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agus Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Employment Affairs
and Social Protection

Ministerial Brief Part b

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DELIVERY OF SCHEMES & SERVICES

Schemes and Payments

One of the major objectives of the social protection system is to redistribute income collected through taxation and social insurance charges via social transfers. Social transfers are important both in enabling income to be directed towards addressing the particular contingencies that may arise during the claimant's life cycle (e.g. unemployment, illness, caring and disability-related payments) and in ensuring an equitable distribution of income (e.g. the working family payment). In addition to mitigating the impact of specified contingencies, payments made by the Department may also be structured to incentivise activities that will reduce reliance on welfare. For example, jobseekers under the age of 25 receive a higher rate of payment if they participate in training/education. Employment is also incentivised through the use of tapered rates of payment (e.g. in the case of the Back to Work Family Dividend payment) and income disregards (e.g. in the case of the One Parent Family payment).

The broad range of payments outlined in this section – whether universal (Child Benefit), means-tested (e.g. Jobseeker's Allowance, State Pension Non-contributory) or based on social insurance contributions (e.g. Jobseeker's Benefit, State Pension Contributory) - play a vital role in delivering all of these objectives.

Social transfers in Ireland have been shown to be highly effective in alleviating poverty, as demonstrated in a 2013 ESRI study commissioned by the Department. It showed that social transfers significantly reduced the pre-transfer poverty rate (those who are poor before social transfers but not poor after social transfers).

When viewed in a comparative context, it is clear also that social transfers play a more significant role in Ireland than in most other countries. The most recent poverty data from the 2018 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (published by the CSO in November 2019) showed that social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 30.2% before social transfers to 14% after social transfers. This equates to a poverty reduction effect of almost 54% in 2018, ensuring Ireland remains one of the best performing EU countries in reducing poverty through social transfers.

(i) Child Income Support

Assistant Secretary (Policy): Rónán Hession *Principal Officer (Policy): John O'Toole*

- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection makes a number of payments to families with children.
    - Child Benefit (CB);
    - Working Family Payment;
    - Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA);
    - Guardian's Payment Scheme (contributory and non-contributory);
    - Domiciliary Care Allowance;
    - Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC). Most weekly social welfare payments include an additional payment in respect of each qualified child up to age 18, which is extended to encompass older school/college going children to age 22 under certain circumstances.

In the past five years, the rates of IQCs for children have been as follows:

Age Of Child	2009	2010-2017	2018	2019	2020
Under 12	€26	€29.80	€31.80	€34	€36
Over 12	€26	€29.80	€31.80	€37	€40

In recognition of the higher costs faced by families with older children, a higher rate for children aged over 12 was introduced in Budget 2019 and further increased in Budget 2020. In addition, DEASP funds the School Meals Programme.

Expenditure on child related payments is estimated to be almost €2.6 billion in 2020 (excluding increases for qualified children), of which over €2.1 billion relates to Child Benefit. Expenditure on families with children represents over 12% of total Departmental expenditure in 2020. The overall trend for the past five years is as follows:

Year	Child Benefit Expenditure (€billion)	Expenditure on Children (€billion)	Total Departmental Expenditure (€billion)	% of total spend
2020	€2.119*	€2.662*	21.20*	12.56
2019	€2.102**	€2.632**	20.80**	12.65
2018	€2.097	€2.632	20.40	12.90
2017	€2.086	€2.621	20.10	13.04
2016	€2.078	€2.594	19.90	13.04

**Estimate; **provisional*

The reduction in the percentage share of total spend account for by payments to children reflects the increase in pension related payments.

Child Poverty - Headline statistics

- The main measure of poverty used in Ireland is known as **consistent poverty**. This measure combines two separate measures - **at-risk-of-poverty** (the percentage of people whose income is less than 60% of the equivalised median income) and **basic deprivation** (the percentage of people who report that they are deprived of any two of eleven basic items (e.g. owning two pairs of strong shoes, being unable to replace worn-out furniture)). The consistent poverty rate measures those people who are both at risk of poverty and suffer from basic deprivation.

- The latest figures measuring poverty, including child poverty, are from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) for 2018. (This survey is generally published one year in arrears and is based on information relating to income over the previous two years). These figures show that the rate of consistent poverty among children has fallen to 7.7 per cent from 8.8 per cent in 2017 (2017 data covers income received in 2017 and 2018). The overall trend since 2013 is as follows:

Children At risk of poverty, Deprivation, and Consistent Poverty

SILC Data 2013-2018

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Children at risk of poverty rate	17.9%	18.6%	19.5%	19.3%	18.4%	15.9%
Child Deprivation	37.3%	36.1%	31.4%	25.2%	23.0%	19.7%
Children in Consistent poverty	11.7%	11.2%	11.5%	11.1%	8.8%	7.7%

- By comparison, the overall risk of poverty rate for the population as a whole is 14%, the population deprivation rate is 15.1% and the population consistent poverty rate is 5.6%. Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2018

- If the data is unpacked, it can be seen that child poverty rates are closely associated with the percentage of people living in lone parent households, and to the relatively low employment rate of lone parents in Ireland (64% vs an EU average of 74%). This gap in employment rates is particularly marked among female lone parent household (60% vs EU average of 72%) The employment rate among male lone parent households in Ireland (82%) is closer to the EU average for male lone parents (84%).

Child Poverty Target

- The policy target in recent years has been to reduce the number of children in consistent poverty by at least two-thirds of the 2011 level by 2020. Applying the target means that by the end of 2020 (data not available until 2022), the number of children in consistent poverty would have to be reduced to 37,000.

- The 2018 consistent poverty rate for children of 7.7% equates to some 92,000 children. Therefore, meeting the 2020 target means lifting a further 55,000 children out of poverty over the period 2019 to 2020. Even though the full benefit of the growing economy (until the public health crisis from Covid-19) and the increases introduced in more recent Budgets (which have targeted lone parent households and households with children in particular) has yet to be seen, it is unlikely that the target will be met. This is primarily because the measure of consistent poverty is a relative measure that moves year on year as a result of change in median income – as incomes increase generally, the level of income required to exceed the poverty threshold also increases.

- The challenge Ireland faces in trying to achieve the child poverty target needs some perspective: at the height of the economic boom in 2008, when the consistent poverty rate for children was its lowest, there were 68,000 children in consistent poverty. So, in

order to meet the target, Ireland will have to be more than twice as effective as our best ever performance to date.

