process for completion of the school buildings is being undertaken by infrastructure fund manager DIF on behalf of the PPP Company.

As the Deputy will be aware, an examiner has been appointed to Sammon Contracting Group, including SCIL. The tender evaluation process is currently being conducted by DIF and any implications arising from the examinership will need to be considered as part of this process.

Management representatives of the relevant schools continue to be kept informed of developments by my Department.

Sammon Contracting Ireland Ltd is also currently delivering three large scale non-PPP school building projects. A fourth project, which was ready for occupation in September 2017, requires completion of external works. The Department is directly engaging with the examiner in relation to these projects.

Education Grants

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if the ancillary grant rate increased by €5 per pupil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16870/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The estimated full year cost of increasing the rate of ancillary grant by €5 per pupil in primary schools is circa €2.8m.

The ancillary grant at primary level is €163 per pupil. The ancillary grant was increased by €6 in 2016, €5 in 2017 and €5 in 2018, in order to enable primary schools to implement the arbitration salary increase for grant funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

Internet Safety

87. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process by which his Department will be developing and contributing draft actions to be considered as part of the action plan on Internet safety to be published in June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16889/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government will develop an Action Plan on Internet safety and my Department will work with the other Government Departments with responsibility in the area to develop those actions to be included in the new Action Plan.

The recommendations from the recent Joint Oireachtas Committee Report on Cyber Security for Children and Young Adults are under consideration, and will underpin and inform the development of the draft actions in the new Action Plan on Internet safety.

My Department promotes internet safety in a number of ways including the prescription of school curriculum, provision of teacher professional development programmes, development of specialist resources for teachers and schools and provision of advice and information.

The PDST (Technology in Education) is a dedicated team established and funded by the Department to advise and support schools in the area of digital technologies, including issues of internet safety. The PDST-TiE also oversee Webwise.ie. which is a major part of the Safer Internet Ireland Project coordinated by the Office for Internet Safety. Webwise.ie has responsibility for national initiatives aimed at the promotion of the safer use of electronic media and the protection of the vulnerable, particularly children, against the downsides of the internet.

The PDST also provide information, advice, and tools to parents to support their engagement in their children's online lives and with the help of the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel they develop youth oriented awareness raising resources and campaigns that address topics such as social networking, sexting, cyber bullying.

Under the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 one of the key objectives is to promote responsible and ethical use of the internet and related technologies and to continue to undertake awareness-raising actions and programmes that promote responsible and ethical use of the internet.

School Staff

88. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to appoint an administrative principal to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16892/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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 criteria for the appointment of an administrative principal to a school, which are enrolment related, are set out in Appendix B of Circular, 0010/2018. The school referred to by the Deputy does not meet this criteria. There is no scope to deviate from these arrangements.

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

School Transport

89. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a Bus Éireann school bus service (details supplied) in County Kerry will be maintained in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16912/18]

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

Currently over 116,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Bus Éireann is obliged to tender all works, goods and services in line with the European Directives on public procurement, which includes school transport services performed by con-

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tractors under the School Transport Scheme.

In this regard, Bus Éireann has advised that the school transport service referred to by the Deputy is currently out to tender.

School Staff

90. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional teachers will be allocated to a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that it had the required number of students in September 2017 in accordance with the staffing schedule. [16915/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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. Budget 2018 announced a one point improvement to the primary staffing schedule, which reduced the average pupil teacher ratio to 26:1. The improved staffing schedule has been implemented for the 2018/19 school year and is set out in Circular 0010/2018, available on the Department of Education website.

In establishing their staffing for the 2018/19 school year, schools may appoint the number of teachers allowed for on the staffing schedule using the school enrolment of 30th September 2017. Any teachers appointed from the staffing schedule must be engaged in teaching duties within the school. Schools are subject to the published redeployment arrangements in filling teaching vacancies.

Foirne Scoile

91. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an gcuirfidh sé múinteoirí breise ar fáil do scoil (sonraí tugtha) an bhliain seo chugainn toisc go raibh go leor leanaí ar an rolla mí Mheán Fómhair seo caite. [16916/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is í an phríomh-shlat tomhais lena gcinntear leibhéal na n-acmhainní foirne a chuirtear ar fáil ag leibhéal scoile aonair ná an sceideal foirne don scoilbhliain ábhartha agus rollú na ndaltaí ar an 30 Meán Fómhair roimhe sin. Le buiséad 2018 fógraíodh go ndéanfaí feabhas pointe amháin ar an sceideal foirne bunscoile, rud a laghdaigh an meánchóimheas múinteoir dalta go 26:1. Cuireadh an sceideal foirne feabhsaithe i bhfeidhm don scoilbhliain 2018/19 agus tá sé leagtha amach i gCiorclán 0010/2018, atá ar fáil ar láithreán gréasáin na Roinne Oideachais.

Féadfaidh scoileanna líon na múinteoirí a cheadaítear a cheapadh ar an sceideal foirne ag baint úsáide as rollú na scoile ar an 30 Meán Fómhair 2017 d'fhonn a gcuid foirne don scoilbhliain 2018/19 a dhéanamh amach. Ní mór do mhúinteoirí a cheapfar ón sceideal foirne a bheith ag gabháil do dhualgais teagaisc laistigh den scoil. Tá scoileanna faoi réir na socrúithe athimlonnaithe foilsithe chun folúntais mhúinteoireachta a líonadh.

English translation:

To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide additional teachers to this school (details supplied) next year as there was a sufficient number of children on the roll last September.

Answer:

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. Budget 2018 announced a one point improvement to the primary staffing schedule, which reduced the average pupil teacher ratio to 26:1. The improved staffing schedule has been implemented for the 2018/19 school year and is set out in Circular 0010/2018, available on the Department of Education website.

In establishing their staffing for the 2018/19 school year, schools may appoint the number of teachers allowed for on the staffing schedule using the school enrolment of 30th September 2017. Any teachers appointed from the staffing schedule must be engaged in teaching duties within the school. Schools are subject to the published redeployment arrangements in filling teaching vacancies.

DEIS Status

92. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a consultation process has been concluded with a school (details supplied); and if the DEIS status of this school will be adjusted as a result. [16917/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has not been engaged in a consultation process with individual schools including the school referred to by the Deputy.

The identification of schools for receipt of additional resources under the DEIS programme is informed by a scientific data based model which assesses levels of disadvantage in individual schools based on the pupil cohort of the school. It is important to note that any adjustment to the DEIS status of a school, including the school referred to by the Deputy, will be based on the DEIS Identification process.

As the Deputy may be aware, an update of the DEIS Identification process is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on CSO Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. It is envisaged that this process will be completed in the coming weeks.

Should this exercise reveal that any school, including the school referred to by the Deputy, which did not qualify for DEIS in 2017 now meets the criteria, applicable to schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage based on the updated information, then additional schools may be included, subject to available resources.

School Accommodation Provision

93. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for works by a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16926/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for additional accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

Higher Education Authority

94. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he last met and will next meet the CEO of the Higher Education Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16961/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I meet the CEO of the HEA on an ongoing basis at various events and meetings. The most recent meeting took place at the National Skills Council, which I chair and of which the CEO is a member, on 16 April 2018.

The Minister of State for Higher Education in my Department is next due to meet with the Chief Executive Officer of the Higher Education Authority on Thursday 19 April.

Schools Data

95. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the primary and post primary school population nationally for the school years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16962/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the academic year 2015-16 there were 553,380 pupils in primary schools. There were 345,550 pupils enrolled in post-primary schools. Post-Leaving Certificate enrolments were 32,453.

In 2016-17, there were 558,314 primary pupils and 352,257 in post-primary schools, and 31,969 in PLC.

Multidenominational Schools

96. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the definition of a multid denominational ethos used by his Department; the steps he is taking to ensure the ethos of all multid denominational schools is reflective of the school community as a whole and not dominated by the majority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16967/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the patron body of a school which determines the ethos or characteristic spirit of the school, in accordance with Section 15 of the Education Act 1998, which provides that a board of management shall uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school. The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 seeks to introduce a new requirement for a school to set out the characteristic spirit and general objectives of the school in their admission policy.

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

The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary School Sector recognised that there are factors affecting diversity in all primary schools. A follow-up paper to the Forum Report entitled Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future

Directions was published in 2014. The paper outlines good practice and options for promoting diversity in all schools regardless of whether or not the school has a highly diverse student population. This was informed by a public consultation held in 2013 that asked parents, in particular, to submit their views on how primary schools can make all children feel included and involved. This included issues such as how best to accommodate students of various belief systems and traditions and how schools have developed and implemented policies on marking religious celebrations and the display of religious symbols in the school.

The paper is not prescriptive on how schools should address issues of diversity and inclusivity, but instead it encourages school authorities to engage in consultation with stakeholders and to review their policies and practices on an ongoing basis to ensure that they remain suitable for the school population that they serve. It recognises that each school should arrive at solutions that suit its own particular context. It also notes that this is an evolving situation and that practices may evolve over time as circumstances change. The paper expressly welcomes feedback and views on this matter.

The paper also outlines the results of the public consultation and encourages school authorities to take time to consider their policies and practices and to review whether they are taking the steps necessary to welcome all pupils and make them feel included.

Schools Building Projects Status

97. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a proposed building project for a school (details supplied); when this project will proceed to construction stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17000/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

In this regard, the proposed development is at project brief stage. The next step involves the commencement of the architectural planning process and my Department will be in further contact with the school in this context.

Interdepartmental Working Groups

98. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if officials in his Department are on the interdepartmental group set up to examine third level education funding. [16805/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The programme for Government provided that the Cassells report would be referred to the Oireachtas Education Committee, who would review its recommendations and outline a proposed funding plan for this sector, as part of the process for building political consensus around the most appropriate means of ensuring a sustainable funding model for the future.

While I have awaited the recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee in relation to a long term funding model, we have developed an employer exchequer funding mechanism and increased public funding into the sector, as well as a series of other reforms. In total, the government is investing €100m more into the higher education sector than before the publication of the Cassells report. We are also investing €200m in a PPP programme for the IOT sector and

have set out an ambitious 10 year €2.2bn capital programme for the higher and further education sector.

Following publication of the Cassells report, my Department established an inter-departmental working group on future funding to consider issues relevant to the development of a long term sustainable funding model for higher education.

The Group is made up of representative from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Department of Finance, Department of Business, Enterprise, and Innovation, the Higher Education Authority, Solas and my Department. Officials in my Department also provide secretarial support to the Group.

I received a request from the Oireachtas Education Committee in January 2018, 18 months after the publication of the Cassells report, requesting that my Department carry out a comprehensive economic evaluation of each of the recommendations put forward in the Cassells report.

My Department will now undertake an economic examination of each of the proposed policy options that are presented in the Cassells report to assist the Committee in its consideration of this matter. In carrying out this economic examination, my Department will also consider:

- How the additional funding which has been called for by the Expert Group can positively impact on learners

- What is the appropriate mix of apprenticeship programmes and upskilling programmes for those in work and how that impacts on demand and funding models

- How responsiveness to skills gaps can best be secured.

Naturalisation Applications

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16866/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the applications for a certificate of naturalisation from the persons referred to by the Deputy, is ongoing. On completion of the necessary processing the applications will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

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.

Departmental Staff Data

100. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of each political appointment to his Department since he was appointed; the pay grade, experience and qualification of each person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16875/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ms. Sarah Kavanagh is a Special Advisor in my Office. She holds a BA degree in History and Politics, an MA degree in Politics, an MA in Political Communication, a Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Studies and a Barrister at Law Degree. Ms. Kavanagh worked in the Houses of the Oireachtas as a Parliamentary Assistant and Senior Policy Officer for nine years and as a Special Advisor in three Government Departments over the last four years.

Mr. Tom Fabozzi served as Special Advisor from my appointment as Minister for Justice and Equality until earlier this month. Ms. Caroline Murphy is replacing Mr. Fabozzi and the formal process associated with the appointment is currently underway. Ms. Murphy has over 30 years' experience in the fields of communications and media having worked with RTÉ in both TV and radio. In addition, she is qualified as an Organisational Psychologist.

Both advisors are remunerated on the Principal Officer standard pay scale (PPC).

Having regard to the significant legislative programme that I am responsible for, Robert Bourke BL is currently in the process of being appointed to the position of Legal Advisor on similar remuneration terms. Mr. Bourke has over ten years' experience as a practising barrister and worked for nine months as a Legal Researcher for the Company Law Review Group. He holds a BA degree in Business, Politics and French, a Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Studies and a Barrister at Law Degree.

Internet Safety

101. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the process by which his Department will be developing and contributing draft actions to be considered as part of the action plan on Internet safety to be published in June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16891/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Department of Justice and Equality is primarily responsible for the criminal law aspects of online safety i.e. preparation and enforcement of the criminal law in relation to online content and behaviour that is illegal.

In considering actions for inclusion in the action plan, the Department is considering the feedback from the Open Policy Debate hosted by my colleague Minister Naughten last month together with the recent report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on 'Cyber Security for Children and Young Adults'. That report contains 18 recommendations, five of which fall within the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality. Four of these recommendations are concerned with changes to the criminal law while the fifth one relates to

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the digital age of consent provisions of the Data Protection Bill which is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

All relevant Government Departments with responsibility in this area are working together to develop a whole of Government approach to the Action Plan, and this work is being taken forward under the auspices of Cabinet Committee B.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

102. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of grant applications received under the community based CCTV scheme since its launch in 2017; the number of applications approved; the value of those allocations; the obstacles encountered in the rollout which may militate against take-up of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16927/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, my Department has launched a Community-based CCTV grant-aid scheme to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas.

There has been an increasing level of enquiries relating to the scheme. Some 11 applications have been received to date and I understand that a number of other applications are currently being readied for submission.

4 applications under the scheme have been approved to date, with approved funding totalling almost €120,000. A further 4 applications are under active consideration. The remaining 3 applications received to date have been returned to the applicants concerned, to enable them to provide the information necessary to qualify for grant-aid.

Under the scheme, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000. Successful applicants receive an up-front payment of 50% of approved funding upon approval of the grant, with the balance to be paid when the CCTV system is fully operational.

It is worth pointing out that the scheme is modelled closely on the previous grant-aid scheme operated by Pobal on behalf of my Department between 2005 and 2013, under which some 45 Community-based CCTV systems were established operating in a mix of urban and rural environments.

To make take-up of the scheme as easy as possible, both the application process and documentation were updated and streamlined to make them more user-friendly. Support and guidance is also available to interested groups from my Department.

Further, and again in the interests of avoiding any obstacles, in developing the documentation, my Department consulted extensively with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner along with the Office of the Attorney General, An Garda Síochána, Pobal and the Local Government Management Association.

Full details of the grant aid package including guidelines, application forms, code of practice and other relevant documentation are all available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie.

I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders and I would

encourage interested groups to avail of the scheme.

Garda Equipment

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding will be provided for the updating of the equipment and resources available to Garda public order units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16959/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles and resources are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I understand that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

Regarding the current position and in relation to Garda personnel, I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are Gardai with specialist training in public order policing in each Division who are available to be called upon, when required, to police events involving an increased risk of a public order incident occurring, for example protests or large-scale public events. As such, there are no Gardai assigned to public order units on a full time basis. The number called upon in any given case is dependent on the nature of the event.

As of 16 April 2018, 12 public order vans are available to An Garda Síochána.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46million for investment in the Garda Fleet to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet and this is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total, in the period 2013 to end of 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that a review of the equipment and resources available to the Garda Public Order Units is currently being carried out under the auspices of the Assistant Commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Region. I am further informed that following completion of this review, it is intended that any deficiencies identified will be addressed within the budget available to An Garda Síochána.

Crime Prevention Officers

104. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the post of crime prevention officer for the Dublin North Garda Division will be filled in view of the fact that this post has been vacant since 31 December 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16960/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner 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.

I am informed by the Commissioner that crime prevention is a core function of An Garda Síochána and that all Gardaí play an active role in crime prevention and reduction. In addition there are dedicated Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) within each Garda Division. These CPOs are trained to encourage, promote and advise on crime prevention to both the private and business community. These specially trained officers are skilled at identifying risk factors and advise on what mitigating action can be taken to reduce opportunities to commit crime.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that the Divisional CPO for Dublin North retired last December and pending the holding of a competition to fill this position, the Divisional CPO for the DMR West Division is also covering the DMR North, delivering any crime prevention advice necessary for residents and businesses in the Division. I am advised that the timing of a competition to fill the position will be considered by the Divisional Officer as resources become available following the completion of the ongoing competition for promotion to the rank of sergeant within An Garda Síochána.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

105. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the smaller projects that are serviced by independent youth services will be secured in view of the changes proposed to the Garda Youth Diversion Projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17016/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy is aware, my Department is obliged to carry out a call for proposals process during 2018 in relation to the provision of Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) services, to fully comply with requirements related to the co-funding of projects by the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

To ensure State-wide coverage of GYDP services for young people, (which does not exist at present), the intention is that, in general, service provision will be aligned with Garda Divisions or other appropriate local areas with a distinct community identity as may be agreed during a wide ranging consultation process which is currently ongoing. Issues of community identity and numbers of potential participants on GYDPs in the area will be key considerations here.