- Given the challenge faced, recent budgets have included measures specifically aimed at supporting families on low incomes through increases in qualified child rates, including the introduction of separate rates for children aged under and over 12, increases in earnings disregards for One Parent Family and Jobseeker Transitional payments, increases in the income thresholds for Working Family Payment, the introduction of a maintenance disregard for Working Family Payment as well as an increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

- These increased supports should result in further decreases in the child poverty rates once the next SILC data becomes available at the end of 2020. The impact of the Covid-19 employment shock will not be reflected in SILC data until 2021. However, based on early ESRI analysis, it is expected that the PUP and TWSS schemes will have mitigated the impact for most low income families. Given that poverty measures are influenced by movements in median incomes, the overall impact will depend on how median income levels have been affected by the pandemic.

- CSO data from May 2020 show that low levels of the population report financial difficulties as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, with only 3% of the population aged 15 years and over reporting that they are unable to pay bills, 5% deferring bills and 2% reporting rent or mortgage payment difficulties.

- While social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and Ireland is among the best performing EU States for reducing poverty through social transfers, tackling child poverty is not just about income supports and welfare. Rather, it is also about supporting parents to make the transition into employment and assisting families through the provision of quality affordable services in areas such as education, health, housing and childcare.

- The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025 sets out the range of policy measures across government departments that are designed to address poverty and social exclusion. The focus of the Roadmap is on building social inclusion, using an expanded approach that moves beyond the traditional focus on income poverty. The Roadmap commits to establishing and reporting on a new target in respect of child poverty, to improve Ireland's ranking from 20th to at least 5th for the reporting year of 2025. This will be equivalent to reducing the percentage of children under 18 years of age at risk of poverty and social exclusion from 23.9 per cent to 16 per cent.

Budget 2020 impact on children

- The full list of Budget 2020 measures is outlined in Part A of this Brief. The main changes include:

- €3 increase for qualified **child dependants** aged 12 and over (€37 to €40) and €2 increase for qualified child dependants up to age 12 (€34 to €36) in all weekly payments from January 2020.
- **Working lone parents –** earnings disregard for working lone parents in receipt of One-Parent Family payment or Jobseeker's Transitional Payment increased by €15 to €165 per week.
- **Working Family Payment threshold –** increase of €10 per week in the income thresholds for families with up to three children.

- Child poverty rates in Ireland are closely correlated with household joblessness – particularly in single parent households. Overall levels of income inequality are also strongly correlated with the level of joblessness among single parent households, in particular among those households headed by a woman. More single adult households in Ireland are also lone parent households (31%) than is the case in the EU generally (18%) and Irish employment rates for lone parents of approximately 64% are ten percentage points lower than the EU average.

- A key policy objective is, therefore, to encourage and support parents into employment. Measures introduced in recent years, including the introduction of the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment, have sought to address this issue. Recent budgets have sought to continue this policy by increasing the income disregards (i.e. the amount of money people in receipt of a welfare payment can earn without affecting their payment) for recipients of the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transitional Payment.

- In addition, the Working Family Payment and the Back to Work Family Dividend payment continue to support parents to take up and remain in employment, especially those furthest from the labour market.

- Budget 2019 saw the introduction of the hot school meal pilot at a cost of €1m. Budget 2020 provided for the extension of the hot meals scheme, with the total scheme expenditure increasing to €61.6m in 2020. This extension, to an additional 30,000 primary children already receiving the cold lunch option, has been deferred to January 2021 due to the uncertainty around schools re-opening for the 2020/21 school year.

- As a result of COVID-19, all schools were closed from 13th March 2020. A government decision was taken in March to allow schools to use funding under the school meals programme to provide food packs to children in disadvantaged households to the end of the school year.

Child Benefit

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Tony Kieran*

- Child Benefit is a monthly payment to the parents or guardians of children under 16 years of age, or under 18 years of age where the child remains in full time education, Youthreach training or where the child has a disability. It is a universal payment with no social insurance or means conditions attached but applicants must continue to satisfy the habitual residence condition.

- In 2019, the total cost of Child Benefit was €2.1 billion which was paid to some 637,000 families in respect of 1.2 million children.

- Child Benefit is payable at €140 per month per child with higher rates applying to twins and other multiple births.

- Claims are processed promptly, with the average processing time recorded as two weeks for new claims (December 2019). Where a family is already in receipt of payment and they register the birth of an additional child, their Child Benefit will automatically be increased to take this into account. The legislation governing Child Benefit (since 1974) provides that the payment should be made to the mother. This was seen as a progressive step, at that time, in terms of enhancing the status of women.

Child Benefit Control

- As with all schemes, DEASP operates a Child Benefit control programme to ensure that it is paid only to families who continue to have an entitlement to the benefit. The main aspect of control is certification, whereby customers are issued with continuing eligibility certificates which they are required to return within a (28 day) time limit.

- 22,371 customers have had their payment stopped over the period from 2015 to the end of 2019 because they did not provide certification of continuing eligibility. This is an average of 4,474 claims stopped per year.

- Some 240,090 reviews were undertaken in 2019, with associated savings of €61.85 million. A review of the continuing eligibility certificates was conducted in 2019 and during the review process no certificates were issued. Certificates recommenced issuing in February 2020. Issuing of certificates was again suspended temporarily due to the issues arising with COVID 19, but it is planned to re-commence in late June 2020.

- The Data Protection Commissioner (DPC) has initiated an inquiry into the use of the certificates.

Child Benefit Payments to Foreign Nationals

- EU/EEA citizens and Swiss nationals working in Ireland qualify for Child Benefit under EU Regulations and do not have to satisfy the habitual residence condition. Their children

may be resident either here or in their home countries. In 2019, €13.1m was paid in respect of approximately 7,637 non-resident children and 4,281 customers.

- Parents, where the children are resident abroad, are required to confirm their continued entitlement to benefit every six months. The confirmation includes a statement from the customer's employer, confirming that the person is still employed in Ireland.

Working Family Payment (formerly Family Income Supplement)

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Christine Gilligan*

- Working Family Payment (WFP) provides support for employees with families on low earnings. The payment is provided tax-free and is paid weekly to approximately 53,100 families in respect of 120,000 children.

- Estimated expenditure on WFP in 2020 approximately €402m. The average weekly payment made to families is currently estimated at €133 per week.

- 23,878 applications for WFP were received in 2019. The COVID-19 outbreak has seen a significant reduction in the number of applications for WFP. Up to the end of May, 6,854 applications were received, a reduction of 33% compared to the same period last year.

- The average time to award a new WFP claim in May 2020 was 1 week. This compares to an average of 6 weeks in 2019.

- WFP is calculated on the basis of 60% of the difference between the income limit for the family size and the weekly family income of the person(s) raising the children. Weekly family income for WFP purposes is net assessable earnings from employment, income from self-employment or any other source.

- To qualify for payment, a person should be engaged in paid employment as an employee which is expected to last for at least three months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with him/her or is part of a family supported by him/her.

- An integral part of the WFP scheme is that once the level of payment is determined, that rate continues to be payable for a period of 52 weeks, provided that the person remains in employment (i.e. it does not vary over the year if income changes). This stability in the payment rate allows for more effective family budgeting. The exceptions to this rule are where there is an additional child born during that period or following the termination of One-Parent Family Payment due to the youngest child reaching the relevant age.

- Income threshold limits to qualify for a Working Family Payment are:

If you have:	And your weekly family income is less than:
One child	€531
Two children	€632
Three children	€733
Four children	€834
Five children	€960
Six children	€1,076
Seven children	€1,212
Eight or more children	€1,308

- Recent analysis undertaken by this Department showed that existing in-work supports, in particular the Working Family Payment and the Back to Work Family Dividend, are very effective, and work well in assisting individuals to make the transition from unemployment into employment[1].

Guardian's Payment Scheme (contributory and non-contributory)

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Nora Durcan*

- The Guardian's Payment is made to a person taking care of a child whose parents are dead or who have abandoned and failed to provide for the child. It is not necessary for the guardian to be appointed by the Courts to qualify for payment.
- Guardian's Payment can be contributory (based on PRSI contributions paid by the parent) or non-contributory (based on a means test of the child) and the payment rate is €186 per week.
- At the end of 2019, there were 1,738 people receiving Guardian's Payments in respect of 2,563 children (1,188 contributory and 550 non-contributory).
- Expenditure for 2019 was €23m (€15.6m contributory, €7.4m non-contributory).
- Guardian's Payments applications take on average eight weeks to decide. As the involvement of a Social Welfare Inspector is usually required, along with a Social Worker (usually), some cases may take longer to process.

[1] Review of the Operation of the Working Family Payment, DEASP (2018).

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Des Henry*

- The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) scheme is a non-statutory scheme which provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of school clothing and footwear when children start school each autumn.
- €153 million has been provided for the scheme in 2020. In 2019, 143,150 families in respect of 263,400 children benefitted from the scheme at a cost of €53.5 million.
- The allowance is €150 for children between the ages of 4 and 11 years and €275 for children between 12 and 22 years. Children aged over 18 must be attending second level education to qualify.
- 2019 was the first year applicants could apply for the Back to School Footwear & Allowance Scheme online at www.mywelfare.ie. 7,903 applicants availed of this option. For 2020, all customers are encouraged to apply online.
- The scheme will open for online applications on 6th July and close on 30th September. Any customer that cannot make an application online should contact the section for a paper application.
- Approximately 110,000 customers on a qualifying payment who satisfy all the qualifying conditions will be identified by 28th June, notified by 6th July and paid automatically during the week ending 17th July. These customers will not be required to complete an application.
- For recipients of the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) who may not satisfy the means criteria for the allowance, these applications will be held by the scheme and reviewed if their eligibility for the payment changes prior to closing date for applications.

School Meals Programme

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Des Henry*

- The School Meals Programme provides funding towards the provision of food services to some 1,580 schools and organisations and benefits 250,000 children. The estimated cost in 2020 is €61.6m.
- Funding is strictly for food items only, which must be of suitable nutritional quality. Funding under the scheme is based on a maximum rate per child per day, depending on the type of meal being provided (e.g. €1.40 per child per day where lunch is being provided).

- Priority for funding under the scheme is given to schools which are part of the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS). Since 2016, additional funding is available to all DEIS schools to provide breakfast and lunch to the majority of pupils. In Budget 2019, it was announced that DEASP would commence a pilot scheme, providing Hot School Meals in 37 primary schools at a cost of €1m for 2019 and €2.5m in 2020.

- An evaluation of the hot school meals pilot is being undertaken to determine if the pilot has been successful. Early indications from this pilot project are very positive.

- Budget 2020 provided for an extension of the hot school meals option from September 2020 to a further 35,000 primary school children currently receiving the cold lunch option. Due to Covid-19, this extension of hot meals is being delayed to January 2021.

- During the public health crisis, the Department ensured that funding to schools would continue to enable schools provide food until the end of the current school year.

Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA)

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Tony Kieran*

- DCA is a monthly payment (€309.50) to parents of children with a significant disability, in recognition of the burden of providing the required level of additional and continuous care.

- The scheme is not means tested, nor is it linked to social insurance contributions.

- The Carer's Support Grant is also automatically payable to DCA recipients. Nearly 60% of recipients of DCA are also in receipt of the Carer's Allowance.

- The cost of the scheme in 2019 was €182m (plus €76m on the associated Carer's Support Grant). In December 2019, there were 41,939 customers in receipt of DCA in respect of some 46,223 children.

- Given the broad nature of the disabilities covered (including ADHD and autism spectrum disorders) and the absence of any social insurance requirement or means test, claim volumes are increasing year on year. In 2019, 8,719 claims were received, up from 8,609 in 2018 and 8,197 in 2017. Following the full application process (i.e. the initial application, the provision of further medical information by the applicant, revised decisions and appeals) over 80% of applications are allowed.

- The processing target is to have 90% of claims decided within 10 weeks. 71% of claims were processed in 2019 within that timeframe. This has improved over recent months, with over 90% of claims processed and finalised within 10 weeks.

- There has been a small drop off in the number of new claims received in 2020 to date (around 300 less in the year to date compared to last year) which may be attributable to the COVID-19 public health crisis. A small number of customers have cited difficulty getting access to specialists and consultant reports but these have been encouraged to submit claims and assured that the Department will revert if additional information is required.

(ii) Working Age

The Department provides a range of working-age payments for people, aged between 18 and 66, who meet the required contingency (e.g. unemployment, parenting alone, maternity etc.) at an approximate cost in 2019 of some €2.9 billion.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Jackie Harrington*

- Jobseeker's Allowance is a social assistance scheme. To qualify, a claimant must be unemployed (for at least four days out of seven consecutive days), be capable of work, be available for and genuinely seeking full-time work, satisfy the means test and meet the habitual residence condition.

Year (December)	Jobseekers Allowance Recipients	Change in number of recipients from previous year	% Change
2015	246,537	23,414	-8.7%
2016	218,260	28,277	-11.5%
2017	184,310	33,950	-15.6%
2018	155,133	29,177	-15.8%
2019	138,867	16,266	-10.5%

- Reduced rates for young recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance aged 18-25 were introduced on a phased basis from April 2009 to prevent long-term welfare dependency by encouraging participation in training and employment programmes. If a young jobseeker participates in education or training or has a qualified child, they receive the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance of €203.