The provision of GYDP services in all parts of the State has obvious advantages, particularly in terms of providing services for significant numbers of young people who cannot currently access them. In this regard, an independent evaluation report of the operation of an integrated approach to delivery of GYDP services within County Kerry, commissioned by my Department is expected to be finalised shortly. This report will help with the further development GYDP services in the context of the Call for Proposals.

GYDPs deliver valuable services for young people who have committed a crime or may be at risk of offending as well as providing important support for An Garda Síochána at local level. I can assure the Deputy that in the context of the Call for Proposals my Department is committed to ensuring continuity of service for participants on GYDPs and maintain a community driven approach to their operation, as well as minimising any disruption for workers and service providers. In this regard, and in line with the overall objective of providing GYDP services to all children and young persons who require them, I am advised that the Call for Proposals will require applicants to provide for continuity of GYDP services for young people currently participating in the service. Furthermore, the Call for Proposals process will facilitate existing service providers forming consortiums, which could apply to provide services under the new comprehensive approach that is being developed.

GYDPs provide an effective and essential support to the operation of the statutory Garda Diversion Programme by An Garda Síochána. The principal focus of GYDPs is on young people who receive a Garda caution under the Diversion Programme for involvement in criminal or anti-social behaviour and are referred to a local GYDP (primary referrals). GYDPs also accommodate a certain proportion of young people who are considered to be at risk of involvement in offending or anti-social behaviour (secondary referrals).

In relation to secondary referrals, it has to be considered if, in principle, it is appropriate to refer a child to a Garda project where no criminal act has been identified. For some, a better option might be referral to available mainstream youth services that could appropriately support them. That being said, it is accepted that referrals to GYDPs must take account of local needs and issues in relation to access and availability of mainstream youth services. Following the Call for Proposals process, GYDP services will still accommodate secondary referrals and the proportion of these may vary from area to area depending on identified local needs.

My Department is very much aware of the range of concerns expressed in relation to the Call for Proposals process. I can assure the Deputy that careful consideration is being given to all issues raised by stakeholders involved in GYDPs, including those of independent service providers, as part of the extensive consultation process which is currently ongoing. This process includes arrangements for an extensive series of meetings with community based organisations and project workers which will facilitate closer communication and exchange of information in relation to these matters. In addition, the consultations will include arrangements to hear the views of young people, including participants or former participants on GYDPs.

I can assure the Deputy that the new approach to GYDP provision which is being developed in preparation for the Call for Proposals will not reduce the level of service that already exists, or the importance of community involvement in its delivery. On the contrary, the intention is to build on, update and improve a very valuable service so that it is available to every child or young person in the country who requires it. This improvement to the service will have benefits for significant numbers of young people in the State who cannot currently access GYDP services. While certain aspects of the new service delivery approach have been determined, work is ongoing to complete the full details to be included in the Call for Proposals, which is expected to issue in the second quarter of this year. I am convinced that community ownership and participation of the projects is an essential dimension that must be preserved and strengthened in the working out of this process.

Local Enterprise Offices Data

106. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs supported by the local enterprise office in Galway city and county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16188/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Galway City & County is the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and 'soft' supports in the form of training and mentoring to anyone wishing to start or grow a business.

LEO Galway provides a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant state supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland.

Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs provide financial assistance to microenter-

prises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities.

In that regard in 2017 the LEO Galway City & County supported 254 clients with 1,039 total jobs which was a gross increase of 192 jobs on 2016.

Brexit Supports

107. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the work that has been done by her Department to date in relation to combatting trade deficits which may be experienced by suppliers and companies in counties Longford and Westmeath and the midlands post-Brexit; the number of staff that have been working on this issue across agencies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14015/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the primary providers of supports to assist enterprises within the indigenous sector that are facing challenges arising from Brexit. They are working vigorously to enable companies to consolidate market share within the UK and also to become more resilient by broadening their sales to other international markets.

My Department provided additional resources in 2017 to enable EI and the LEOs to ramp up supports in light of Brexit to drive improvements in:

- productivity,
- competitiveness,
- innovation, and
- management capability and leadership skills.

Enterprise Ireland's funding for 2017 included an additional €1.7 million to assist in the recruitment of 39 Brexit specific posts. A further €1.3m was provided in budget 2018 to enable EI to recruit approximately 18 additional staff this year.

As part of EI's response to Brexit, the agency launched several initiatives including:

- **Brexit Scorecard:** This interactive online platform can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars. Based on answers supplied by the user, the Scorecard generates an immediate report which contains suggested actions and resources, and information on events for companies to attend, to prepare for Brexit.

- **Be Prepared Grant:** This grant offers SMEs a grant of up to €5,000 to assist them in preparing an action plan for economic shocks such as Brexit. The grant can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and travel expenses associated with researching the direction of their action plan.

- **Brexit Advisory Clinics:** Enterprise Ireland held four Brexit Advisory Clinics over the past few months in Portlaoise, Mayo, Cavan and Cork. The purpose of these Clinics is to support companies affected by Brexit to take immediate action to address their exposure. More dates will be announced soon.

- **Brexit Act On Programme:** A consultant spends time with EI client companies to discuss

specific challenges and draw up a report with tailored recommendations that will help them address weaknesses and become more resilient.

In addition, EI is implementing extensive trade mission and event schedules focused on global and sectoral opportunities, further developing in-market expertise and networks, placing greater focus on identifying new sectoral opportunities and stimulating demand for Irish products and services through international marketing campaigns. In 2017, EI launched a new Eurozone Strategy to increase exports to Eurozone countries by 50% by 2020.

The LEOs are supporting their clients by providing information, training and mentoring on Brexit related issues as well as advice on other sources of support. The six LEOs in the Border region are also working together with their Northern Ireland counterparts under the EU Co-Innovate Programme.

Other initiatives that my Department are advancing include the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme, under which accessible finance is made available to businesses at favourable terms.

In addition, on Monday 16th April last I launched the second call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, which is aimed at supporting the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. Twenty-one successful applicants representing all regions of the country have secured up to €30.5m for their projects in the first competitive call. I know there is great interest in this Second Call in across all counties, including in Longford and Westmeath, and I would encourage all stakeholders in those counties to continue to work collaboratively to develop strong and competitive proposals over the coming weeks.

Regional Development Funding

108. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the type of projects eligible for support under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund 2017-2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16189/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I launched the Second Call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) on Monday the 16th of April. The first call under the Fund was announced in May 2017, with the results released in December 2017. Twenty-one applicants representing all regions of the country secured a total of up to €30.5m in financial support for a range of enterprise and capability development projects. The second call will fund projects with the balance of the €60m remaining under the fund.

The REDF is aimed at accelerating economic recovery in every part of the country by delivering on the potential of local and regional strengths. The funding is provided by my Department, through Enterprise Ireland under the National Development Plan. It is a key action to support the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

A maximum support level of up to 80% is available for projects, with the balance to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector.

The Fund will support major new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions or nationally to build the unique USP capabilities to grow the regions. Projects must be impactful, with the impact being jobs.

The fund will consist of 4 streams, as follows:

Stream 1: Major Regional Change Projects

Investment of €2m up to €5m per project (min of 20% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) for major initiatives with high impact on enterprise development of the region and ability to create jobs, for example in Specialised Incubators; Hubs in Design; and initiatives in areas such as Medical Devices, Fintech, Agri-tech and Food etc.

Stream 2: Regionally Significant Change Projects

Investment of €250,000 up to €2m per project (min. of 20% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) for initiatives with high impact at regional/multi-regional level. Examples of potential initiatives include:

- Developing e-working centres;
- Stimulating the development of SME outreach from 3rd level;
- Projects to accelerate start-ups.

Stream 3: Local & Community Enterprise Development Initiative

Investment of €50,000 up to €250,000 per project (with a minimum of 20% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) to stimulate the development of community based enterprises & networks that can grow and sustain jobs in their area/county/region. Examples of potential projects include:

- Start-Up/Scaling Academies;
- Local Networks/ Consortia to deliver sectoral growth;
- Addressing sectoral challenges around Green, Energy, Digital, Innovation.

Stream 4: Industry Clusters

Investment of €50,000 up to €250,000 per project (min of 50% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) to maximise the benefits of collaborative opportunities through industry clusters (both established and new).

Further information and detail on the schemes is available on Enterprise Ireland's website.

IDA Ireland

109. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the specific steps being taken by the IDA to support job creation in County Limerick and the mid-west region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16191/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): This Government is committed to supporting job creation in the regions. My Department and its agencies are working towards ambitious targets to ensure that employment and investment are distributed as evenly as possible across the country. This includes County Limerick, which is marketed by the IDA as part of the Mid-West region.

The employment situation in the Mid-West, which covers Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary, has been steadily improving in recent years. IDA Ireland client companies in the Mid-West

created 1,481 new jobs last year, an increase of 5% over the previous year, with total employment in overseas companies in the region now at 17,787 people across 128 client companies.

Looking ahead, the IDA will continue to work with both existing and prospective clients to identify new opportunities for investment in the Mid-West. In doing so, the Agency will continue to highlight the region's strengths to overseas firms. These include the area's accessibility and the strong collaboration between industry there and Limerick's third level institutions, which has seen clusters of expertise develop in a number of sectors.

In addition, the Agency is itself investing in property solutions to help drive the growth of foreign direct investment in the region. The IDA's €150m regional property programme, launched in 2015, includes the construction of nine new advance facilities around the country, one of which will be located in Limerick. The completion of that facility in Limerick, which will help to attract further investment there, is expected next year.

Job Creation

110. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to increase employment opportunities in north west areas of County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8705/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, through its Enterprise Agencies, is committed to supporting indigenous and FDI businesses to grow, innovate and perform strongly in global markets.

I am delighted to say that 2017 was a particularly good year for job creation in Agency supported companies, with Enterprise Ireland client companies creating a total of 1,714 new full time jobs in County Cork, IDA client companies creating a total of 2,388 new full time jobs and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) creating 491 new full time jobs in County Cork.

Enterprise Ireland's focus for 2018 is to help clients, including those located in West Cork, to build on the strength of their 2017 performance by supporting them to innovate, be competitive and to diversify their global footprint - key attributes required to be resilient to economic shocks, such as those emerging from any kind of Brexit. In delivering on this, new supports have been introduced, others streamlined, and a *Global Ambition* campaign launched.

Enterprise Ireland recognises the importance of strengthening enterprise capability across all regions of the country. On Monday, I launched the Second Call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund. The first call under the Fund was announced in May 2017, with the results released in December. Twenty-one applicants representing all regions of the country secured a total of up to €30.5m in financial support for a range of enterprise and capability development projects. The second call will fund projects with the balance of the €60m remaining under the fund.

2017 was also a good year for regional job growth in Ireland, with 64% of new jobs created being located outside Dublin. It is important, however, not to become complacent and it is with this in mind that Enterprise Ireland will continue to implement its wider strategy contained in its *Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017-2020* report, which includes aims such as:

- Assisting clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 while sustaining the existing record level of jobs;
- Growing the annual exports of client companies by €5bn to €26bn per annum;

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- Increasing the level of spend made by client companies in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020; and

- Inspiring more Irish owned companies to have global ambition.

The three Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) located in Cork (Cork City, Cork South and Cork North and West) are the 'first-stop-shop' for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports for anyone that intends to start or grow a business in the country. The LEOs operating in Cork have a total of 620 clients, employing 3,324 people.

IDA Ireland's strategy, Winning Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019, sets out challenging targets in respect of the FDI sector for the period. Under the programme, IDA is targeting a minimum increase in investment of 30% to 40% in each region outside Dublin.

Company Law

111. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the likely impact of the recently announced US Treasury sanctions against Russian oligarchs for both Irish and overseas companies operating here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16873/18]

112. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the likely impact of the recently announced US Treasury sanctions against a person (details supplied) on a business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16874/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 112 together.

The Government is currently working to determine the extent to which the recent sanctions announced by the US Government will impact on companies operating in Ireland. It is very much aware of the risk, in particular, for Aughinish Alumina. I have already spoken directly with the company's CEO about the situation and the Taoiseach met with its senior management in Limerick last week. The IDA has also been in regular contact with the firm since details of the sanctions first emerged.

This though remains a fluid situation, with businesses still assessing their own respective potential legal and commercial exposure.

Internet Safety

113. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the process by which her Department will be developing and contributing draft actions to be considered as part of the action plan on Internet safety to be published in June 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16886/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Internet safety and security for children and young adults is one of the most urgent and pressing child protection concerns facing policy makers, parents and guardians, teachers and children themselves.

An Open Policy Debate on online safety took place on 8th March. It was led by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment with the support of five other Gov-

ernment Departments including Justice & Equality; Education & Skills; Business, Enterprise and Innovation; Health; and Children and Youth Affairs.

Furthermore, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is participating in a cross-Departmental Committee, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, tasked with the preparation of the Action Plan which will contain specific actionable measures, with timelines, to be taken by the relevant Government Departments.

In light of the findings of the Open Policy Debate and the work underway through the cross-Departmental group, it is anticipated that an Action Plan will be published by the end of June 2018.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she is satisfied that the ODCE is adequately staffed and funded to enable it to undertake its role in data protection; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16905/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Data Protection Commissioner is responsible for upholding the rights of individuals as set out in the Data Protection Acts. The Commissioner is appointed by Government and is independent in the exercise of her functions.

Since mid-2016 my Department has been participating in the Inter-Departmental Committee on Data Issues, led by the Department of the Taoiseach. The implications of, and preparedness for, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been the main agenda item over this time. This forum has provided observations on the Data Protection Bill, and has also acted as a very useful network to discuss issues across Government Departments and what needs to be done to respond accordingly.

It is a requirement under the GDPR for Government Departments to have a Data Protection Officer (DPO). The DPO in my Department plays a critical role in assisting the Department on data protection, and with preparing for, and responding to, issues that may arise when the EU GDPR comes into force on 25 May 2018. This Officer works with Business Units across the Department, and also with the Offices that come within its remit, including the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement.

Media Mergers

115. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to meet the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to discuss media ownership and media diversity here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16908/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The media merger functions previously held by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation were transferred to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment in the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) has a statutory role in determining certain mergers and acquisitions. With respect to media mergers, under section 18(1)(b) of the Competition Act 2002, and pursuant to Statutory Instrument No. 122 of 2007, a

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merger or acquisition must be notified to the CCPC, irrespective of the turnover of the undertakings involved, if:

(a) two or more of the undertakings involved carry on a media business in the State, or

(b) one or more of the undertakings involved carries on a media business in the State and one or more of the undertakings involved carries on a media business elsewhere.

The sole role of the CCPC is to form a view whether the result of the merger or acquisition would be to substantially lessen competition in markets for goods or services in the State. It does not have any role in relation to media plurality or diversity.

Section 9 (5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions, including making a determination in relation to a merger or acquisition.

As merger notifications form part of the day to day operational work of the CCPC, I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in determining merger notifications, including media mergers.

Social Media Monitoring

116. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she discussed with her officials the impact of fake news on social media here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16910/18]

117. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has met with companies (details supplied) to discuss the impact of fake news here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16911/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 117 together.

I have not met with Facebook or Twitter to specifically discuss the impact of “fake news” here in Ireland, nor have I discussed this matter in detail with my officials.

Interaction between my Department and multinational companies based here is primarily focused on and aligned with the Department’s key objectives in this area, namely the continued attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) and creating and sustaining high quality enterprise and employment across Ireland. My priority in this area, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, remains increasing the economic opportunities associated with FDI for the people of this country.

Qualifications Recognition

118. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 98 of 14 November 2017, if the request from a society (details supplied) to have the first aid at work UK qualification recognised has received a response; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16988/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations (S.I. No. 299 of

2007) concerning first aid at work employers have a duty to provide first-aid materials/equipment at all places of work where working conditions require it. Depending on the size and/or specific hazards of the workplace, trained occupational first aiders must also be provided.

An “occupational first aider” is defined in the Regulations as a person trained and qualified in occupational first aid. Such training can only be provided by organisations or individuals on the Register of Occupational First Aid Training Providers.

However, the management of first aid qualifications does not rest with the Health and Safety Authority. This rests with the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and with the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) and they are best placed to provide up to date information on any requests for, or progress on, mutual recognition arrangements.

PHECC is the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council and is an independent statutory agency with responsibility for standards, education and training in the field of pre-hospital emergency care. It was established by the Minister for Health.

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) is an independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. It was established in 2012 by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. It operates under the aegis of the Minister for Education and Skills.

In this regard queries on this matter would be best referred to my colleagues the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Skills respectively.

Brexit Supports

119. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the specific programmes to assist small and medium enterprises that face particular difficulties due to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16996/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is continuing to work hard to help Irish businesses across the country to withstand the challenges and avail of the opportunities posed by Brexit. The long-term response to Brexit is for companies to become more competitive, more innovative, and to diversify their export footprint into more markets.

In response to Brexit, EI has introduced a range of new supports, streamlined others, and launched a Global Ambition communications campaign.

For client companies, being prepared is crucial to ensuring resilience to emerging challenges. To promote awareness, and supported by a national Prepare For Brexit campaign, EI has:

- Developed and launched the Brexit SME Scorecard, an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars. To date over 2,000 companies have utilised this Scorecard.

- Designed and launched a €5k Be Prepared Grant that helps to support the costs of SME clients to prepare a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit.

- Held a number of Brexit Advisory Clinics to encourage companies to examine their potential exposure to Brexit.

In 2018 EI is:

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- Continuing to run regional Brexit Advisory Clinics to support companies to take immediate action to address their potential exposure.

- Providing an independent consultant to companies through the Act On Programme. This consultant will assist companies to identify specific actions they can take over a short period to address some of the risks and opportunities caused by Brexit.

To support the eight Regional Action Plans, and as part of the Government's strategic response to Brexit, additional funding of up to €60m is being rolled out by EI over the next 4 years. The Fund will support collaborative projects that will boost the regions by supporting enterprise and creating jobs. Twenty-one successful applicants representing all regions of the country have secured up to €30.5m for their projects in the first competitive call. The second call was launched earlier this week.

The Local Enterprise Offices are supporting their clients by providing information, training and mentoring on Brexit related issues as well as advice on other sources of support. The suite of LEO Brexit supports available to micro and small businesses through the 31 LEOs nationwide include.

InterTrade Ireland (ITI), has also been very active in assisting businesses address the challenges that Brexit may present for future cross-border commerce. A series of information and awareness raising events have been underway in towns across both North and South over recent months. ITI is also rolling out a 'Start to Plan' readiness voucher scheme, which enables companies to purchase specialist advice in areas such as customs, tax, tariff and non-tariff barriers, legal and labour mobility issues.

My Department has also launched a Brexit Loan Scheme. The Scheme makes a fund of up to €300 million available to eligible Irish businesses. Finance provided under the scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced, and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses.

Brexit Supports

120. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the specific programmes that will be introduced to assist enterprises and businesses that are heavily or totally dependent on the British market for exports in view of the challenges that have already occurred and the further difficulties that will arise from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16997/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, am acutely aware that many Irish exporters are highly reliant on the UK as their primary export destination. My Department is central to the Government wide effort to prepare Irish enterprises and our wider business ecosystem for Brexit. Steps already taken include Budget 2018 (and 2017), our Trade and Investment Strategy published in March 2017 and through the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 and 2018.

"Building Stronger Business" sets out work underway, and planned, by Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) and its Agencies in response to Brexit, including supports available to companies, to help them prepare for Brexit. It also describes our research programme designed to inform that response. This Paper focuses on businesses given that they are already dealing with the consequences of the Brexit referendum result. The Government is responding with supports to help make companies more resilient in the face of changes to come because of Brexit but also because of broader global challenges. We are focusing on deepening

ing national and firm level competitiveness, fostering product, service and process innovation within companies and working with businesses to diversify their trade with the world.

The following is a list of supports available to Irish enterprises, especially those who are highly dependent on the UK market as the destination for their exports. These supports will help alleviate the impact of Brexit on their businesses:

€300m Brexit Loan Scheme

In March 2018, the Government launched a new Brexit Loan Scheme for eligible businesses with up to 499 employees. Loan amounts range from €25,000 up to €1.5m, for terms of up to 3 years and a maximum interest rate of 4%. The Scheme will provide much-needed finance to eligible business impacted by the UK's decision to leave the European Union. It will make a real difference to firms, enabling them to adapt, change and innovate. This, in turn, will help them to become more competitive, a fundamental trait in any resilient business.

SME Scorecard Online Tool

Any business can quickly self-diagnose whether they are ready for Brexit. This Enterprise Ireland (EI) scorecard is a first step in developing a robust Brexit plan. It will help to stimulate thinking about the key areas that may be impacted in your business and to self-assess your level of preparedness. www.prepareforbrexit.ie

Awareness Sessions & Advisory Clinics

There are a range of awareness sessions and Advisory Clinics being convened by EI, Inter-Trade Ireland (ITI) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to provide information and support to companies all around the country on actions to address exposure to Brexit. The key focus of advisory clinics are Financial and Currency Management, Strategic Sourcing and Customs, Transport and Logistics.

Be Prepared Grant

For businesses that need external support in planning for Brexit, Enterprise Ireland offers up to €5,000 to assist client companies develop a plan.

EI Market Discovery Fund

Diversifying to new markets is one option for many businesses in preparing for Brexit. EI supports businesses to research viable and sustainable new market entry strategies.

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

Brexit supports from LEOs in every county include:

LEO Brexit Mentor Programme: supporting Owner/Managers identify key Brexit exposures and develop robust strategies to address issues and maximise potential opportunities.

Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters (TAME): Financial assistance to support market diversification in qualifying businesses to develop new and export market opportunities.

Lean for Micro: helping businesses adopt LEAN business practices to increase competitiveness.

LEO Innovation and Investment Fund (LIIF): Support for innovative developments in micro-enterprises by getting them investor ready.

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InterTradeIreland (ITI) Brexit ‘Start to Plan’ Vouchers

ITI provides a Brexit Advisory Service to help businesses with practical advice, support and information on Brexit related issues. ITI also provides vouchers to enable companies to get professional advice on Brexit, including likely tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services.

FDI Brexit Supports

IDA Ireland offers support to client companies as they grow and diversify their Irish footprint. The IDA offers practical assistance, such as information and advice on Brexit risks and opportunities, and financial assistance across R&D, training, employment and capital investment.

Health and Safety Authority (HSA)

The HSA’s Chemicals Helpdesk provides a support service for Irish chemical companies and SMEs on meeting legislative duties and ensuring they can source chemicals and sell in the EU.

Certification, Standards and Metrology

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) provides advice on how best to ensure businesses are certified to appropriate standards to access markets.

A number of Brexit alleviation supports are also available from Government Agencies outside of my Department that are involved in specific business sectors:

Tourism and Hospitality

Fáilte Ireland offers a suite of supports for hospitality and tourism businesses, including an online Brexit Readiness Check, to assess Brexit risks and to respond to current challenges.

Bord Bia Brexit Barometer

Bord Bia’s Brexit Barometer is designed to help businesses assess their readiness for Brexit and also provides information on supply chain, currency, customs and international market diversification opportunities.

My Department is leading on a range of Brexit research projects, which will provide an extensive evidence base and valuable analysis to inform and guide Ireland’s position within the EU-27. The Department’s actions are set out in more detail in the publication Building Stronger Business: Responding to Brexit.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

121. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans and the plans of the State’s industrial promotion agencies to assist in 2018 in the maintenance of existing employment and in job creation throughout County Cavan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16998/18]

122. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans and the plans of the State’s industrial promotion agencies to assist in 2018 in the maintenance of existing employment and in job creation throughout County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16999/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 121 and 122 together.

The North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs is a key policy response for supporting employment growth in the Border region. The Plan is stimulating job creation across the region, including Counties Cavan and Monaghan, by facilitating collaborative initiatives between the public and private sector, and through the provision of new competitive funds, awarded through Enterprise Ireland (EI) to support regional enterprise projects. The North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs is a key policy response for supporting employment growth in the Border region. The Plan is stimulating job creation across the region, including Counties Cavan and Monaghan, by facilitating collaborative initiatives between the public and private sector, and through the provision of new competitive funds, awarded through Enterprise Ireland (EI) to support regional enterprise projects.

The core objective of the Action Plan is to have a further 28,000 at work in the region by 2020. We are aiming to ensure the unemployment rate is within the 1% of the State average.

Sectors targeted as part of the plan include traditionally strong sectors for the region like agri-food, manufacturing/engineering and tourism. The Local Authorities, enterprise agencies, and other key public and private sector stakeholders in Counties Cavan and Monaghan have been strongly involved in, and are key drivers of the Action Plan.

The third progress report on the implementation of the Action Plan, covering the period from June-December 2017, is being finalised and shows that good progress is being made. The progress reports are available on www.regionalapj.ie.

Some 12,000 jobs were created in the Border region since the regional Action Plans for Jobs initiative was launched in January 2015 while the unemployment rate in the region has fallen since then and now stands at 6.5% according to the CSO.

Furthermore, Live Register numbers have fallen in County Cavan by 16.1% and in County Monaghan by 15.3% in the past 12 months. There is of course always room for improvement but the latest CSO figures are testament to the Government's efforts to help create jobs and reduce unemployment.

In May 2017 Enterprise Ireland launched the Regional Enterprise Development Fund with funding of up to €60m, designed to support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. The first call under this Fund concluded last August, with results announced on 11th December and 21 projects were successful, totalling €30.5m in aggregate grant support. The second call which was launched this past Monday, will fund projects from the remaining balance of the €60m budget available.

Monaghan County Enterprise Fund is one of the 21 collaborative projects that secured funding under Stream 3 which is designed to support Local & Community Enterprise Development Projects with grants of €50,000 up to €250,000 per project. The project involves the development of a Regional Food Centre of Excellence and a range of Food Product development supports.

EI together with the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) play a critical role in driving and nurturing entrepreneurship all the way from an originating idea at local level, to taking-on global markets. In 2017, EI paid €2.5m to companies in Cavan and €7.2m to companies in Monaghan.

The LEOs in Cavan and Monaghan continue to provide its range of supports for the micro and small business sector in 2018 and beyond. Capital allocations of €565,001 and €583,428 were made available to LEO Monaghan and LEO Cavan respectively in 2018 to fund invest-

ment in their clients by way of grants and a range of “soft” supports, such as training and mentoring. This funding is supplemented by a further €132,000 investment fund to both LEOs under the Ireland’s Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) competition – a total of 32 (Monaghan) and 31 (Cavan) applications were received this year by the closing date at the end of September.

Both LEO Monaghan and LEO Cavan are also in partnership with the LEOs in Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo in a project that was awarded funding of €175,000 in 2016 under the LEO Competitive Fund. The programme – ACCELINVEST – aims at creating a clear pathway for export focused, investment-ready regional companies to progress from the LEO Network to Enterprise Ireland. LEO Cavan is also a partner in 2 other competitive fund projects with the LEOs in Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon. The LEOs concerned were awarded almost €220,000 to collaborate on a Graduate Internship for Entrepreneurship Programme in their areas and an initiative aimed at encouraging shared learning, dynamic trade development and knowledge transfer in the creative sector.

2017 was the first year of EI’s strategy, Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 – 2020. This Strategy is focused on:

- Assisting clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 while sustaining the existing record level of jobs;
- Growing the annual exports of client companies by €5bn to €26bn per annum;
- Increasing the level of spend made by client companies in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020; and
- Inspiring more Irish owned companies to have global ambition.

I am committed to work closely with Enterprise Ireland to drive this Strategy, to ensure that it continues to support companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate, increase our exports and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. In recent months, with the support of my Department, EI has launched new measures to strengthen the rural and regional economy and to provide quicker access to innovation funding for exporting companies. This includes the new €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund and a new fast-track Agile Innovation Fund. I launched the 2nd Call for the Regional Fund on Monday 16th April.

My priority, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, is to drive creation of high-quality and sustainable employment across Ireland, including in Cavan and Monaghan. We are making significant progress towards achieving our regional development targets, which include a 30% to 40% increase in FDI in the North East Region. There are 36 multinational companies based in this region, employing 5,007 staff.

Enterprise Support Schemes

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which she continues to encourage start-up enterprises in all regions throughout the country; the issues to date identified as being likely to impede progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17061/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My priority as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation is to drive the creation of high-quality and sustainable jobs around all the regions and counties of Ireland.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) play a critical role in supporting microenterprises in the start-up and expansion phases in all regions throughout the country.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to micro-enterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. The LEOs also offer ‘soft’ supports in the form of training and mentoring for anyone interested in starting or growing a business. In addition, the LEOs provide a ‘signposting’ service for the micro-enterprise and SME sector in relation to other relevant State supports, for example: Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Microfinance Ireland, Trading Online Vouchers, LEADER and Education & Training Boards (ETBs).

As you may be aware Capital allocation made available and maintained in 2018 to the 31 LEOs is €22.5m. This is an increase from €18.5 in 2016 and is being used to fund LEO clients by way of financial assistance and a range of soft supports such as training and mentoring and initiatives such as Ireland’s Best Young Entrepreneur Competition.

I am delighted that Government funding is being put to such an excellent cause through Ireland’s Best Young Entrepreneur. The facts speak for themselves: including this year’s applicants, over 5,500 18-35 year olds have applied for funding to develop their business ideas. New research now shows that the €5m we invested in IBYE has supported over 2,200 jobs and €124m in sales.

In addition, the LEOs have also delivered specific Brexit initiatives for micro-enterprises, including:

- LEO Competitive Fund for Innovative Micro Enterprises: - this new competitive initiative incentivised LEO clients to engage in innovation to develop New Product, Process or Markets.

- Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Export: Financial assistance to support market diversification in qualifying businesses to develop new market opportunities.

- The LEO’s developed a Lean4Micro offer for micro enterprise clients: Helping business clients adopt LEAN business practices to increase competitiveness.

A net total of 3,760 new jobs were delivered in 2017 by start-ups and small businesses from across the country that have been supported by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

This brings the total number of new jobs created by LEO-backed companies nationwide to 15,000 since the LEOs were set up in 2014.

That is an increase of 10% on 2016 - and the fourth straight year of employment growth.

Growth was evident in each area showing that each county has the potential to grow its own jobs if the right promotion, encouragement and supports are put in place.

A new client portfolio management model will be rolled out nationally this year by Enterprise Ireland to the LEOs, which will support portfolio performance and potential.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs are also designed to encourage all the players in each region to actively support enterprise creation. There are 8 Regional Action Plans and they are underpinned by the €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund which supports the establishment of enterprise creation initiatives such as incubators, co-working space, clustering etc. I launched the second call under the Fund on Monday 16 April 2018.

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which she is in the course of making provision for the negative impact of Brexit with particular reference to the industries here most likely to be affected negatively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17062/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Contingency planning for a no-deal or worst-case outcome, bringing together the detailed work being undertaken by individual Ministers and their Departments on issues within their policy remit, is now well advanced. Its focus is on the immediate regulatory and operational challenges which would result from such an outcome. It assumes a trading relationship based on the default WTO rules, but also examines the possible effects on many other areas of concern. This work is therefore providing baseline scenarios for the impact of Brexit across all sectors, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations, including in regard to transition arrangements and the future relationship. It also takes account of the planning being undertaken at EU level by the new Commission Preparedness Unit, which is issuing information notes aimed at different business sectors.

The Government is already acting in order to get Ireland Brexit ready. Dedicated measures were announced in Budget 2018, including a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme for Business and a €25m Brexit Response Loan Scheme for the agri-food sector as well as additional supports for capital investment in the food industry and Bord Bia marketing and promotion activities, amounting to over €50m in total. Additional capital expenditure allocation of €4.3bn over four years will also allow the State and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects while ensuring that communities and businesses can plan ahead. There was also increased funding provided to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the opening of six new diplomatic missions as part of Global Footprint 2025, which will contribute to helping our exporters find new markets. Our Government's enterprise agencies continue to work with companies, helping them to deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling teams.

Longer-term economic strategies will also be critically important in addressing the challenges of Brexit, notably Ireland 2040 –the National Development Plan. “Enterprise 2025 Renewed: Building resilience in the face of global challenges” was launched on the 9th of March and sets out Ireland's medium-term national enterprise strategy. We are also in active discussions with the European Investment Bank on a potential increase in investment in the country.

Before the summer the Government will finalise a paper, building on that published in May 2017, on our approach to the negotiations and our latest assessment of the economic and sectoral challenges posed by Brexit and our responses to them.

My own Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) plays a key role in implementing the Government's policies to stimulate the productive capacity of the economy and create an environment which supports job-creation and jobs maintenance.

In relation to Brexit, our objective is to support firms to adapt to the challenges and opportunities Brexit presents by ensuring we have fit for purpose policies. Our strategy is to minimise risks and maximise opportunities by ensuring the growth and resilience of Irish enterprise post-Brexit working across four pillars which are:

- Helping Firms to Compete;

- Enabling Firms to Innovate;
- Supporting Firms to Trade;
- Negotiating for the Best Possible Outcome;

Several important steps have already been taken to prepare our economy, including through a range of measures announced in Budgets 2017 and 2018, as well as commitments set out in APJ 2017 and 2018 and the targets included in the Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy.

From my Department's perspective, we are leveraging the expertise and enhancing the capacity of our Agencies to ensure that they are in the best possible position to address the needs of their clients in relation to competitiveness, innovation and trade diversification. This is being achieved through the provision of information, advice, training and other supports.

Specific DBEI actions to date include:

- We are developing proposals for a Longer-Term Business Investment Loan Scheme together with a new Business Advisory Hub service which would focus on business development to allow enterprises to position themselves for a post-Brexit environment.

- The EU Commission has approved a 'rescue and restructuring' scheme. The scheme can be drawn on in exceptional circumstance for a company severely affected by Brexit.