- In March 2009, the seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rate was 21.9% compared with a general unemployment rate of 11.6%. Youth unemployment peaked at 31.5% in June 2012 when the general unemployment rate was 15.5%. The youth unemployment rate was 11.1% in December 2019 while the general unemployment rate was 4.7% [2] .

[2] CSO Statbank 5th February 2020

Year (December)	Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24 years)	Unemployment Rate (15-74 years)
2015	19.4%	9.4%
2016	15.9%	7.5%
2017	13.5%	6.2%
2018	13.1%	5.5%
2019	11.1%	4.7%

- It should be noted that youth unemployment is statistically expected to be about twice the level of overall unemployment. This phenomenon is consistent over time and across most countries. It is due to what is known as the 'denominator effect', i.e. the exclusion of college students from the population included in the labour market.

- Budget 2020 abolished the age-related reduced rate of payment for 25 year olds. This measure supported approximately 1,800 young people. There were 11,930 jobseekers aged 18-24 on age related reduced rates in December 2019.

- Budget 2020 also provided for the higher rate of payment for young jobseekers aged 18-24 years who are living independently and in receipt of certain State housing supports in their own right, including Housing Assistance Payment and other social housing supports. This measure is expected to support approximately 300 young people.

- There are approximately 2,500 people aged 65 on Jobseeker's Allowance.

- Under the Creative Ireland Programme, a Pilot Scheme for self-employed artists on Jobseeker's Allowance was launched in June 2017. This scheme exempts them from activation for 12 months but the other conditions (e.g. a means test) continue to apply. The scheme was placed on a permanent basis in September 2019. In December 2019 there were approximately 100 professional artists participating on the scheme.

Jobseeker's Allowance Rates - 2020

	25 years or over	18 - 24 years
Maximum Personal Rate - no children	€203.00	€112.70
IQA Increase for a Qualified Adult	€134.70	€112.70
IQC Increase for a Qualified Child	under 12: €36.00,	N/A
	12 and over: €40.00	

- Expenditure on Jobseeker's Allowance in 2019 amounted to €1.6 billion and the provision for 2020 is €2.6 billion.

Jobseeker's Benefit

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Jackie Harrington*

- Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) is a weekly payment to people who are out of work and who have the required level of social insurance contributions. It is not means tested and it is paid at the same rate as the Jobseekers Allowance scheme. Reduced rates for those aged under 25 do not apply to the Jobseekers Benefit scheme. However, payment rates payable to previously part-time or low paid workers are graduated, based on past earnings (people previously on low earnings and with no other household income are eligible for jobseeker's allowance).

- At December 2019, there were 34,810 JB recipients. This figure had fallen steadily from a peak of 96,044 recipients in 2011 representing a significant decrease of 64%.

Year (December)	Jobseekers Benefit Recipients	Change in recipient numbers from previous year	% change
2015	37,845	8,490	18.30%
2016	37,625	220	0.60%
2017	35,463	2,162	5.70%
2018	34,189	1,274	3.60%
2019	34,807	-618	-1.80%

- To qualify, a claimant must be unemployed, be available for and genuinely seeking work, have had a substantial loss of employment and, as a result, be unemployed for at least four days out of seven.
- JB is paid for nine months (234 days) for people with 260 or more Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contributions paid or for 6 months (156 days) for people with less than 260 PRSI contributions paid.
- Expenditure on jobseeker's benefit in 2019 amounted to some €346 million and the provision for 2020 is over €1.5 billion.
- Arrangements are in place so that people whose jobseeker's benefit expires in their 65th year continue to be paid until reaching pension age, provided they satisfy the necessary contribution conditions. They are not subject to any activation measures nor are they subject to the 'genuinely seeking work' test. In effect, this is a form of transitionary pension payment. There are in the region of 2,600 recipients of JB aged 65 years.

Jobseeker's Benefit for the Self-Employed

- A new social insurance benefit scheme for the self-employed who lose their self-employment was introduced in November 2019.
- Many of the key features of the existing jobseeker's benefit scheme apply to the new scheme such as its duration and rate of payment.
- Estimated expenditure for 2020 is €35.7m.

Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)

- The Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was introduced in March as a time-limited emergency measure so that payments could be made as quickly as possible to the large number of people who became fully unemployed due to the pandemic.
- This payment is available to employees and the self-employed living in Ireland, who were in employment immediately before 13th March and lost their employment as a result of the pandemic. Recipients must be between the ages of 18 and 66 years and not in receipt of income from their employer. The payment is available to the self-employed whose trading income had collapsed and who would be in a position to take up alternative employment if it were available.
- A person who voluntarily left their employment or self-employment does not qualify.

Numbers in Receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment

- As of 23nd June, there are 465,900 people in receipt of PUP at a cost of €163.1 million. This is a drop of 32,800 people since the same point in the previous week. These numbers reflect a drop of over 130,000 people receiving support – over 20% - since the peak of recipients in May.

- In the week prior to 23rd June some 30,000 people closed their claim for the PUP of which 23,900 reported that they were returning to work. Of those 23,900 returning to work, approx. 17,900 are receiving their last unemployment payment this week and are included in the 465,900 people reported above. There is a one week lag in how closures due to people returning to work are reflected in the payment data.

- The above payments are in addition to the 220,821 people who were reported on the Live Register as of 19th June.

Rate of Payment

- Initially the rate of payment was set at €203 and was increased to €350 from 24th March (the second week following its introduction). A flat rate of €350 was applied which allowed payments to be made to over half a million people in a matter of weeks. The rate of €350 is broadly equivalent to the two-person household (claimant and qualified adult) rate for the main social welfare payments and is also broadly equivalent to average take-home pay levels in the sectors most immediately affected by the public health restrictions. For example, average take home pay in the wholesale and retail sector was approximately €330 per week.

Changes to the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and other Income Supports

- On 5th June, the following changes were announced to the payment:

- extend the period of payment until 10th August (payment was originally payable to 9th June)

- introduce a number of modifications by introducing a two band payment level aligned to prior earnings;

- From the **29th June** what a person will receive will depend on their gross weekly employment earnings as follows;

  - For those whose prior gross earnings were €200 per week or higher (about 75% of recipients), the PUP payment rate will remain at €350 per week;

  - For those whose prior gross earnings were up to €199.99 per week (about 25% of recipients), the PUP payment rate will be €203 per week.

- The PUP is paid in arrears and the changes from the **29th June** will take effect in payments from Tuesday **7th July**.

- With the support of the Revenue Commissioners, the Department will examine the employee's average gross weekly earnings in 2019 and in January and February 2020. The higher of the two figures will be used to determine the level of their PUP payment.

- In the case of the self-employed, the average weekly income for 2018 will be used to determine the appropriate rate of payment. Because of the nature of self-employment for those who pay tax through the self-assessed system of tax collection, 2018 is the last tax year for which verifiable data on self-employed income is available.

Rationale for Changes

Expenditure

- The retention of PUP until 10th August, even taking account of some savings for a lower rate of payment for some workers, will cost an estimated additional €850 million.

- This expenditure is on top of the additional €6.8 billion which the Department will spend in 2020 on measures to support those impacted by Covid pandemic crisis.

Frontier Workers

- The Pandemic Unemployment Payment is payable to people living in the Republic of Ireland.

- EU citizens have the right to live and work in any other EU country. A cross-border worker (also called a 'frontier' worker) describes where a person works on one side of a border but lives on the other and returns home at least once a week.

- The position regarding the question of paying the PUP to wholly unemployed frontier workers is <u>consistent</u> with the EU rules for determining the competent State for Jobseekers payments. Under EU rules, the Member State of residence is competent for the payment of Unemployment Benefits in the case of wholly unemployed frontier workers [as set out in Article 65 of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004]. This arrangement in respect of frontier workers is long established and reflects the view taken across the EU that, on balance, income support payments should be aligned with the circumstances that pertain in the country of residence.

- Irish residents who work in Northern Ireland have access to the income support system of this State.

- An employer can claim the Temporary Wage Subsidy in respect of all PAYE workers on their payroll. This includes frontier workers living in the North of Ireland but working on this side of the border.

Seasonal Workers

- The eligibility conditions for Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) require that a person must have been in receipt of pay by their employer, have lost that employment

and the income associated with that employment following the onset of the Covid19 pandemic.

- If this is not the case, PUP is not payable. It would be unfeasible to allow claims of potential or prospective but unrealised employment, particularly in an environment where the economy was operating at full-employment with many unfilled vacancies prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- People who are currently receiving a Jobseeker's Payment including seasonal workers who have been out of work for some time will continue to remain on this payment for the period they are entitled.

Over 66 Years of Age

- The PUP payment is payable to qualifying persons between the ages of 18 to 66 which is consistent with Jobseeker's schemes and other working age social welfare supports.

- People aged 66 or over do not pay any social insurance contributions.

- People aged 66 years and over are provided for through the State Pension (contributory or non-contributory) and a range of ancillary supports that are are not generally paid to people of working age. These supports include the free travel pass, living-alone allowance, the free television licence, and the household benefits package (electricity and gas subsidy).

- A person in receipt of the State Contributory Pension and who also has employment income retains their State pension payment even if they lose employment income, thus guaranteeing an income support.

- Persons in receipt of the non-contributory (means-tested pension) who are also in receipt of employment income may (depending on their level of pension payment) have their pension payment increased if they lose that employment income or if it is reduced. Similarly, a person who did not previously qualify or make an application for a means-tested pension may qualify for a pension payment if their circumstances change.

- People aged over 66 who are employees and have lost employment, are eligible to be included in the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme.

Farm Assist/Fish Assist

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Jackie Harrington*

- Farm Assist/Fish Assist is a means-tested payment for low income farmers/share fishermen/smallholders. The Farm Assist scheme is very closely aligned to the

Jobseeker's Allowance scheme and effectively mirrors how self–employed people are supported under the Jobseekers Allowance scheme.

- It features a more generous means test which takes account of the specific nature of farming.
- Expenditure on the scheme in 2019 was €72 million and the provision for 2020 is just over €60 million. There were 5,970 Farm Assist claimants and 70 recipients of Fish Assist at the end of December 2019. The numbers on the scheme have steadily declined from 11,333 in 2011, a decrease of 47% - mainly as a result of the ageing profile of the customers.

Year (December)	Farm Assist Recipients	Change in recipient numbers from previous year	% decrease
2015	8,790	1,019	10.4
2016	7,828	962	10.9
2017	7,234	594	7.6
2018	6,535	699	9.7
2019	5,971	564	8.6

Maternity Benefit

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Tony Kieran*

- Maternity Benefit is a payment made for 26 weeks to employed and self-employed women who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions and who are otherwise eligible.
- The weekly rate of payment is €245. A person in receipt of some other social welfare payments will receive half-rate maternity benefit.
- In 2019, the total cost of maternity benefit was €267.6 million, which was paid in respect of 44,000 claims. The provision for 2020 is just over €270m.
- Since 2017, Maternity Benefit is payable for an extra period after the end of this 26 weeks in the case of a premature birth.
- The following table details the number of claims and expenditure from 2015 to 2019.

Year	Expenditure €m	No. of claims
2015	€259.80	44,500
2016	€257.90	41,400
2017	€261.10	45,300
2018	€265.30	41,200
2019	€267.20	44,200

- Generally claims are processed in advance of commencement of maternity leave – 92% in 2019.
- Although the number of online claims received in 2019 is an increase of 80% compared to 2018, overall claims submitted through the online channel remain low at 9%.
- An on-line petition (approx. 25,000 signatures) has called for a three month extension to maternity leave to help families during the Covid pandemic. The primary reason centres on the availability of childcare options for women who would be due to return to work. Maternity leave policy comes under the aegis of the Minister of Justice and Equality. Paternity benefit and parent's benefit have been introduced in recent years. Unpaid parental leave has also been extended.

- The Wage Subsidy Scheme, operated by the Revenue Commissioners, accommodates the salaries of parents returning from maternity or adoptive leave. This includes individuals who may not have been on the payroll of their employer on 29th February, or been paid in either January or February 2020 and will allow for consistent treatment with other employees.

- If the employment is no longer available to mothers due to return to work after maternity leave, they may be eligible for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

Paternity Benefit

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Tony Kieran*

- Paternity Benefit was introduced in September 2016. Eligibility based on PRSI contribution conditions is the same as that for Maternity Benefit.

- The rate of payment of Paternity Benefit is €245 per week and is paid for two weeks.

- In 2019, the total cost of Paternity Benefit was approximately €12 million which was paid in respect of 28,200 claims. The provision for 2020 is €15m.

- The take-up of Paternity Benefit improved in 2019, with 11% more applications received compared to 2018. The ratio of Paternity Benefit to Maternity Benefit also improved; from less than 60% in 2018 to approximately 64% in 2019.