With regard to industry specific responses my Department has already outlined our Brexit Response Plan in "Building Stronger Business – Responding to Brexit by competing, innovating and trading" published last November. This sets out our response to Brexit which supports all enterprise sectors.

My Department also commissioned a report by Copenhagen Economics (CE) on the trade impacts of Brexit (published 21 February 2018) which indicates that 5 sectors account for 90% of the possible economic impact. These are Agri-food (beef, processed food and dairy), Chemicals & Pharma, Electrical Machinery, Wholesale & Retail and Air Transport. However, the impacts are felt in different ways and require different approaches.

In the case of Agri-food, Retail and Air Transport the potential impacts will be felt at the firm level, and we are engaging intensively with those sectors. For Chemicals & Pharma as well as Electrical Machinery, small impacts at firm level have a significant impact on the economy given their overall contribution to GDP in this context broad based mitigation the Government is undertaking to make our economy more resilient may be more relevant to these sectors and individual support for companies is not necessarily what is needed.

The Government has an extensive Plan of activity underway, to support the Agri-Food sector through initiatives by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland. In the case of Retail my own Department is working with the Retail Representative organisations through the Retail Consultation Forum, which I chair.

The most effective mitigation measure the Government can undertake is to negotiate for the best possible outcome in the future relationship between the EU and the UK. This will benefit all sectors of the economy and the detail contained in the CE study will further help to inform our approach to the negotiations.

Skills Development

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she has continued to monitor the availability of the requisite skills in the workplace having particular regard to the skills requirements of the high tech industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17063/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is aware that it is essential that Irish enterprise has access to high-quality, adaptable and flexible talent. In order to meet this demand, the Government is committed to building and retaining a highly skilled indigenous workforce to serve the needs of the economy.

This goal is set out under the framework of two overarching skills development strategies:

- Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025, which sets out a vision of how Ireland can continue to develop relevant skills and ensure that the supply of skills is activated and effectively used; and

- Action Plan for Education, 2016-2019, which aims to make the Irish education and training system the best in Europe over the next decade

The sophisticated skills architecture established in Ireland is key in identifying and responding to skills gaps as identified by enterprise and education and training providers. It constitutes the following:

National Skills Council (NSC): The NSC was established in 2017. It provides a mechanism for mediating demands on resources in a manner that facilitates prioritisation within the identified needs, while at the same time enhancing the education and training provider responses to identified skills needs and ensuring delivery on priorities. The Council draws on the work of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in SOLAS, and the Regional Skills Fora.

Regional Skills Fora: A network of 9 Regional Skills Fora fostering close co-operation at regional level between education and training providers and regional enterprise. The Fora provide a cohesive education-led structure for employers and the further education and higher education system to work together in building the skills needs of their regions.

- **Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN):** The EGFSN is an independent, non-statutory body, which includes representatives from the business community, education and training providers, learner-support groups, trade unions, and a smaller number of Government Departments and agencies. It identifies the skills required by enterprise across occupations and sectors, as well as providing information to education and training providers to allow them to support the alignment of programmes with employers' needs. My Department, in conjunction with SOLAS, provides the EGFSN with research and secretariat support.

High level ICT skills have been a key concern of the EGFSN since 2013, when it undertook the study Addressing Future Demand for High-Level ICT Skills. This study included a demand forecast for such skills, both in the ICT sector and across other sectors of the economy, over the period 2013-2018. A related objective was how Ireland could retain and attract high-level ICT Skills to address immediate high level ICT skills recruitment needs. The findings and recommendations of this report were essential inputs into the development of the ICT Skills Action Plan 2014-2018.

At official level, my Department has also been involved in the High Level Steering Group responsible for monitoring the implementation of the ICT Skills Action Plan. As the Department of Education and Skills looks to develop a new ICT Skills Action Plan for the coming years, the EGFSN is now engaged in a refresh of the demand forecast exercise undertaken in

2013, for the period 2017-2022.

Through the agencies and initiatives mentioned above my Department and the Department of Education and Skills will continue to ensure that an adequate and appropriately skilled workforce remains readily available to meet the requirements of the high tech industry.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which emphasis is placed on the facilitating and encouraging employment generating enterprises throughout the regions with particular reference to the need to ensure an even spread of investment with consequent benefit to the economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17064/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I made jobs and enterprise growth in the regions my top priority.

Since 2015, the Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative has been a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, with 135,000 of these jobs to be located outside of Dublin. Eight Regional Action Plans for Jobs (RAPJs) were published by the Department between June 2015 and January 2016, aimed at raising employment levels in the regions and facilitating them to achieve their economic potential.

The primary objective of these plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020 and to ensure the unemployment rate of each region does not exceed the State average by more than one percentage point.

The Plans, incorporating over 1,300 actions, are being monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the business community, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. Many of the actions set out in the RAPJs require active engagement with, and the development of networks within, the private sector. To drive this process, key industry figures have been appointed to act as Enterprise Champions within each Region. Indeed, eight of the nine Implementation Committees are industry led.

Progress across the eight regions has been very positive since the launch of the initiative, with an increase in employment of 8.5% or 118,600 jobs in the regions outside of Dublin and 166,800 additional jobs nationwide, from Q1 2015 to Q2 2017. Importantly, the Plans have been embraced within the regions and implementation rates for actions within the First and Second Progress Reports are over 90% for each region. Final progress reports for the current iteration of the Regional Plans are in preparation and will be published in the coming weeks.

The enterprise agencies have recorded substantial progress in the past few years. Under the IDA 'Winning' Strategy 2015-2019, the Agency is targeting a minimum 30% to 40% increase in the number of investments for each region outside Dublin in the period of the Strategy. These targets have been developed taking into account the key factors crucial to attracting and retaining FDI.

Since the IDA 'Winning' Strategy was launched in 2015, half of all new IDA backed jobs created, were outside Dublin. All regions saw increases in IDA employment in 2017, with the South East experiencing the highest growth at 9%.

Similarly, every region saw increases in Enterprise Ireland-supported jobs in 2017, with 64% of new positions outside of Dublin. The West, Mid-West and North West saw the largest level of increases at 7%.

Micro and small businesses supported by the Local Enterprise Offices are making a hugely important contribution to employment growth. An average of 3,750 new jobs were created in LEO supported companies in each of the last four years.

To support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, last May my Department launched the €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund. This competitive Fund is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. In December last year I announced an allocation of €30.5 million under the first call under the Fund, with 21 projects from all over the country approved for funding.

I launched the second call under the REDF on Monday 16th April, which will allocate the remainder of the €60 million, and I hope to see more successful projects coming through from all regions. I want to see all regions benefitting from this Fund and to this end, I am committed to ensuring that a minimum of €2 million in funding will be allocated to each region once projects submitted meet the threshold of standard set by Enterprise Ireland under the Scheme.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans is my priority. On Monday last I also met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders all over the country to ensure we deliver to the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Enterprise Support Schemes

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which the reliance on technology remains an integral part of business and enterprise expansion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17065/18]

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which innovation and technology remains an integral part of new businesses being set up here in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17068/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 130 together.

Technology and Innovation remains an integral part of any business, both new businesses getting started and established companies wishing to continue to grow and expand. In simple terms, innovation involves helping companies improve competitiveness by developing new processes, products or services. Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) are essential components in a company's ability to maintain a competitive edge in the market and increase output.

Enterprise Ireland's annual business results survey notes that Enterprise Ireland clients invested €916m in innovation in 2016 and over half of these used Enterprise Ireland RDI funding and support. This illustrates the commitment to innovation in firms, both new and existing and also the importance of Enterprise Ireland support in helping them to pursue their Innovation

goals.

Enterprise Ireland encourages companies to engage with RDI by collaborating with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or by sourcing/licensing new technologies from HEIs which can provide a step change in their innovative capabilities. At the same time Enterprise Ireland has supports in place to help companies maximise the funding they can receive from the European Union. These supports all help new and existing companies to develop new and improved products and services which serve as the basis for sustainable economic growth and are detailed below.

In Company RD&I supports the development of new or substantially improved products, services or processes which will have a competitive advantage in their target market. This enables companies to increase employment through sustainable and substantially increased sales. The new Agile Innovation Fund was launched in Quarter 4 2017 and is already gaining huge interest from companies. This Fund allows up to 50% in support for projects to a maximum total cost of €300,000 and has fast track approval.

Foreign Direct Investment

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which the IDA's development programme continues to develop to maximise advantages for job creation and economic competitiveness on international markets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17066/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Competition for global foreign direct investment (FDI) has become increasingly intense. Nevertheless, multinational companies continue to invest and reinvest here with leading global firms from many sectors - including life sciences, ICT, engineering and digital media - all based in Ireland. The contribution that these investments make to our wider economy is undoubtedly significant and the Government is working hard to ensure that the country remains a destination of choice for overseas firms.

Ireland's strengths when it comes to attracting FDI are well documented. These include our competitiveness, talented and productive workforce, favourable demographics and membership of the European Union. Our pro-enterprise business environment, and track record as a home to FDI, are also key factors. Reinforcing and sustaining these strengths is important to ensuring Ireland's continuing FDI competitiveness.

The IDA's 2017 Annual Results provides evidence of our continuing capacity to attract FDI to Ireland. Total employment by overseas companies in Ireland has now surpassed 210,000 people - a record level - with the numbers of investments also increasing. We are also attracting more investment to the regions.

Economic Competitiveness

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures she continues to take to develop and improve the competitiveness of Irish goods and services on world markets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17067/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland's competitiveness has improved in recent years. In 2017, Ireland moved from seventh

to sixth in the IMD (Institute for Management Development) World Competitiveness Yearbook. Most importantly, Ireland's improved competitiveness is reflected in the labour market. The results from the Labour Force Survey in respect of Q4 2017 shows employment totalled 2,231,000, up 3.1% or 66,800 from the same quarter in 2016. Employment increased in twelve of fourteen economic sectors over the year.

While our competitiveness performance in recent years has been positive, Brexit brings into sharp focus the need for continued improvement in competitiveness. The immediate challenge for Ireland is to ensure growth is sustainable, enterprises are resilient and our economy is internationally competitive. As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, my objective is to create the best possible environment for enterprise, entrepreneurship, innovation and investment across all regions. Our enterprise policies are delivering but Brexit, international tax developments, US policy developments and technological advances present direct events that will have an impact on Ireland's prospects.

Brexit has exposed how Irish export markets are geographically concentrated and the range of products and services exported has likewise become increasingly concentrated. Our Brexit response has seen further company-led expansion into markets and a deepening of trade links with the world's leading and emerging economies. My Department through Enterprise Ireland is actively supporting exporters, particularly SMEs to intensify their efforts to scale and diversify sustainably and to enhance the competitiveness of Irish exports.

Through the implementation of Enterprise 2025 Renewed and the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 we have set out a range of short and long term measures to deepen resilience in Ireland's enterprise and enhance the competitiveness of Irish exports.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 127.

Skills Development

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which an adequate and appropriately skilled workforce remains readily available here to meet the innovative challenges of the workplace; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17069/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As we draw closer to full employment, it is essential to ensure that Irish enterprise has access to high-quality, adaptable and flexible talent. In order to meet this demand, the Government remains committed to building and retaining a highly skilled indigenous workforce.

This goal is set out under the framework of two overarching skills development strategies:

- Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025, which sets out a vision of how Ireland can continue to develop relevant skills and ensure that the supply of skills is activated and effectively used; and

- Action Plan for Education, 2016-2019, which aims to make the Irish education and training system the best in Europe over the next decade

The sophisticated skills architecture established in Ireland is key in identifying and responding to skills gaps as identified by enterprise and education and training providers. It constitutes the following:

- National Skills Council (NSC): The NSC was established in 2017. It provides a mechanism for mediating demands on resources in a manner that facilitates prioritisation within the identified needs, while at the same time enhancing the education and training provider responses to identified skills needs and ensuring delivery on priorities. The Council draws on the work of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in SOLAS, and the Regional Skills Fora.

- Regional Skills Fora: A network of 9 Regional Skills Fora fostering close co-operation at regional level between education and training providers and regional enterprise. The Fora provide a cohesive education-led structure for employers and the further education and higher education system to work together in building the skills needs of their regions.

- Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN): The EGFSN is an independent, non-statutory body, which includes representatives from the business community, education and training providers, learner-support groups, trade unions, and a smaller number of Government Departments and agencies. It identifies the skills required by enterprise across occupations and sectors, as well as providing information to education and training providers to allow them to support the alignment of programmes with employers' needs. My Department, in conjunction with SOLAS, provides the EGFSN with research and secretariat support.

An example of the EGFSN's upcoming work on meeting the challenges of rapid innovation and its impact on the Irish workforce is the report on Skills for the Digital Economy. This report will emphasise the importance of the constant reskilling and upskilling of the workforce in creating a resilient economy. The report will focus on how different roles and different sectors will be impacted by digitalisation and will develop a synopsis of approaches to upskilling the existing workforce. The report will add to the body of work completed by the EGFSN since its inception in relation to filling skills gaps using our current labour market.

Further to this, a number of agencies and initiatives work in collaboration with my Department in order to ensure our workforce is equipped with the skills necessary to meet the growing demands of enterprise.

- Springboard is an initiative under the Higher Education Authority that strategically targets funding of free higher education courses to engage jobseekers to upskill or reskill in areas where there are identified labour market skills shortages or employment opportunities. As of 2018 Springboard offers 208 free, part-time and intensive conversion courses in higher education from certificate, to degree, to post-graduate level. All Springboard courses lead to qualifications in enterprise sectors which are growing and need skilled personnel, including ICT; manufacturing; international financial services; and key skills for enterprise to trade internationally.

- Skillnets is a state-funded, enterprise-led body established in 1999. Skillnets operates a number of specialised programmes which have played a significant role in addressing current and future skills needs in Ireland. For example, the Future Skills Needs Programme (FSNP) facilitates collaboration between enterprise, academic institutions and industry training providers to develop innovative new programmes that specifically address the future skills needs of businesses. Working in close collaboration with its networks, Skillnets ensure training interventions are relevant to the specific skills needs of participating firms, congruent with the ever-changing world of work, and meeting a high bar in terms of programme design and delivery.

- SOLAS is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills established in 2013 under the Further Education and Training Act. SOLAS functions are to manage, co-ordinate and support the delivery of this integrated Further Education and Training by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs); to monitor delivery and provide funding based on reliable, good quality data and positive outcomes; and to promote Further Education and Training provision that is

relevant to individual learner needs and national skills needs. This includes the needs of business and future skills requirements. The work of SOLAS is vital in meeting future skills needs through the Irish talent pool. Under the Action Plan for Jobs 2018, SOLAS will support up to 6,200 apprenticeship registrations and 3,900 traineeship enrolments throughout this year.

Through the agencies and initiatives mentioned above my Department and the Department of Education and Skills will continue to ensure that that an adequate and appropriately skilled workforce remains readily available to meet the innovative challenges of the workplace.

Foreign Direct Investment

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of countries with which Ireland now competes for foreign direct investment; if she is satisfied that Ireland remains an attractive location for investment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17070/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland remains a global leader in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and competes with a range of jurisdictions across Europe, Asia and the Americas. Whilst this competition is increasingly intense, our country has a number of key strengths that continue to make us a highly attractive destination for FDI. These include our highly skilled workers, first-class education system and positive demographics. Our membership of the EU and Eurozone, pro-enterprise policy environment, and competitive corporation tax regime are other significant selling points.

Taken together, these strengths help the IDA make a compelling case to prospective investors about the merits of investing in Ireland. They also help to explain our strong national performance in terms of FDI-driven investment and job creation. In 2017, for example, the IDA's client companies created over 19,500 new jobs across a range of sectors, bringing total employment at FDI firms to 210,000.

Ireland clearly therefore does remain an attractive location for FDI. The Government is nevertheless conscious of our need to remain as competitive as possible. That is why it will continue to explore how to both reinforce existing strengths and find new ways of attracting job-rich investment to the country.

Knowledge Development Box

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which the knowledge development box continues to be an asset in securing investment in jobs here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17072/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Knowledge Development Box (KDB), introduced in Budget 2016, forms part of Ireland's competitive offering to continue to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and to support Irish owned companies to innovate and to compete effectively on international markets. The KDB provides an effective 6.25% rate of corporation tax which is internationally competitive. The KDB complements the existing suite of initiatives available to companies that undertake R&D activities in Ireland across the lifecycle of research and development – providing a competitive proposition for continued business investment.

The continuing imperative to establish Ireland as the best place in which to succeed in

business is reinforced in our national Enterprise and Innovation strategies - strategies based on export-led growth, underpinned by innovation and talent - strategies that aim to embed resilience, to deliver sustainable employment opportunities and a higher standard of living for all.

As a key part of Ireland's competitive offering as a location of choice from which to do business, the KDB has helped secure investment since its introduction in 2016. It will continue to form part of Ireland's proposition and stimulate further investment in R&D activities by both Irish and foreign owned enterprises - ultimately delivering jobs and economic substance in Ireland.