- Approximately 49% of all Paternity Benefit claims are made online and those who fulfil all the conditions are automatically approved within minutes.

- The following table details the number of claims and expenditure from 2016 to 2019:

Year	Expenditure	No. of claims
2016	Scheme only commenced in late 2016	5,000

2017	€12,182,850	26,600
2018	€11,836,530	24,000
2019	€13,487,238	28,200

Parent's Leave and Benefit

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Tony Kieran*

- Parent's Benefit was introduced in November 2019 and provides for two weeks leave paid at the same rate (€245) as maternity and paternity benefit to each parent of a child aged under one year.
- The two weeks parent's leave is additional to that already available under maternity benefit (26 weeks paid & 16 unpaid) and paternity benefit (two weeks).
- Costs to the Exchequer for two weeks' benefit for both parents are estimated at €32m in a full year.
- A total of 256 Parent's Benefit claims were received in the period 1st November to year end.
- One of the actions in the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* is to increase this leave to seven weeks per parent. The future policy of this scheme will be developed in line with the requirements of the EU Work Life Balance Directive which has to be transposed by August 2022. Primary responsibility for the transposition of this Directive is with the Department of Justice and Equality.
- The EU Directive provides that Member States must provide four months of paid parental leave but it can be taken up to age eight, not in the first year as required by the current parent's leave and benefit scheme. An employer can postpone Parent's Leave for two months i.e. it must be taken within 14 months from the birth of a baby in the current scheme. An eight year window is less restrictive for employers than a 12 month window.
- The full year cost of the benefit (on introducing seven weeks parental leave) would be some €111 million per annum ongoing (increasing to €143m a year for nine weeks per parent as per the commitment in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion).
- There will be significant additional exchequer costs and private sector employer costs associated with substitution of staff as the period of leave is extended.
- The following table sets out the numbers who awarded Parent's Benefits from Jan-May 2020. This indicates the increasing popularity of the new scheme.

End of month recipients	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	Apr 2020	May 2020

Parent's Benefit	458	517	665	702	924

Adoptive Benefit

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Tony Kieran*

- Adoptive Benefit is a weekly payment for 24 weeks from the date of placement of the child to an adopting parent who is on adoptive leave from work and covered by social insurance.
- The rate of payment is €245 per week. A person in receipt of certain social welfare payments will receive half-rate Adoptive Benefit. The Department is working with the Department of Justice and Equality to address a lacuna in legislation relating to male same sex couples adopting children.
- The following table details the number of claims and expenditure from 2015 to 2019:

Year	Expenditure	No. of claims
2015	€279,680	58
2016	€288,498	55
2017	€275,655	49
2018	€188,101	42
2019	€150,932	30

Health and Safety Benefit

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Tony Kieran*

- Health and Safety Benefit is a weekly payment for employed women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and who are granted health and safety leave by their employer. An employer pays the normal wage for the first 21 days of the health and safety leave and the Department pays Health and Safety Benefit for the remainder.
- In 2019, the total cost of Health & Safety Benefit was almost €400,000. 214 claims were awarded.
- The following table details the number of claims and expenditure from 2015 to 2019:

Year	Expenditure	No. of claims
2015	€523,000	229
2016	€408,000	295
2017	€467,000	313
2018	€369,000	263
2019	€377,000	269

Back to Education Allowance

Assistant Secretary: Ronan Hession Principal Officer: Jackie Harrington

- Back to Education Allowance is a full-time education support available to jobseekers. It is a broad based, non-statutory scheme offering eligible people a second chance at education. The main focus of the scheme is to assist those who are most marginalised to improve their qualifications and, therefore, to improve their prospects of returning to sustainable employment.

- Progression from second chance education into employment is an important objective for the scheme but longer-term social impacts are also important – there is evidence that children in families where adults have higher levels of education will, themselves, do better in education and ultimately in employment.

- A detailed econometric evaluation of the Back to Education Allowance Scheme was commissioned by the Department and completed by the ESRI in 2015. The evaluation applied counterfactual analysis techniques to compare the progression outcomes of jobseekers who commenced BTEA supported education programmes in 2008 with a control group of matched jobseekers who did not avail of BTEA. The principal conclusion of the evaluation is that BTEA participants who commenced courses in 2008 were less likely to have left the Live Register or be in employment in 2012 and 2014 than a matched group of non-participants. In effect the results indicate that the 'positive' progression effect does not compensate for the negative 'lock-in' effect whereby participants on BTEA supported programmes are not available for employment for the duration of the programme.

- To qualify for support while pursuing a third level qualification a person must be in receipt of a qualifying welfare payment for nine months. This waiting period is waived if the jobseeker has been made compulsorily redundant from their employment.

- Not all education or training supports require a nine month waiting period. Support at second level (typically a payment for one or two years duration) is available following three months of unemployment. This ensures young people with severe educational gaps are provided with the second chance to attain an education sooner.

- The Department supports jobseekers (through the preservation of their Jobseekers Allowance/Benefit payment) wishing to advance to part-time education or short-term training from their first day in receipt of a jobseekers payment. This ensures a wealth of training and educational opportunities are available to jobseekers following engagement with the Department. Such supports include the SpringBoard and Education Training Board (ETB) options.

- The total number of Back to Education participants at the end of December 2019 was 7,283. 60 participants are on Springboard/ICT Skills courses, 6,131 on Jobseeker's Allowance, 219 on Jobseeker's Benefit and 873 on other qualifying social welfare

payments. 2,190 are attending second level education and 4,160 are completing a third level course.

- A Cost of Education Allowance of €500 was reinstated for the academic year 2018/19 and paid to approximately 1,832 recipients by the end of 2019.

- Total expenditure on this support in 2019 was €66m. The estimate for 2020 is €56.9m.

- The following table details the number of participants and expenditure from 2015 to 2019:

Year	Expenditure	No. of Participants
2015	€143.96m	11,900
2016	€114.34m	14,400
2017	€93.73m	11,300
2018	€78.59m	9,200
2019	€65.16m	7,300

- Those who lost employment as a result of the Covid crisis and in receipt of the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment must establish an entitlement to a jobseeker's payment to avail of this support.

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Jackie Harrington*

- There are two schemes to assist people on certain social protection payments who wish to become self-employed: Short Term Enterprise Allowance and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance.

- The Short Term Enterprise Allowance provides immediate access to those who qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit wishing to set up a business. Payment under the scheme is at the same rate and for the same duration as their entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit.