Commencement of Legislation

134. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in commencing sections 20 to 23 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; the time-frame for the commencement of the sections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16923/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A number of technical drafting issues have come to light in relation to Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. The implications of these issues are being explored by officials in my Department and the Office of the Attorney General and clarification on whether primary legislation is required to resolve these issues is being sought. In the event that primary legislation is required I would seek to deal with it as a matter of urgency.

General Practitioner Services

135. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the rights a person has when a general practitioner patient dispute occurs; if there are procedures in place to resolve these disputes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16833/18]

136. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if a general practitioner can unilaterally decide to remove medical card patients that they deem difficult without a patient's ability to challenge this decision or have access to a process that will adjudicate the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16834/18]

137. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if the process of general practitioner removal of medical card patients from their list will be examined; if there are policies, structures and patient representation in place in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16835/18]

138. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if there are statistics available regarding the number of medical card and private patients removed from general practitioner lists and the reasons for removal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16836/18]

139. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that general practitioner patients have full rights and protection in patient general practitioner disputes including a right to challenge a general practitioner decision and to protect their good name, especially in relation to sourcing another general practitioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16837/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 to 139, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to operational matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

140. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he has received correspondence from a company (details supplied) in relation to a new drug scheme for persons with MS; and his plans to meet the company to discuss the matter further [16844/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the 2013 Act. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

The 2013 Act does not give the Minister for Health any powers in this regard. The HSE does not require approval or consent from the Minister or Government when making a reimbursement decision.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either:

1. add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine,
2. refuse to reimburse the medicine.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible and within the 180 days. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. Successful price negotiations also allow for further drugs to be approved within the finite budget available.

I have been informed that the NCPE are currently conducting a health technology assessment on Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) and for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (RMS).

I can confirm that I received a letter from Roche Products (Ireland) Ltd in December 2017 concerning Ocrelizumab, however as I have stated, the drug in question is being assessed in accordance with the statutory procedure in place. I am keen to engage with Industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions which are in place and must also recognise the fundamental pricing/funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

My Department will be engaging with Industry over the coming months to explore avenues for securing more timely and affordable access to new medicines.

Mobility Allowance

141. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the mobility allowance will be reintroduced for new applicants in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16845/18]

142. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made on the new transport support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16846/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 and 142 together.

The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013. Since the closure of the Mobility Allowance, the Government has directed that the Health Service Executive should continue to pay an equivalent monthly payment of up to €208.50 per month to the 4,133 people in receipt of the Mobility Allowance, on an interim basis, pending the establishment of a new Transport Support Scheme.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Programme for a Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme to assist those with a disability to meet their mobility costs. The Health (Transport Support) Bill is on the list of priority legislation for publication in the Spring/Summer session 2018. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

It is hoped to bring a General Scheme and Heads of Bill to Government shortly, seeking Government approval to the drafting of the Bill for the new Transport Support Payment.

With regard to the Motorised Transport Grant, this scheme operated as a means-tested grant to assist persons with severe disabilities with the purchase or adaptation of a car, where that car was essential to retain employment. The maximum Motorised Transport Grant, which was payable once in any three-year period, was €5,020. Following closure of the scheme in February 2013, no further Motorised Transport Grants have been payable.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by disabled persons are also exempt from payment of tolls on national toll roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular Scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to

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persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Speech and Language Therapy

143. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the HSE's engagement with the introduction of a new in-school speech and language service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16848/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Programme for a Partnership Government commits that a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy will be established.

Budget 2018 provided an additional €2m to introduce a demonstration project for in-school Therapy services in 2018.

It is intended that the project should commence in schools from September 2018 and proceed over the course of the 2018/19 school year.

The demonstration project will develop and test a model for the delivery of in-school speech and language and occupational therapy support, in a defined regional area, across a range of schools, in conjunction with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and supplementing existing HSE therapy services.

The demonstration model will focus on developing greater linkages between educational and therapy supports.

An Interdepartmental Working Group, including representatives from the National Council for Special Education, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, has been appointed to develop the pilot/demonstration model for In-school Therapy Services.

Further details will be announced in relation to the project in the near future.

Speech and Language Therapy

144. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the review into existing speech and language therapy from 2018 has been carried out; and if so, if the findings and recommendations have been finalised. [16849/18]

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.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

145. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the way in which it is planned to reduce the long waiting times being experienced by children in counties Laois and Offaly

that are in need of an assessment for occupational therapy. [16850/18]

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.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

146. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the way in which it is planned to reduce the long waiting times being experienced by children in County Kildare that are in need of an assessment for occupational therapy. [16851/18]

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.

Medicinal Products

147. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be granted eligibility in order to gain access to the immunotherapy drugs Nivolumab or Pembrolizumab; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16855/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Data

148. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners that have indicated they will not take on additional medical card patients by county; the number of medical card patients seen by general practitioners by county; the number of medical cards issued by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16864/18]

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 for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications Data

149. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list for mobility appliances in each CHO; the number of persons waiting over six months and over one and two years by CHO, respectively; the number of those that are children in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16865/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Internet Safety

150. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the way in which his Department will engage with the development of the action plan on Internet safety that will be published in June 2018; if he will be engaging with stakeholders within this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16883/18]

151. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he will be engaging with Internet companies on the policy areas under his remit in the development of the action plan on Internet safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16884/18]

153. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the process by which his Department will be developing and contributing draft actions to be considered as part of the action plan on Internet safety to be published in June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16890/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 to 153, inclusive, together.

The Action Plan will be developed and contributed to by a number of Departments, including the Department of Health. As the Department of the Taoiseach has responsibility for the coordination of this Action Plan, the main questions posed would be better directed to that department.

The Department of Health recognises the importance of Internet Safety, with several actions and initiatives in this area. These include Connecting for Life, the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health, and online mental health support courses.

Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to reduce suicide, commits to engaging with online platforms to encourage best practice in reporting around suicidal behaviour, so as to encourage a safer online environment in this area.

The Programme for Partnership Government (2016) committed to the establishment of a National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health "to consider how best to introduce and teach resilience, coping mechanisms, greater awareness to children and young people, and how to access support services voluntarily at a young age."

The Task Force process came to a conclusion last summer and its final set of recommendations were published in December. The recommendations include actions in areas such as consultation and advocacy; awareness and training; accessibility and alignment of mental health services; and improving knowledge through research online youth mental health supports.

Work in this area is further informed by good practice guidelines for the safe delivery of online mental health information and support commissioned by the National Office for Suicide Prevention in 2015.

Internet Safety

152. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the input his Department will have on the issue of advertising and marketing to children in view of the recent publication of a document (details supplied) and the strict timeframes involved in publishing the action plan on Internet safety; if the absence of a monitoring body will impede this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16885/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): In accor-

dance with Section 10 on governance of the Codes of Practice concerned, the Department of Health's involvement in them will include the designation of a monitoring body and the maintenance and publication - either by the Department or the monitoring body - of a register of signatories to these codes. Section 10 also stipulates that the monitoring body shall produce an annual report for the Minister for Health.

The Codes of Practice concerned were published in February. They were developed by a multi-stakeholder group that included IBEC, Food Drink Ireland, Retail Ireland, Association of Advertisers in Ireland and the Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland. Work on the designation of a monitoring body to monitor these codes for compliance and effectiveness is underway and impedance of the work referred to by the Deputy has not been envisaged in the interim.

Question No. 153 answered with Question No. 150.

Hospital Appointments Status

154. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for an operation at Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16893/18]

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.

Dental Services Expenditure

155. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the average cost per treatment item provided by the HSE dental service when factors (details supplied) are taken into account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16894/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Primary Care Centres Provision

156. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of the primary care centre for Leixlip, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16913/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Administration

157. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if the abolition of the loco parentis clause in paediatric homecare packages will be reconsidered (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16922/18]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

158. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for hip replacement surgery; and the expected timeframe in this regard. [16924/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

159. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16931/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Neuro-Rehabilitation Services

160. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if investment in neurological services will be increased for persons living with neurological conditions including stroke, dementia, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease in addition to some rare genetic

conditions to provide assistance with their care (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16932/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Model of Care for Neurology was launched by the Director General of the HSE in late 2016. This was developed by the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Neurology in collaboration with consultants, nurses, health and social care professionals and patient support groups. It aims to address the need for strategic development of neurology services in the provision of better care for these patients. Progress is being made in this area. For example, this year funding has been allocated by the HSE to commence development of peri- and post-operative services to support patients with Parkinson's Disease receiving Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS).

As the query raised is a service matter, I have also asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with any further information.

Hospital Appointments Administration

161. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for surgery has been issued for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16933/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

162. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons with multiple sclerosis here face significant delays in accessing new medicines and treatments in comparison with other European countries; if there will be engagement with the pharmaceutical industry in order to remedy the situation and to improve market access; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16934/18]

174. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with an organisation (details supplied) and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure new medicines are available to persons with MS. [16990/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 174 together.

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The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine. HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention. The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

I have been informed that Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) and for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (RMS) is currently undergoing a full pharmacoeconomic assessment by the NCPE.

I am keen to engage with Industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions which are in place and must also recognise the fundamental pricing/funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

I have indicated willingness to meet with MS Ireland and my office is in contact with the organisation to arrange a mutually convenient date.

Hospital Appointments Administration

163. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16935/18]

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.

Civil Registration Service

164. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if arrangements will be made to reopen the Civil Registration Office in Dundalk, County Louth; his views on whether it is unacceptable for persons in the north of the county to have to travel over 60 km to access this service now located in Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16936/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Civil Registration Service is operated by the Health Service Executive on behalf of the General Register Office under the aegis of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. I have referred your question to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to you.

HSE Expenditure

165. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent per day by the HSE on taxis; the amount spent on accessible taxis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16947/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This matter has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Disability Support Services Expenditure

166. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has undertaken a cost benefit analysis and plans to increase personal assistant hours for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16948/18]

167. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the cost of increasing personal assistance hours by 500,000 hours; his plans to improve the personal assistance service for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16949/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 166 and 167 together.

In the 2018 National Service Plan, the HSE's priority is to provide 1.46 million hours of personal assistance to more than 2,000 people with disability, representing an increase of 60,000 hours over the 2017 target of 1.4 million hours.

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

168. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16957/18]

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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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

169. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if the FreeStyle Libre reimbursement scheme will be extended to all persons with type 1 diabetes; if not, the reason for excluding older persons from the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16958/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Administration

170. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16965/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

171. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16968/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

172. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish the review of the pricing system for long-term residential care facilities as recommended within the review of the fair deal scheme; if an independent appeals mechanism will be introduced within the fair deal scheme to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that fail to agree a fee with the NTPF and in an effort to bring greater transparency to the fair deal pricing mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16969/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Report of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NTPF have responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism within the NHSS to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF, I cannot nor would I wish to, prejudge the outcomes of the NTPF pricing mechanism review. However I welcome the work to date and look forward to the NTPF

concluding the review later this year.

Medicinal Products

173. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the HSE’s policy in relation to Suboxone take-away doses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16989/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 174 answered with Question No. 162.

Electronic Cigarettes

175. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if evidence which shows that millions of smokers have successfully quit smoking by switching to e-cigarettes has been examined; the action his Department is taking to support the transition to e-cigarettes as a means of quitting smoking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16991/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Smoking is the greatest single cause of preventable illness and premature death in Ireland, killing almost 6,000 people a year.

The primary objectives set out in the Tobacco Free Ireland (2013) policy document are to denormalise smoking and to protect children from the dangers of tobacco consumption. Tobacco Free Ireland sets a target for Ireland to be tobacco free (i.e. with a prevalence rate of less than 5%) by 2025.

Tobacco Free Ireland contains a number of recommendations to assist smokers in quitting tobacco use. One of those recommendations is to examine the evidence regarding the outcomes of the use of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (‘NRT’) and other approaches.

My Department requested HIQA to undertake a Health Technology Assessment (‘HTA’) of the clinical and cost effectiveness of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical smoking cessation products and services. The HTA was published in 2017 and found that all the pharmacological interventions were effective compared to no treatment and that a prescription only drug called varenicline was the most effective drug on its own. However, the HTA also found that using a combination of varenicline and NRT was the most effective pharmacological intervention and that people using this combination were over three and a half times more likely to quit than those who were in a control group and did not receive this treatment.

Group behavioural therapy, individual counselling, intensive advice and telephone support were all found to be effective behavioural interventions with group therapy found to be the most effective of these interventions. The addition of a behavioural intervention to a pharmacological intervention improved the effectiveness of the intervention.

The HTA recommended that smoking cessation services should seek to increase the uptake of varenicline, either alone or in combination with NRT, for smokers who want to use a pharmacological support.

In relation to e-cigarettes and vaping, although the HTA found that results for e-cigarettes are promising, there is currently a lack of evidence to recommend their use as a smoking ces-

sation aid and at present no e-cigarette product is licensed as a medicinal product in Ireland. The safety of e-cigarettes is an evolving area of research; while potentially safer than smoking, evidence on its long-term safety has yet to be established. In the absence of additional evidence confirming the effectiveness of e-cigarettes, the HTA recommended that the HSE smoking cessation services should seek to increase the uptake of combination NRT treatment among those for whom varenicline is contraindicated, not tolerated or not preferred.

The results of the HTA are informing the development by the HSE, in conjunction with the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee, of national clinical guidelines.

Current evidence-based means of quitting include behavioural support and pharmacotherapies. The HSE provides and promotes these safe and evidence-based services, supports and aids to help people to quit. The HSE recommends that those wishing to give up smoking uses its cessation services as the first port of call.

My Department will continue to monitor the emerging research on all products, so as to inform decisions around any future additional regulation in this area.

Hospital Services

176. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the commitment in the programme for Government to introduce cystic fibrosis beds for Beaumont Hospital will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16993/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government contains a Government commitment regarding the development of a dedicated Cystic Fibrosis (CF) Unit in Beaumont Hospital, to be progressed in the context of a CF Model of Care.

This CF Unit capital project will thus be underpinned by the “Model of Care for People with Cystic Fibrosis in Ireland” which is being developed by the National Clinical Programme for Cystic Fibrosis (NCPCF). The Model of Care will set out standards and requirements for the physical and human resources to be provided for treatment of cystic fibrosis patients from a national perspective.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform governs the processes surrounding the development of healthcare projects by way of guidelines, principally the Public Spending Code. Further rigour is demanded by, and set out in, relevant EU Directives. All proposed projects must be submitted to the HSE’s Capital and Property Steering Committee for approval and prioritisation prior to inclusion in its multi-annual Capital Plans.

In terms of the progression of the CF Unit capital project I am happy to confirm that it has been included in the National Planning Framework under Project Ireland 2040, as well as being recommended for inclusion in the capital plan by the HSE National Capital Steering Committee.

Organ Donation

177. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to bring forward a soft opt-out organ donation system; and when legislation will be introduced in this regard [16994/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government approved the preparation

of a General Scheme and Heads of a Human Tissue Bill last year. The proposed legislation will include provisions for a soft opt-out organ donation system.

Work on drafting the General Scheme is progressing and it is proposed to seek Government approval to publish the General Scheme shortly.

Medical Card Eligibility

178. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons diagnosed with cancer are not automatically being granted a medical card to alleviate the financial burden and stress during their treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16995/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE's Expert Group on Medical Need and Medical Card Eligibility examined the issue of awarding medical cards on the basis of illness and concluded that it was not feasible, desirable, nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. The Expert Group also concluded that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. This position remains unchanged.

Medical card provision is based on financial assessment. In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

Every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. It should be noted, in certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

Home Help Service Provision

179. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if allocated hours of home help service will be commenced for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17001/18]

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 Appeals

180. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a decision not to grant home help to a person (details supplied) will be reviewed with a view to making hours available in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17002/18]

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

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

181. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of the new primary care centre in Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17021/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

182. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if the salary scale for the CEO position of a section 38 agency (details supplied) in County Kildare will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17022/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2015, my Department completed a review of the appropriate salary levels for the CEOs of Section 38 funded agencies, in conjunction with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The review was carried out on foot of Recommendation No. 20 in the HSE's Internal Audit report on the remuneration of senior managers in Section 38 agencies. This recommendation stated that a review of the remuneration rates of CEOs and senior management was required for a number of organisations, particularly in the social care area, to ensure pay rates reflect the comparable size, scale and complexity of each organisation.

Completion of this banding exercise was an important stage in addressing non-compliance with Government pay policy as it provided clarity on the appropriate rate of pay for all the CEO posts in Section 38 funded agencies.

Currently, the approved rate of pay for a newly appointed CEO post in the agency referred to by the Deputy is €66,470 - €79,679.

In instances where a Section 38 organisation can demonstrate that it has attempted to fill a post but has been unsuccessful in attracting suitable applicants, there may be grounds for a

business case to be made to the HSE to seek an increase in the remuneration level payable. If the HSE were supportive, it would then be considered by my Department. Given the senior level of the post in question, sanction would also be required from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

General Practitioner Services

183. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of work to address concerns on the future availability of general practitioners nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17023/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services, especially in remote rural areas and also in disadvantaged urban areas, and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. I want to ensure that existing GP services are retained and that general practice remains an attractive career option for newly-qualified GPs.

The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,637 in 2017 and there are now 2,485 GPs contracted to the HSE under the GMS scheme compared to 2,098 in 2008. It should be noted that as of 1 March there were only 23 GMS panels that do not have a permanent GP in place – a vacancy rate of less than 1%.

In addition, the Government has also taken steps to expand GP training. In 2009, there were 120 GP training places and this year there are 194 GP training places available for the 2018 GP training intake. The Government is committed to further increasing this number to 259 places annually in future years.

Further efforts undertaken in recent years to increase the number of practicing GPs include changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS/GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday, as well as the introduction of an enhanced supports package for rural GP practices.

It is generally accepted that there is a need to modernise the current GMS contract and ensure that general practice benefits patients while providing for a viable and rewarding career for current and future GPs. The aim is to develop a contract which has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion and disease prevention and for the structured ongoing care of chronic conditions.

Engagement with GP representatives on contractual issues will commence in the coming weeks. It is important that any new contract will result in service improvements across general practice benefiting both patients and GPs.

Organic Farming

184. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the salmon hatchery operated by a company (details supplied) in County Donegal has been awarded organic status. [16838/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The certification, control and inspection of all organic operators in Ireland, including those engaged in the

production of organic farmed salmon, has been delegated in accordance with EU Regulations to a number of approved Organic Control Bodies.

The relevant Organic Control Body has confirmed that the site named is certified as an organic freshwater rearing site i.e. a hatchery.

Origin Green Programme

185. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the food producers that have been included in the Origin Green Programme while being investigated by his Department or other State agencies for breaches of statutory requirements. [16839/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Origin Green is the national sustainability programme for the Irish food and drink industry. It is a Bord Bia initiative and operated by that State Body.

Participating companies within the programme sign up on a voluntary basis. As part of the membership requirements, companies must develop a multi-annual sustainability plan with time-bound targets. This plan is then independently assessed and verified by a third party auditing and conformance body. It is then reassessed annually to ensure minimum performance requirements are being met. Should a company fail to meet these minimum standards, membership of Origin Green is revoked.

All members of Origin Green must comply with legislative requirements and evidence is sought from the independent programme auditors to ensure compliance.

Organic Farming

186. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether it is appropriate for his Department to have responsibility for the organic food programme in view of the continued designation of a company (details supplied) as an organic producer of farmed salmon despite multiple investigations by his Department into breaches of licence conditions by that operator and the payment of fees to the assessors by the operators. [16840/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The organic status of operators in the food sector here in Ireland is certified by rigorous on-going assessment undertaken on behalf of my Department by designated Organic Control Bodies. My Department remains the Competent Authority under EU regulations but has delegated the certification function to those independent control bodies, in accordance with the relevant EU regulations and in common with the practice in many other countries across the EU. The control bodies in question act under formal service agreements with my Department and are themselves subject to audit by my Department, by INAB (the Irish National Accreditation Board) and by the various EU audit authorities.

The certification process for establishing organic status, which includes regular inspection, is financed through membership-subscriptions paid by all organic operators and through a service-payment from my Department to help defray costs. Again, this is normal practice throughout the EU.

In the case of the company mentioned, recent audits undertaken as part of this certification process have given no reason to withdraw its organic status.

Aquaculture Licences

187. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the sites of a company (details supplied) that are being investigated by his Department for breaches of licence conditions; and when he expects these investigations to be completed. [16841/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is currently examining possible breaches of licence conditions in respect of three aquaculture licences held by the Company referred to by the Deputy.

These licences are in respect of the following sites:

1. Deenish (Co. Kerry)
2. Lough Swilly (Co. Donegal)
3. Roancarrig (Co. Cork)

Every effort is being made by my Department to bring these examinations to a conclusion as soon as possible. As these examinations are ongoing as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further pending completion of this process.

Fish Farming

188. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to initiate an inquiry into salmon farming here in view of the public concern regarding environmental damage to the coastal environment caused by the industry and the recent report of the Scottish Parliament stating that salmon production in that country is unsustainable and is not being sufficiently regulated. [16842/18]

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

The licensing process provides for a period of Statutory and Public Consultation. Licensing decisions are taken following the fullest consideration of all scientific, environmental, legal, engineering and public policy aspects of each application.

In addition, decisions in respect of aquaculture licensing may be appealed to the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent body established by Statute for the specific purpose of considering such appeals.

In all the circumstances, it is clear that the aquaculture licensing system in Ireland takes full account of the views and concerns of all relevant stakeholders.

Veterinary Inspection Service Administration

189. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding relocating his Department's laboratories; and the projected timeframe for completion. [16872/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following

a competitive tender process, my Department has commissioned RSM Ireland to undertake a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of options that have been proposed for the future development of the Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVLs). The team conducting the CBA includes internationally-recognised, independent experts in economic analysis and animal disease surveillance. It is expected to complete its work in mid-2018, after which a report and recommendations will be presented to me.

To date no decision has been taken in respect of the options proposed for the RVLs. My Department completed an initial consultative process with all relevant stakeholders on the options for the RVLs during the course of last year. Any decision that is made on the RVLs will be informed by both that consultative process and the outcome of the CBA.

TAMS Eligibility

190. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a requirement when applying for a TAMS grant in relation to a TAMS approved machine (details supplied) that the balance of the cost must be financed through cash; if hire purchase or a pre-authorised loan can be considered as appropriate part finance when applying for a grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16925/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Terms and Conditions of the TAMS II Schemes are very specific in advising applicants that grant aid will not be paid in respect of new equipment or investments unless full ownership has been transferred to the applicant prior to the lodgement of the payment claim. Full ownership is defined as when the applicants themselves have fully paid for the investment from their bank account.

When an approval issues to an applicant for any new investment under the TAMS Schemes this approval is subject to the applicant adhering to the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme before any grant aid is paid.

There are no plans to change the Terms and Conditions of the TAMS Scheme in respect of the issue raised.

Farm Enterprises

191. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the farm entitlements of a deceased person are paid to the deceased person's estate or if they are paid directly to the beneficiary of the farm enterprise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16930/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Inheritance Enquiry Unit in my Department provides advice and assistance and is the central point of contact for family members, legal representatives and solicitors with my Department. When a person submits a Basic Payment Scheme application to my Department for a scheme year and subsequently dies, payments due to that person are released to the representatives of the deceased. Payments are released on foot of the receipt of specified testamentary documentation. The exact documentation required will depend on the circumstances surrounding the estate of the deceased. The Inheritance Enquiry Unit advises and assists concerned parties in the process of making all necessary transfers of schemes and herd number and puts in place the legal framework to allow for the issuing of outstanding payments.

Veterinary Inspection Service

192. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when public consultation will take place on the preferred option identified by the by the strategic review working group for the future development of the Regional Veterinary Laboratories network service in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17015/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following a competitive tender process, my Department has commissioned RSM Ireland to undertake a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of options that have been proposed for the future development of the Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVLs). The team conducting the CBA includes internationally-recognised, independent experts in economic analysis and animal disease surveillance. It is expected to complete its work in mid-2018, after which a report and recommendations will be presented to me.

To date no decision has been taken in respect of the options proposed for the RVLs, including the RVL in county Sligo. My Department completed an initial consultative process with all relevant stakeholders on the options for the RVLs during the course of last year. Consultation with Department staff and external stakeholders has also been undertaken by RSM Ireland as part of the CBA process. Any decision that is made on the RVLs will be informed by these consultations and the outcome of the CBA.

Farm Improvement Scheme Payments

193. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a payment under the equine knowledge transfer scheme. [17019/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Knowledge Transfer is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves the formation of knowledge transfer groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors. Participants attend meetings of their KT Group and complete a tailored Farm Improvement Plan with their approved KT Facilitator.

The person named is a primary participant in the Knowledge Transfer Equine Programme. A reimbursement of €750 per annum is due to farmer participants who complete all scheme commitments in each year of the three year programme.

The person named has satisfied all aspects of year one of the scheme and will be included in the next round of payments to KT Equine participants which is expected to issue shortly.

Waste Management

194. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that local authorities are proactive and have adequate powers regarding the removal of abandoned vehicles on suburban roads and streets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16951/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In accordance with section 59(1) of the Waste Management Act, 1996, each local authority is responsible generally for the supervision and the enforcement of the relevant

provisions of the Waste Management Act in relation to the holding, recovery and disposal of waste within its functional area. Local authorities have specific powers under sections 55 and 56 of the Act to require measures to be taken, or to take measures directly, to prevent or limit environmental pollution caused or likely to be caused by holding, recovery or disposal of waste, and to mitigate or remedy the effects on the environment of any such activity. With regard to abandoned vehicles, Section 71 of the Waste Management Act, 1996 prohibits the abandonment of vehicles on any land, creates an offence in this regard and enables local authorities to enter on any land upon which vehicles have been abandoned to remove and store such abandoned vehicles. These vehicles may subsequently become the property of the authority, if not reclaimed by the registered owner within a period of four weeks. A local authority may also seek reimbursement of the costs for the removal and storage of abandoned vehicles from the registered owners of such vehicles.

In certain circumstances, an abandoned vehicle is also a matter for An Garda Síochána as vehicles and may be removed under Road Traffic legislation.

Broadband Service Provision

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a person (details supplied) will be connected to a broadband service via fibre optic cable recently installed by Eir; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16858/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, almost 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. Since this Government came into office almost 400,000 additional premises have access to high speed broadband. This will increase to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by the end of this year and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. The premises referred to by the Deputy is in an AMBER area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. It is therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the NBP.

With regards to the infrastructure deployment referred to by the Deputy, decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the rollout and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages.

In the interim, 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 the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are

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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 with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Internet Safety

196. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the Department that will be taking the lead role on the development and publication of the action plan on Internet safety; the timeframe for same; the processes that will be involved; if there will be a public consultation; the stakeholders that will be involved in its production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16881/18]

197. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which he will be engaging with Internet in the development of his Department's input into the action plan on Internet safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16882/18]

198. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the process by which his Department will be developing and contributing draft actions to be considered as part of the action plan on Internet safety to be published in June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16888/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 to 198, inclusive, together.

On 21 November 2017, I convened a meeting with my colleagues the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to progress the subject of digital safety for all citizens, especially children. It was agreed at that meeting that an Open Policy Debate would be the most appropriate way to progress the issue and ensure a coherent cross departmental approach.

On 8 March 2018, I hosted this debate at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham which was opened by An Taoiseach. The event was supported by five other Ministers and organised in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality; Education and Skills; Health; Business Enterprise and Innovation; Children and Youth Affairs.

Over 120 representatives from a range of stakeholders participated, including NGOs, online companies, parents' groups and young people.

An Taoiseach announced that the Government would, by June of this year, prepare an action plan on online safety. My Department is actively contributing to the preparation of that plan, which is being currently coordinated by the Department of An Taoiseach. A report on the Open Policy Debate will form one of the inputs to the plan.

Media Pluralism

199. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied regarding media diversity here; his plans to review media ownership and media control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16907/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): Media diversity in Ireland is supported by various legislation and policies. Firstly, the Broadcasting Act requires the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland to ensure the provision of open and pluralistic broadcasting services; to promote diversity in viewpoint, outlet and source, and to promote diversity in control of the more influential commercial and community broadcasting services.

One way in which the BAI achieve these goals is to assess licence applications and proposals for ownership and control changes under the BAI ownership and Control Policy 2012. Further information regarding the work of the Authority can be found on its *website*.

As a result of amendments made to the Competition Act 2002 by the Competition & Consumer Protection Act 2014, all media mergers must be notified to me as Minister. Following an assessment of the proposed media merger's impact on the plurality of media in the State, I must make a determination whether or not the proposed media merger may proceed.

The examinations of all previous proposed media mergers conducted by my Department are available on my Department's *website*, as are a number of supplementary materials and a *FAQ page* concerning the media mergers process.

The amendments to the Competition Act also require the BAI to prepare a report every three years which describes the ownership and control arrangements for media businesses in the State; describes changes to ownership and control arrangements over the previous three years, and analyses the effect of those changes on the plurality of media in the State.

The first such report "Report on Ownership and Control of Media Businesses in Ireland 2012-2014" is also available on my Department's *website*. Preparatory work on the second such report by the BAI for the period 2015-2017 is currently underway.

Social Media Monitoring

200. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions he is taking to address the issue of fake news on social media here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16909/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The dissemination of so-called "fake news" and disinformation through social media and other online platforms is currently a matter of widespread concern.

Effective, proportionate and appropriate responses to this issue will require international co-operation and agreement. In this regard, the European Commission established an *Independent High Level Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation* which reported in March 2018. The Report recognises the complexity of the issue and calls for a multi-stakeholder approach to drive greater transparency, fact-checking and media literacy in tackling online disinformation. It also recognises the importance of diverse and sustainable sources of news media and of quality journalism in this regard.

The European Commission is currently preparing a Communication in respect of an EU approach to addressing online disinformation which is expected to issue in the coming weeks.

At national level, the Government has established an interdepartmental group to consider the issues arising from recent experiences in other democratic countries with regard to the use of social media by external, anonymous or hidden third parties. It will focus on the risks arising from disinformation spread by social media and other means, particularly in respect of

safeguarding the integrity of electoral processes. My Department is represented on that group which is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach.

The BAI has produced a media literacy policy to support users in acquiring the skills to better understand how media works and to determine the accuracy and fairness of the information they receive. The BAI also supports the recently formed Irish Media Literacy Network which has 93 members, including online platforms.

I have stated on a number of occasions that one of the most effective means of tackling disinformation is to support the provision of impartial and independent news which is reliable and provides the necessary Irish perspective on news events and current affairs. In this regard, it is important to ensure that public service broadcasters are properly funded to support quality journalism and news services. We must also recognise the financial difficulty that all broadcasters are facing. This is why the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill that I have proposed provides for the introduction of a new funding scheme to offer bursaries to journalists working in local or community radio stations. The Broadcasting Bill also provides for measures that will enable a reduction in the burden of the broadcasting levy on all broadcasters, and for exempting community broadcasters from the levy altogether. In addition, I have announced my intention to seek Government approval to amend section 41(2) of the Broadcasting Act, 2009 at Committee Stage of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill, in order to remove the hourly limit on advertising for commercial radio stations. Together, these measures will contribute to mitigating the financial challenges faced by Irish broadcasters.

National Broadband Plan Data

201. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of domestic, business and other premises in Waterford city and county that are broadband enabled; the number of addresses in County Waterford that remain to receive high-speed broadband under the State intervention contract when Eir and other commercial providers have completed their planned network investments locally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16920/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, almost 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. Since this Government came into office almost 400,000 additional premises have access to high speed broadband. This will increase to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by the end of this year and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. I assume the Deputies question refers to premises in Waterford County and City which have access to high speed broadband.

Of the over 61,000 premises in Waterford County, nearly 41,500 can currently access a high speed broadband connection. By the end of this year some further 3,300 will receive this access via eir's ongoing commercial deployment. The remaining 16,500 premises will receive access to a high speed broadband connection via the State led intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages.

In the interim, 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 the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. 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 with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Road Traffic Legislation

202. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the provisions in relation to the display of tax certificates, insurance certificates and NCT certificates need to be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16951/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Motor tax, insurance and NCT discs are required to be displayed on a vehicle being used in a public place. Use includes leaving a vehicle stationary. There are no plans to review these requirements.

The Cost of Insurance Working Group, chaired by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Mr. Eoghan Murphy, T.D., in his former role as Minister of State at the Department of Finance, published a Report on the cost of motor insurance in January 2017. The Group considered the issue of the abolition of the paper-based insurance disc as part of its deliberations. The decision of the Working Group was that it was not recommending the phasing out of the paper-based insurance disc. In arriving at its conclusion, the Group noted the experience in the U.K. where vehicle excise evasion surveys carried out after the abolition of the paper motor tax disc in that jurisdiction in 2014 have found that the rate of unlicensed vehicles was much higher than had been observed prior to abolition. In terms of enforcement, the Working Group also concluded that Ireland is not yet in a position to underpin an enforcement regime where technology would be the primary method of enforcement. The Group recommended that the phasing out of the paper insurance disc should be reviewed in the future as the development of technology progresses. The continued use of the paper motor tax and NCT discs will also be kept under review in that context.

Rail Services

203. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce the Leap card on Irish Rail in County Meath. [16843/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport Fares

204. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the NTA's plans to consider rail prices in County Kildare for 2018; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [16852/18]

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. However, I am not involved in the day to day operations of public transport, nor decisions on the issue of rail fares in any part of the country. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December 2009, the NTA is the statutory body with responsibility for the regulation of fares charged by the public transport providers.

Therefore, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for direct reply. If you do not receive a response within 10 working days, please contact my private office.