- The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance is designed to provide a monetary incentive for people who are on social welfare payments to develop a business while allowing them to retain a reducing proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment over two years - 100% in year 1 and 75% in year 2.

- To be approved, the business plan must be developed with the support of, and recommended by, one of the Local Development Companies.

- Self-employed individuals participating on Back to Work Enterprise Allowance were entitled to claim the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment where their businesses were adversely affected.

- The following details the number of participants and expenditure from 2015 to 2019:

Year	Expenditure	No. of Participants
2015	€129.03m	11,900
2016	€126.25m	11,000
2017	€119.56m	9,700
2018	€90.48m	6,700
2019	€59.69m	4,100

- The total spend in 2019 was approximately €60m.

Enterprise Support Grant

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Jackie Harrington*

- A grant is payable to Back to Work Enterprise Allowance participants up to a maximum of €2,500 over 24 months. The grant is awarded by Case Officers as co-funding for approved goods or services that should assist a business to develop.
- Following a recent Government Decision, the grant will be made available to assist self-employed recipients who are exiting the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) scheme with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business.
- The following details the numbers supported and expenditure from 2015 to 2019:

Year	Expenditure €m	No. of Participants
2015	€ 4.2	6,100
2016	€ 4.5	5,200
2017	€ 4.6	7,200
2018	€ 3.7	6,300
2019	€ 2.9	4,800

Activation & Family Support Programme

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Jackie Harrington*

- The objective of the Activation and Family Support Programme is to provide funding to enable the development of training and education initiatives, mainly in conjunction with other organisations and agencies, to assist people who are in receipt of social welfare payments to enhance their employability and to improve their quality of life.
- The application of the funds is largely responsive, in that, as needs are identified by local Case Officers and agencies, a course may be considered.
- The total spend in 2019 was approx. €382,000.

Year	Expenditure €m	No. of Participants
2015	1.32	4,200
2016	0.84	1,500
2017	0.59	1,100
2018	0.54	1,300
2019	0.38	700

Training Support Grant

- This scheme permits quick access to short-term training or related interventions (for example, to obtain/renew certification/permits) for individual jobseekers who have identified work opportunities or where Case Officers have identified an immediate skills gap that represents an obstacle to taking up a job offer or accessing other activation interventions.
- It provides Case Officers with financial resources to respond to identified training needs of jobseekers that are focused on obtaining work, in line with their agreed personal progression plan.
- 5,600 jobseekers were supported by this scheme in 2019.
- The total spend in 2019 was €2 million. Below is the trend in expenditure:

Year	Expenditure	Approved
2015	€3.31	10,600
2016	€3.15	9,600
2017	€2.64	7,500
2018	€2.23	6,400
2019	€2.00	5,600

JobsPlus

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon *Principal Officer (Operations): Kieran Lea*

- JobsPlus was introduced in July 2013. It is an employer incentive that encourages and rewards employers who offer employment opportunities to the unemployed. It is designed to encourage employers and businesses to focus their recruitment efforts on those who have been out of work for long periods, with a higher rate of payment for the recruitment of those out of work for more than two years.
- Under the scheme, monthly payments are made to qualifying employers to offset wage costs where they engage jobseekers. There are no limits to the number of eligible employees any one employer may hire under the scheme. The job must be a full-time position and not displace any existing employee. Employees and employers can verify their eligibility for JobsPlus by applying on line at Jobs Plus Service

- A grant of €7,500 is payable over two years for the following categories of jobseeker:
  - Jobseeker's under 25 years of age and on the live register for at least four months in the previous six months. This element of the incentive is co-funded by the European Social Fund.
  - Jobseeker's over 25 years of age and under 50 years of age who are on the live register and have been at least 12 months unemployed in the previous 18 months.
  - Former One Parent Family Payment customers whose youngest child is at least seven years of age and under 14, who transfer to the live register and are now in receipt of Jobseeker's Transitional Payment. No qualifying periods applies for this customer.
  - Persons with refugee status and in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance. No qualifying period applies.

  A grant of €10,000 is payable over two years for the following categories of jobseeker:
  - Jobseeker's under 50 years of age who are on the live register and have been at least 36 months unemployed in the previous 42 months.
  - Jobseeker's over 50 years of age who are on the live register and have been at least 12 months unemployed in the previous 18 months.
- Since the scheme commenced, over 19,000 positions have been supported with funding of over €124m provided to employers that availed of the scheme.
- In 2019, the JobsPlus scheme paid €14.47m to 3,850 employers for the support of 5,035 employees.
- Currently there is an upper limit of 6,000 employees supported annually on the Scheme. A budget of €10.1m is provided for JobsPlus in 2020.
- The following details the number of employees supported and expenditure from 2015 to 2019:

No of JobsPlus Employees in Payment					
	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Number of Employees Supported	**7500**	**8,380**	**8,960**	**7,556**	**5,035**
Scheme Expenditure	€22.6m	€23.7m	€28.9m	€22.8m	€14.4m

- JobsPlus is not payable in conjunction with the Revenue Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme or in instances where an employer ceased the employee's employment. Where this occurs, JobsPlus support is suspended temporarily and upon resumption of employment, the funding will recommence for the duration remaining on the scheme.

- March 2020 to May 2020 has seen a 75% reduction in the volume of JobsPlus employees being supported through the scheme:

2020	Paid Employers/ Month	Paid Employees / Month
March	1593	1896
April	465	573
May	396	474

- The Department is working with JobsPlus' supported employers to ensure employees are reactivated once the employment resumes.
- As jobseekers aged 25 year or younger become eligible for JobsPlus after 4 months unemployment, supports will be available to address youth unemployment through this scheme from the summer.