Sport Ireland

205. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to address an issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16857/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Sport Ireland, under the Sport Ireland Act 2015, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport in Ireland. One of its more important functions is to act as the national anti-doping organisation (NADO) in Ireland. To that end, it provides important services in the fight against the use of illegal performance substances in sport, including testing and education. Irish anti-doping efforts are internationally renowned to be of a high standard, as Sport Ireland continues to work to ensure that the integrity of sporting competitions is maintained and all clean athletes compete on a level playing field.

In relation to the specific cases referred to by the Deputy, it is important to note that the awarding and rescinding of medals, whether immediately after competition or a number of years thereafter, is a matter for decision by the organisers of the events in question. The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) is responsible for awarding and rescinding medals in the case of the World Championships in Athletics. The IAAF's regional associations are responsible in cases of regional athletics championships.

Minister Ross and I have made clear our dissatisfaction with the chaotic situation currently in the World Anti-Doping Agency. We believe it is essential to address the clear conflict of interest that arises from having sport policy decision makers involved in the anti-doping process. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has a clear conflict of interest and should have no influence or role in the affairs of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). The status quo undermines the credibility of a system which is failing clean athletes, who dedicate their lives to sport and deserve a level playing field. We believe it is necessary for Governments to take concerted and collaborative action and we are in ongoing contact with our fellow sports ministers in this regard.

National Driver Licensing Service

206. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to assist elderly persons that do not have access to computers or broadband to book an appointment for the National Driver Licensing Service; if they will be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16859/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for

the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Rural Transport Programme

207. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the scoring system which is used when tenders and applications are being assessed for operators of the rural link service; the way in which the scoring process is weighted in terms of costing, age of vehicle, experience and local knowledge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16939/18]

208. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria in the tender process of the rural link scheme which requests that operators have a legal right to a suitable bus; the way in which this information is assessed; his views on whether there is a need for applicants to own their own vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16940/18]

209. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which the local link service monitors the usage of a primary vehicle by a successful applicant to the scheme; if there is a minimum requirement for usage time of the highlighted primary vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16941/18]

210. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the possibility of harmonising contracts on the rural link service will be investigated (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16942/18]

211. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions that have taken place between the NTA and rural link in counties Longford and Westmeath regarding service issues within the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16943/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 to 211, inclusive, together.

As I advised the Deputy in response to similar questions last January, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) which now operates under the “Local Link” brand.

In light of the NTA’s responsibilities regarding Local Link services, I have referred the Deputy’s questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Taxi Data

212. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of accessible taxis available here; his plans to increase the number of wheelchair accessible taxis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16946/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

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In order to support an increase in the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) in Ireland's SPSV fleet, licences for new taxis or hackneys will only be granted in respect of WAVs. This requirement was introduced in 2010.

To supplement this measure, the NTA administers a WAV Grant Scheme, which offers grants on a sliding scale from €2,500 to €7,500. The set amounts awarded by grants through this scheme aim to align with the cost difference in purchasing a WAV or converting a vehicle to fulfill the WAV requirements. This scheme is open to all SPSV drivers, with grants offered on a first-come-first-served basis.

The share of WAVs in our SPSV fleet is currently 8%. We are on trajectory towards meeting our goal of a 10% share by 2020. I remain committed to increasing the number of WAVs within our SPSV fleet and supporting the NTA in the administration of the WAV Grant Scheme.

In relation to your question on the number of accessible taxis available in Ireland, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

213. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policies that exist for the transferability of taxi plates including but not limited to wheelchair accessible taxis; and his plans to adjust same. [16970/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

At present, the transfer of SPSV licences is prohibited under section 14(1) of the 2013 Act which was commenced with effect from 6 April 2014. However, in the case of the death of a licence holder, section 15 of the same Act applies special provisions. In such circumstances, a SPSV licence may continue to be operated by a person who was nominated by the licence holder in advance of his or her death. I have no plans at present to adjust these provisions.

However, I was recently made aware that there have been some cases where licence holders have passed away without completing and submitting the required nomination form to the NTA. As a result, I am asking the NTA to consider raising the level of awareness around the associated nomination process and would certainly urge all SPSV licence holders to take the time to complete the nomination form as soon as possible.

Given the particular role of the Authority in these matters, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

214. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether taxi enforcement officers have enough powers; his plans for additional powers in this regard; and the number of enforcement officers in place. [16971/18]

215. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if taxi enforcement officers are available to work, inspect and enforce at night; and if so,

the extent to which they are. [16972/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 215 together.

The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA). The Authority's functions, along with the functions of taxi enforcement officers, are established under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

My Department has regular liaison meetings with the NTA regarding the full suite of the Authority's responsibilities, including the regulation of the SPSV industry and, as I understand that issues relating to enforcement powers have not been raised as a matter of concern in that context, I have as a consequence no plans to provide additional powers at this time.

As outlined above, the NTA is responsible for appointing taxi enforcement officers and issues relating to the availability of officers to work at night is a matter for them.

To be of assistance, I have referred your question to the Authority for their consideration and direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days

Taxi Regulations

216. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the regulation of rickshaws. [16973/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy may be aware, I asked the National Transport Authority (NTA) to conduct a public consultation on rickshaws last year, which concluded at the end of September. A report on the consultation, along with recommendations by the NTA, were submitted to my Department in the latter part of 2017.

My Department is now considering a range of options for regulating rickshaws from the perspective of proportionality, public safety and enforcement as well as regarding the question of costs and benefits. I intend to select a preferred approach in the near future, with any corresponding legislative provisions to be developed shortly thereafter.

Tourism Policy

217. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for investment and spending in County Longford as part of the new Hidden Heartlands tourism brand. [16985/18]

218. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for investment and spending in County Westmeath as part of the new Hidden Heartlands tourism brand. [16986/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 together.

The matter raised by the Deputy is one for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to the agency for further information and direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Eligibility

219. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a sports club that does not own the land on which it operates is adversely affected when applying for the sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17003/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment.

Over recent years, the SCP has invested several hundred million euro into sports facilities throughout the country. It is prudent for the Department to ensure that any organisation receiving capital funding can guarantee that any facilities developed with SCP funding will stay in sporting use. At application stage, such a guarantee is provided by way of a template, filled out and signed by the applicant's solicitor confirming ownership of the site where the proposed development is taking place.

Where the applicant does not own their land or have a long lease, a smaller capital grant (€25,000 in the case of the 2017 round of the SCP) can still be applied for. In these cases the property owner must fill out a template confirming continued access to property for a minimum of five years.

It is also open for any club or organisation to apply for funding for sports equipment up to the maximum level of grant (under the 2017 round of the SCP this equated to €150,000 for local projects and €200,000 for regional projects) even if the applicant does not have title to the property in question. In these cases the owner of the land is simply required to confirm that he/she has no intention of taking the facility away from the applicant for a minimum of five years.

Rail Network

220. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the planned train station in the Ashington and Pelletstown areas of Dublin 7; the precise location for the station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17052/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, work commenced last year to complete a detailed design and prepare tender documents for a new train station at Pelletstown which is located approximately mid-way between Broombridge and Ashtown railway stations.

In light of the National Transport Authority's statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for an update on the matter raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Child Protection

221. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her

views on whether her Department is adequately resourced to protect children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16847/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to the protection and welfare of children and believe that there is a moral duty on Government and on society to work together to protect children and to ensure their safety. As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I have sought to maximise the resources available for this important work and the effectiveness in the deployment of these resources.

From my Department's perspective Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. Any child who resides in Ireland and who is not receiving adequate care and protection can be received into the care of the State if deemed to be the appropriate action required. Tusla is required under the 1991 Act to investigate allegations of abuse, including historical abuse, and to engage with An Garda Síochána where appropriate. Tusla has a key role in supporting some of the most vulnerable children and young people in State care. My Department provides funding for Tusla. In 2018 it has been allocated exchequer funding of €757 million, representing an increase of €44 million on 2017. Tusla provides a comprehensive range of services and supports for vulnerable children and families. These include child welfare and protection, including family support; educational welfare; pre-school inspection and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. These services and supports are provided by Social Workers, Educational Welfare Officers, and Early Years Inspectors. The precise level of funding available to services for children is considered by Tusla in implementing its 2018 Business Plan, based on the Performance Statement. The Business Plan is available at - www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Business_Plan_2018.pdf.

Internet Safety

222. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process by which her Department will be developing and contributing draft actions to be considered as part of the action plan on Internet safety to be published in June 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16887/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can confirm that the development of an Action Plan is being coordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach, that officials from my Department are participating in the process and that actions for inclusion in the Plan are being considered as part of this process.

National Counselling Service

223. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a person has been deemed to have met the criteria for counselling with regard to counselling being provided to survivors of mother and baby institutions; the average waiting time for the first appointment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16952/18]

224. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the criteria for being eligible to receive counselling services with regard to counselling being provided to survivors of mother and baby institutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16953/18]

225. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the pro-

visions made for those that have previous to the granting of cover under the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, been attending attend their own counsellor with regard to counselling being provided to survivors of mother and baby institutions; and if there is provision for that person to continue on the counsellor client relationship that is already in existence. [16954/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 to 225, inclusive, together.

Persons affected by experiences connected to mother and baby homes may wish to contact the HSE National Counselling Service (NCS) which provides free professional, confidential counselling and psychotherapy services in all regions of the country.

Persons seeking access to this support and other health services can contact the HSELive team, on Low Call Telephone **1850 241850** from 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday 10am-5pm on Saturdays, for further information.

As the Deputy will be aware, responsibility for health services is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Health and the Health Service Executive. I do not have information in relation to the eligibility criteria or arrangements for access to individual health services.

With regard to the statutory Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters), it is important to recognise that the Commission is independent in the conduct of its investigations. Any arrangements with witnesses are a matter for the Commission and I have no role in this regard.

Separately, health and well-being supports is one of the specific areas to be examined through the Collaborative Forum process which I am establishing. I have appointed a selection panel and it has commenced the process to select representative members for the Forum. Participants in the Forum will identify and prioritise actions on issues of concern to them and their families.

I will engage with colleagues across Government in relation to the recommendations which emerge from the Collaborative Forum in the course of its work.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

226. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that under new vetting procedures organisations can no longer have all their staff and board vetted as is good practice and that roles now must be defined as having relevant work experience with children; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that there are no guidelines available as to the way in which to define roles or space on the forms to achieve this (details supplied); the way in which she plans to address these gaps in the new system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16964/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As you are aware, matters relating to Garda vetting, carried out under the National Vetting Bureau Act 2012-2016, fall under the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality. The Deputy may therefore wish to ask the Department of Justice and Equality to respond to specific queries in relation to any new vetting procedures or Garda vetting forms.

The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 to 2016 provides a legislative basis for the mandatory vetting of persons who wish to undertake certain work or activities relating to children or vulnerable persons or to provide certain services to children or

vulnerable persons.

Parts 1 and 2 of Schedule 1 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 to 2016 sets out details of relevant work or activities relating to children and vulnerable persons. Garda Vetting is conducted in respect of any person who is carrying out work or activity, a necessary and regular part of which consists mainly of the person having access to, or contact with, children or vulnerable persons. Therefore, in order to have Garda Vetting conducted, a person must fulfil the criteria as set out in the relevant legislation.

I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department and I place great importance on child protection matters. You will be aware that the remaining provisions of the Children First Act 2015 were commenced on 11th December 2017. These provisions impose statutory obligations on key professionals to report child protection concerns at or over a defined threshold to Tusla. For example, all persons running a registered early years service and those employed in them as childcare staff are mandated persons under the Act. Providers of relevant services to children must also undertake a comprehensive risk assessment of their services and prepare a Child Safeguarding Statement. A Child Safeguarding Statement is a written statement that specifies the service being provided and the principles and procedures to be observed in order to ensure, as far as practicable, that a child availing of the service is safe from harm.

The National Early Years Children First Committee, established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2013, is currently rolling out the 2018 Child Protection Plan. 60 Children First trainers are in place and are working to deliver training to early years childcare services on their requirements under the Children First legislation. To date 15,000 workers have been trained from 4,200 services.

It is everyone's responsibility to protect young people and those who are vulnerable, and Garda vetting is just one tool designed to enhance this.

Special Educational Needs

227. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a matter (details supplied) regarding the AIM scheme will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17011/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a programme of supports to enable children with a disability to access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. It was introduced in June 2016 and is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child and the pre-school setting. Level 7 of AIM provides additional assistance in the pre-school room where this is critical to ensuring a child's participation in the ECCE Programme. In line with emerging best practice to support the integration and independence of children with a disability, AIM does not fund Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). Rather, it provides financial support to the pre-school provider, which can be used either to reduce the adult to child ratio in the pre-school room by reducing the number of children in the room or to buy in additional assistance to the pre-school room. The latter is generally managed through a recruitment process if the pre-school does not have access to a staff member to fulfil this role as is the case for most smaller pre-schools. Services who intend to use AIM Level 7 support to recruit an additional person for the pre-school room, or increase hours for existing staff, must ensure that such staff hold at least a major award in early childhood care and education at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed

to be equivalent. This is in line with Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 and recognises early years care and education as a specialised area within education.

These Regulations were amended to allow for an exemption to these qualification requirements for an employee of a registered pre-school provider receiving AIM Level 7 support where it has been deemed that specialised health support is required. In limited circumstances, an exemption may be granted by Pobal where it is considered that such specialist support is required and is critical to the child's meaningful participation in the ECCE programme. Such exemptions will primarily be for children with medically complex needs. The pre-school provider would need to request an exemption during the appraisal process, or once funding has been approved prior to recruitment.

Neither Pobal nor my Department has a direct role in the recruitment of staff for pre-schools which are operated by either private or not for profit entities. While Pobal has noted a time lag for the draw down of some approved AIM Level 7 support, there are several reasons why a pre-school provider may not yet have received a Level 7 payment following approval of such support. For example, the pre-school may need to return or correct the necessary paperwork, the child's registration on the IT system used to administer Early Years funding may need to be amended, or the pre-school may be experiencing difficulty in recruiting staff. In the normal course of events, the recruitment process can take several weeks as the pre-school will have to advertise, review applications, interview candidates, carry out Garda vetting and agree a start date with the successful candidate.

Pobal has received feedback from 10 providers who reported some difficulty in implementing Level 7 support. This included issues around recruiting staff with the minimum qualification, difficulty in recruiting staff to work part-time hours and concerns around staff shortages in the wider pre-school sector. An End of Year One Review of AIM is currently underway which will include an online survey of a representative sample of pre-school practitioners. This may yield further information about recruitment under AIM Level 7.

Overall, in its first year, AIM provided 2,486 children with 4,760 varying degrees of support to ensure that they could fully participate in the ECCE programme. In the second year of AIM from September 2017 to date, AIM provided 3,795 children with 5,900 varying degrees of support to ensure that they could fully participate in the ECCE programme.

Where the 2017/2018 ECCE programme year is concerned, the following applications have been approved to date:

2,602 applications approved for Level 4 (Expert Early Years Educational Advice and Support)

Under Level 5 (Equipment and Minor Alterations), 255 applications for equipment have been approved and 34 applications for minor alterations have been approved.

Under Level 7 (Additional Assistance in the Pre-school Room), 2,196 new applications have been approved to date as well as 633 applications which rolled over from the 2016/2017 ECCE programme year.

The report of the End of Year One Review of AIM is expected in Quarter 2 of 2018.

With regard to recruitment and retention of staff in Early Years services, I am very much aware of the difficulties currently being experienced. It is clear that a major issue impacting on attrition and retention rates is the poor terms and conditions of the workforce. These relate to both pay and part time / part year contracts.

My Department and the Department of Education and Skills have committed to delivering a new workforce plan for the Early Years sector in 2018. To support this work, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs commissioned a skills forecasting model from Prospectus Consulting which will allow detailed analysis of skills needs for the sector at a national and regional level. The model is currently being finalised and will feed into the second phase of the work. The aim of the workforce plan is to examine the impact of a rapidly changing policy and practice landscape in the childcare sector in Ireland on future skills requirements so that Government can ensure that a high quality workforce is in place over the next decade. The ten year Early Years Strategy which I hope to publish later this year will also focus on how this issue can be addressed. Additional investment is required to address the pay and conditions issue. I have regularly spoken about the need to continue to invest both in the quality and affordability of childcare in this country, building on the 80% increase in investment Government has made over the last three budgets. Many efforts have already been made to begin to improve conditions. For example, from September 2018 capitation rates to childcare providers for the provision of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme will increase by 7%. The increase in capitation is targeted at increasing the quality of care and education provided through ECCE, and in particular, supporting the recruitment and retention of high quality staff.

Community Banking

228. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the public banking investigation; if the finalised report has been submitted to Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16966/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to investigate a new model of community banking for Ireland, including an investigation of the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

A project team comprising officials from my Department and the Department of Finance was established last year to progress this commitment. The project team carried out detailed research into the concept of a public banking model, with a particular focus on the Sparkassen model. In addition, a public consultation process, seeking views on the concept of a community banking model, ran for four weeks. A total of 16 replies from a range of stakeholders were received.

Additionally, there has been substantial engagement and a number of meetings held with Irish Rural Link and the Savings Bank Foundation for International Cooperation (SBFIC) - the international development wing of the Sparkassen group - on their proposal for a suggested model of local public banking in Ireland, based on the Sparkassen system.

The Departmental officials have finalised their report and have submitted their findings to the Minister for Finance and myself. I anticipate that the report will be brought to Government in the next few weeks with a view to its publication.

Invalidity Pension Data

229. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of an invalidity pension by those that are under 66 years of age and over 66 years of age respectively. [16854/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): All Invalidation Pension recipients, when they reach their 66th birthday, transfer automatically to the State Pension (Contributory) at the full rate.

At the end of March there were 57,709 people in receipt of an invalidity pension payment, of whom 57,670 were under 66 years of age. The remaining 39 recipients were people whose 66th birthday fell in their final week of receipt of Invalidation Pension before transfer to State Pension (Contributory).

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

230. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16856/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for an exceptional need payment in December 2017 for a replacement boiler. An officer of the Department wrote to the person concerned on 12/12/17 seeking details of the item to be replaced and requesting three quotations. The requested information has not been received to date. A request for the documentation will re-issue to the person concerned on 16/4/18. On receipt of requested documentation, the application will be reviewed and a decision will issue to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance Payments

231. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if the threshold for the lower 8.5% class A rate of employer PRSI was increased from €376 to €400. [16868/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The National Training Fund Levy (NTFL), collected alongside Employer PRSI for Classes A and H, increased by 0.1% from 0.7% to 0.8% from 1 January 2018. This means that Employer rates (combined PRSI and NTFL) for Classes A and H increased by 0.1% from 1 January 2018.

Currently, Class A employers pay PRSI at the rate of 8.6% where weekly earnings are between €38 and €376. Once weekly earnings exceed €376, the rate of employer PRSI is 10.85%.

The cost to social insurance fund of raising the weekly 8.6% threshold to €400 is provided in the table.

-	Cost
Higher rate threshold	€400
Cost	€7.1m
Employments affected	29,279

These estimates are based on the latest available data and reflect macro-economic indicators for 2018. It should be noted that the estimates do not take possible changes in employer behaviour arising from changing rate thresholds into account.

Telephone Support Allowance

232. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the qualifying criteria for the telephone allowance due to be reinstated in October 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16914/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The new weekly Telephone Support Allowance (TSA) of €2.50 will be paid from June 2018. People in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance will automatically qualify for the TSA. It is expected that approximately 124,176 customers will qualify for the scheme and the estimated full year cost is €16.14 million.

The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security. The allowance will also encourage social contact and assist in the prevention of social isolation for those living alone.

The criteria for the TSA are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. Fuel Allowance is a means tested payment and these criteria will ensure that the TSA payment goes to those most at risk of social isolation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Offices

233. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if arrangements have been made to find alternative accommodation in Dunleer, County Louth for the community welfare clinic in view of the recent closure of the social welfare office in Dunleer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16929/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As you are aware, my Department operated an outreach Community Welfare Service (CWS) clinic from HSE premises in Dunleer each Wednesday from 10am to 12 noon. On 21st March 2018, the HSE informed the Department that the condition of the building had rapidly deteriorated and now posed a serious Health & Safety risk to customers and staff. Local management had no option but to immediately suspend the outreach service. My Department took immediate steps to minimise any inconvenience to customers. Other social protection services, such as job-seeker payments are dealt with by Drogheda Intreo Centre, and Ardee Branch Office. Notices were posted directing CWS customers to the Drogheda Intreo Centre which is 15km away and on a main bus route. The CWS service there is available on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week, and from Ardee Health Centre on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Customers have been provided with a phone service staffed by experienced CWS personnel in Drogheda and Ardee. If a customer is unable to visit the centres, for example due to illness, arrangements can be made to conduct a home visit.

The Department is closely monitoring the impact of the closure. While it is early days, the new arrangements appear to be working quite well. No customer complaints have been received and feedback on the telephone service has been very positive. The majority of queries have been fully resolved over the phone and customers have been happy to have avoided otherwise unnecessary visits to the old clinic in Dunleer. For example:

- On 28th March, of the 6 calls received, 4 were for information, with only 2 customers requiring a meeting with the Designated Person (DP).

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- On 4th April, of the 6 calls received, 5 were for information, 1 required a meeting with the DP.

- Week ended 13th April 7 calls received, 6 for information and 1 required a meeting with DP.

The HSE does not intend to renovate the premises in Dunleer but my Department is currently examining the feasibility of providing the CWS service from other premises in Dunleer as well as exploring other options to enhance the provision of CWS services across the County.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Telephone Support Allowance

234. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the telephone allowance payment scheme will commence; and the date the first payment will be issued. [16955/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The new weekly Telephone Support Allowance (TSA) of €2.50 will be paid from June 2018. People in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance will automatically qualify for the TSA. It is expected that approximately 124,176 customers will qualify for the scheme and the estimated full year cost is €16.14 million.

The first payment of the TSA is planned to issue in the week beginning the 4th June.

The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security. The allowance will also encourage social contact and assist in the prevention of social isolation for those living alone.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

235. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance has been awarded to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16956/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 29 December 2016. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this lady was substantially restricted in taking up employment. It was also refused on habitual residency as she was not found to be habitually resident in the state. The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 5 April 2017.

An appeal was lodged with the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). On 14 September 2017 the SWAO notified the person concerned that her appeal was allowed on medical grounds but the decision regarding habitual residency was upheld.

A review of the SWAO decision was requested by this lady's solicitor on 28 September 2017 regarding the habitual residence condition. A review was carried out by the SWAO and a

letter issued to this lady's solicitor on 15 November 2017 stating that the appeal decision was unchanged.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

236. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to alter the State pension qualification criteria to ensure that all persons that have had periods outside of the PAYE system or that have been homemakers for a period of time are entitled to a full State pension; and her further plans for changes which would allow greater entitlements for persons with self employed contributions. [16984/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The State pension (contributory) is a contributory pension, as exists in most developed countries, where people qualify based on a social insurance record, and credited contributions where appropriate. It is based, therefore, on contributions under the PRSI system, and not to income tax collected under the PAYE system. People with no such social insurance record may qualify for a means-tested State pension (non-contributory), paid at up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate. Over 70% of such pensioners qualify for that pension at its maximum rate.

Awarding a maximum rate contributory rate pension to all pensioners with periods outside the PRSI system would effectively remove the pensions-related benefit of paying PRSI, and would also result in very considerable additional costs to the pension system, which would require either very significant cuts either in the rate of payment, or substantial increases in the PRSI and/or income tax paid by workers, or diversion of other expenditure. Given that the main beneficiaries would be better off pensioners (who do not qualify for a non-contributory pension) and those who lose out would be people who either are solely dependent upon the State pension, or are working age people (who have higher rates of poverty than those aged over 66), this would be a regressive move, and also one which made the State pension system – which already faces significant sustainability challenges – unsustainable in the long term, endangering the future pensions of current workers who are paying for today's pensions in their PRSI and taxes. I do not, therefore, propose to make the change suggested in the Deputy's question.

PRSI contributions can be credited to people in a number of contexts, for example when in receipt of a Jobseekers or Illness benefit payments. Where applicable, these may be used towards PRSI-based social protection payments, including the State pension contributory. To qualify for a credit you must have worked and paid at least one PRSI contribution at PRSI Class A, B, C, D, E, or H and have paid or credited contributions in either of the last two completed tax years. Not all credits are reckonable for a State pension (contributory).

A new Total Contributions Approach to determining the level of pay for recipients of the State Pension (contributory) affected by the 2012 rate band changes was agreed by the Government in January. Under this approach a person who reached pension age after 1st September 2012 and has a 40 year record of paid and credited reckonable social insurance contributions, will qualify for a maximum contributory pension where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme. Up to 20 years of a new HomeCaring credit, and/or 10 years of other credits, for example when unemployed or ill, may be used, subject to the total number of credits not exceeding 20 years. So, for example, a person might receive a maximum pension based on 20 years paid PRSI contributions, 5 years jobseeker credits, and 15 years HomeCaring Credits, over a 50 year period. Invalidity pensioners and, in most cases, Widows contributory pensioners will continue to generally qualify for a full pension. Instructions for legislation to give

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effect to this change are currently being set out. When drafted, the legislation will be brought forward at the next available opportunity.

Plans for legislation to introduce a Total Contribution Approach for all new pensioners for 2020 onwards will be brought to Government following public consultation later this year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Housing Issues

237. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has had correspondence or meetings with representative estate agents bodies on the matter of persons queueing over a number of nights to bid on houses; and his views on whether this is an acceptable practice. [16880/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have not had correspondence from, or meetings with, estate agents representative bodies on the matter of persons queueing to purchase houses. However, the delivery of more affordable homes, to buy or rent, is a major priority for Government, focusing in particular on those people on low to moderate incomes. Recognising that housing affordability is a major issue for some households, especially in areas such as Dublin, Cork and Galway, several important initiatives have already been implemented to stimulate housing supply at more affordable prices and rents.

Rebuilding Ireland has prioritised supporting the supply of new and more affordable homes more generally through, inter alia, fast-track planning reforms and more flexible planning guidelines; €200 million investment in enabling infrastructure to enable access to key development sites; the development of large-scale mixed-tenure projects on State lands; and the help-to-buy scheme to assist first-time buyers.

In Budget 2018, the Government removed significant obstacles to building more homes more quickly, by investing more in direct house-building by the State; removing the Capital Gains Tax incentive to hold on to residential land; escalating penalties for land hoarding; introducing a new €25 million Serviced Sites fund and a second LIHAF infrastructural investment fund; and providing a new, more affordable finance vehicle for house building through Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFi).

To help renters in the parts of the country where rents are highest and rising, the Government introduced Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs), where rents can only increase by a maximum of 4% annually for three years. Currently, the measure covers almost 57% of existing rental properties across the country, including 100% of rental properties in Dublin and Cork.

As part of the review of Rebuilding Ireland, a further package of affordability measures was announced on 22 January 2018, with a new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, a new Affordable Purchase Scheme, and a focus on advancing cost rental projects. More recently, I published new planning guidelines last month to facilitate delivery of a broader mix of apartment types to meet contemporary housing demand, including in the emerging 'build to rent' and 'shared accommodation' sectors.

While these actions are having an impact and will have a greater impact in time, I consider that a further package of targeted measures focused on addressing affordability is needed to enable low- to moderate-income households, that do not qualify for social housing supports, to purchase or rent homes, particularly in Dublin and other major urban areas. This will include, but will not be limited to, the deployment of the aforementioned €25 million Exchequer fund-

ing, over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority-owned lands specifically for affordable housing. My Department is currently drawing up the criteria for access to this fund, taking account of broader policy on affordable housing, and will be seeking submissions from local authorities in the coming weeks.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

238. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the criteria for the position of senior staff officer in the finance department in Carlow County Council is established; the way in which an applicant (details supplied) who is employed in the Central Bank would not make the initial qualifying criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16921/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

The qualifications outlined in the advertisement for the post concerned are the declared qualifications as agreed by my Department in consultation with representatives of the Local Government sector in 2003.

Recruitment in the sector is undertaken through a mixture of internal competitions and open competitions. In open competitions candidates may apply irrespective of their place of work and will be assessed against the published criteria. A set proportion of posts are filled on an open competition basis. In addition, posts at some management levels are filled solely through open competition.

In internal competitions in the Local Government sector, only candidates from a range of public sector bodies, what is called the Common Recruitment Pool, may apply. The Central Bank is not within the Common Recruitment Pool. Candidates from the Central Bank may only apply for Local Authority posts being filled through an open competition.

Building Regulations

239. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to ensure that at least 10% of all new builds will be wheelchair liveable; the steps he is taking to ensure that accessible and liveable accommodation is being constructed and made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16944/18]

240. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has met with disability advocates regarding increasing numbers of accommodation units that are wheelchair liveable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16945/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English) (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 and 240 together.

My Department is in regular contact with disability advocates and my colleague Minister Murphy has met with them on the specific issue referenced by the Deputy.

One of the key measures achieved in 2016 under the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD), which has been extended to 2020, was the establishment of Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) in all housing authority areas, to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a disability at local level. These are chaired by Directors of Housing in each authority and include HSE and disability representative organisations. Each HDSG has prepared a local Strategic Plan for its own City/County area, to develop specific local strategies to meet identified and emerging need over the next five years. These Plans, along with the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments, will allow local authorities to plan more strategically for the housing needs of people with a disability and will support the delivery of accommodation using all appropriate housing supply mechanisms. This is a more targeted and responsive way to meet actual need identified rather than designating a specific percentage or number of new social housing builds that are fully wheelchair accessible.

New buildings and extensions or material alterations to existing buildings must comply with the legal minimum performance standards set out in the Building Regulations 1997 - 2017. In this context, the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010, and the accompanying Technical Guidance Document M – Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, set out the minimum statutory requirements that a building must achieve in respect of access. The TGDs are available on my Department's website at www.housing.gov.ie/housing/building-standards/tgd-part-d-materials-and-workmanship/technical-guidance-documents.

The requirements of Part M aim to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

- new buildings other than dwellings are accessible and usable;
- extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;
- material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;
- certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings where practicable; and
- new dwellings are visitable.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages building owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions, where practicable and appropriate.

Guidance on how to design, build and manage buildings and spaces so that they can be readily accessed and used by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability or disability is available in 'Building for Everyone, A Universal Design Approach', a National Disability Authority (NDA) publication, which may be accessed at www.nda.ie.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

241. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review the income guidelines for local authority housing lists in view of rental in-

creases. [17020/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

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

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports has commenced and I expect the results of this review to be available for publication in late Summer 2018.

Local Authority Housing

242. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he will take in relation to the requests from Dublin City Council following the receiver seeking to reduce the amount of social housing in the Poolbeg SDZ; if all materials, correspondence and records related to the Poolbeg SDZ within his Department will be released; and if he will attend Dublin City Council to answer questions from councillors on this issue. [17055/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The development of the Poolbeg Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) will, subject to a decision of An Bord Pleanála to approve the detailed planning scheme drawn up by the City Council and the subject of a current appeal, be subject to the provisions of Part V of the Planning Act which will deliver some 350 social housing units.

Taking account of wider Government policy in the context of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness and specifically the encouragement of mixed-tenure developments and the delivery of social housing by a variety of means, including but not restricted to Part V on privately owned lands such as the SDZ area, my Department has consistently pointed to both the local authority and the owners of this site to engage in order to ensure the level of social housing delivered on this site is far in excess of what would be ordinarily delivered through Part V of the Planning Act and in line with the spirit of the City Council's decision in approving the Planning Scheme that there be of the order of 900 units provided for social and affordable housing.

For example, the observations made by my Department on the draft scheme, which are available as part of the background papers in relation to the preparation of the planning scheme, made the above points very clearly but also signalled that there could be no compulsion about such matters and that such arrangements would have to be progressed in the context of an agreement that would detail the various funding, delivery and value for money considerations that apply in the ordinary course of such matters, parallel to but separate from the finalisation and consideration of the planning merits of the scheme.

However, in its decision on the adoption of the planning scheme, my Department understands that Dublin City Council moved towards a more mandatory approach and that it is es-

entially this aspect which has given rise to the appeal.

It is ultimately a matter for the Board to determine this appeal and neither I nor my Department can be involved in the case.

Notwithstanding the appeal process and subject to the Board's ultimate decision, I and my Department remain committed to working with both the City Council, any relevant housing bodies (AHB's) and either the receiver and/or developers of the SDZ area in order to secure additional social and affordable housing from this site over and above Part V obligations and of the order of magnitude laid out in the adopted planning scheme, but subject to agreement on all the normal and relevant terms, including value for money aspects.

Furthermore, it is my Department's understanding that the receiver is engaging with Dublin City Council with a view to advancing an approach that would both better enable the orderly development of this strategic but complex to develop city location and assist in delivering much needed additional social housing. My Department stands ready to support such initiatives, subject to observance of all the normal value-for-money, procurement and wider legal aspects.

The current legal situation is that no local authority can compel owners of private land to hand over specified numbers of social houses through the development plan process, over and above the requirements of Part V of the Planning Act, or set objectives for delivery of same without the relevant costs and their attribution being agreed and determined through the appropriate processes. It is therefore for the relevant parties using the array of social housing delivery mechanisms supported by my Department, including capital and current funded programmes delivered through the local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, to realise the potential for this site, including enhanced social housing delivery.

I remain confident that a resolution will be reached in the short term to pave the way for the development of Poolbeg West SDZ in a manner which realises the much needed housing mix that it promises to deliver. Whatever the result of the hearing currently underway, I have assured the local community of my continued commitment to delivering the commitments regarding social and affordable housing that have been agreed.

As regards the release of records held by my Department in relation to the SDZ, as indicated above some of these are already publicly available as part of the process leading to the adoption of the SDZ planning scheme and, of course, my Department is a public body subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

Ministerial Meetings

243. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she last met and will next meet a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16963/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I have met the person concerned on a number of occasions since I was appointed as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and both myself and my officials maintain ongoing contact with Chairs and Directors of bodies under the aegis of my Department as appropriate.