One-Parent Family Payment

Assistant Secretary (Policy): Rónán Hession *Principal Officer (Policy): John O'Toole*

- The One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) is a means-tested payment for persons who are bringing up child(ren) without the support of a partner.
- The person must have the main care and charge of at least one child under the age of seven who is residing with them, must not be co-habiting with a partner and have made efforts to seek maintenance for the children.
- Expenditure for the last five years was as follows:

Year	Year-end Recipients	Expenditure €m
2015	41,468	€670.0
2016	40,317	€500.7
2017	39,310	€502.0
2018	39,265	€502.0
2019	39,533	€533.1 (Est)

Reforms of the One-Parent Family Payment

- The *Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act* 2010 provided for significant reforms to the One-Parent Family Payment.
- Previously, OFP provided lone parents with long-term income support until the children were aged 18 (or 22 if in full-time education), without any requirement to engage in employment, education or training. Such long-term welfare dependency and passive income support to individuals of working age is not considered to be in the best interests of the recipient, his or her children, or society generally[3]. The reforms aimed to maximise the opportunities for lone parents to enter into and increase employment by providing them with enhanced access to the wide range of education, training, and employment supports that make up the Department's Intreo services.
- A key reform saw the age of the youngest child (in order for the parent to qualify for OFP) being reduced to age 7 years over the period 2013 to 2015 (in line with European norms). The final phase of this reform was implemented from July 2015. Some 25,500 customers transitioned from the OFP scheme. Of these;
    - 13,600 (or 54%) moved to the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST);
    - 2,500 (or 10%) moved to the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) scheme, and
    - 8,100 (or 32%) moved to the Family Income Supplement (FIS) scheme as Working Family Payment (WFP) was called then.
- Of the 8,100 former OFP recipients who transitioned to FIS (as it was then), approximately 3,000 were new FIS/WFP recipients, indicating that they entered into or increased their employment as a result of the reforms. These new recipients were also eligible for the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD, see below) and gained an increase in their overall income when they transitioned from OFP to WFP and the BTWFD. This contributed to the reduction in both household and child poverty rates.

Independent Review of the OFP Changes since January 2012

- An independent review was commissioned to examine the financial and social effects of the amendments to the OFP scheme made since 2012, taking into account the poverty rates and welfare dependency of those impacted by the reforms.
- The review conducted by Indecon found that:
    - The policy changes introduced have been successful in increasing employment and in reducing welfare dependency – the reforms increased the probability of both employment and of higher employment income.

[3] "Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life", OECD (2003) & "Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents", DSP (2006)

- Responses to the survey showed that the percentage of lone parents in full-time employment increased from 15% to 22%. However, while outcomes for those that transitioned to employment were positive, overall the impact of the reforms led to an increase in the number of lone parents at risk of poverty – this was due primarily to the reduction in the earnings disregard for people who transitioned to the JST payment. Recent budget changes (2019 and 2020) have reversed these changes and increased qualified child payments. This should have the impact of reducing the risk of poverty among lone parents.

Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST)

Assistant Secretary (Policy): Rónán Hession *Principal Officer (Policy): John O'Toole*

- The Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) was introduced in 2013. It is available to customers who lose their entitlement to the OFP payment, who have a youngest child aged 7 to 13 years inclusive and who continue to parent alone. These customers are exempt from the Jobseeker's Allowance conditions that require them to be available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time work. As a consequence, no lone parent with a youngest child under 14 years of age is required to take up employment in order to receive income support from the Department.
- From January 2020, the means test for JST customers includes an earnings disregard of €165 per week (up from €150 per week in 2019) with 50% of the balance of earnings assessed.
- There were 15,234 claimants receiving a JST payment in December 2019.

Activation and Lone Parents

Assistant Secretary John Conlon Principal Officers: Barry Kennedy, Mairín Haran

- All lone parents on a Jobseeker's Allowance or Jobseeker's Transitional Payment have access to activation supports.
- Of all JST recipients (approx. 15,800) over 10,055 received activation reports as of December 2019. This includes:
    - over 6,650 in an activation phase i.e. they have already been selected for activation and are scheduled for an engagement or are waiting an appointment time
    - over 4,380 who have met with a case officer and have agreed a personal plan and are progressing with this plan. Of these, approximately 2,400 have moved into some form of education and training, ranging from personal development, to childcare to third level education.

- Former OFP recipients who moved to a Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) Payment i.e. those with a youngest child 14 year of age or older, gained access to the Intreo supports via the standard activation process for jobseekers commencing with a group engagement with a case officer.

- In order to better understand the extent to which the employment supports were being implemented, a qualitative preliminary study of the JST activation process has been undertaken. The Lone Parent Policy Unit has carried out a process evaluation of how the activation services were being delivered to Jobseeker's Transitional Payment recipients across the country.

Budget 2020 and lone parents

- Budget 2020 increased expenditure on lone parents by €5 million in a full year. This consisted of an increase in the income disregard for parents getting the One-Parent Family Payment and the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment from €150 to €165 per week.

- OFP and JST clients will also benefit from the increased rates for Qualified Children. For children aged under 12, the weekly rate will increase from €34 to €36, and for qualifying children aged 12 and over the weekly rate will increase from €37 to €40.

- The National Childcare Scheme being provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will also significantly reduce the cost of childcare for lone parents and is a step change in state support for childcare in Ireland. This will assist lone parents in low income employment

Back To Work Family Dividend

- The Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) scheme was introduced in 2015. It allows Jobseeker's Allowance/Jobseeker's Benefit recipients who have been jobseekers for 12 months or recipients of the One-Parent Family Payment to retain their full Increase for Qualified Children for the first year in employment, tapering to 50% in the second year. BTWFD is payable at the standard Increase for Qualified Children (IQC) rates for up to four children per household.

- Expenditure on BTWFD in 2019 amounted to €28.45m.

- The number of recipients of BTWFD was 5,345 in December 2019.

Child Maintenance Review Group

- Under Budget 2020, provision was made to establish a Child Maintenance Review Group to examine the approach to child maintenance payments, taking into consideration best international practice.

- The Group's focus includes:
  - The current social welfare treatment of maintenance payments;
  - The current liable relative arrangements of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; and,
  - An examination of whether there is a case for the establishment of a child maintenance agency in Ireland.
- A number of individuals have been identified from legal, policy and academic professions, along with representatives from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and the Department of Justice and Equality to participate on the group. The Group is chaired by former Circuit Court Judge, Catherine Murphy.
- A budget of €150,000 has been allocated in 2020 by DEASP to undertake this review and it is intended that the Group will report by the end of the year.

Redundancy Payments scheme

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon *Principal Officer: Siobhán Lawlor*

- The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to ensure employees receive their statutory redundancy entitlement when they lose their jobs if their employer(s) cannot pay them due to financial difficulties or insolvency. Redundancy payments are paid from the Social Insurance Fund (SIF).
- Payments are based on
  - the employee's length of reckonable service and
  - reckonable weekly remuneration, subject to a ceiling of €600 per week
  - the statutory redundancy payment is two weeks per year of service, plus one bonus week.
- The Minister becomes a preferential creditor against the assets of an employer in respect of payments under the redundancy payments scheme.
- In 2019, 2,446 claims were received. The cost of redundancy payments was approximately €26.8m. Fully completed claims are processed within the target of six weeks.
- The claim load and expenditure has fallen significantly since 2011. This is mainly due to the 2013 abolition of the rebate to employers and the continued fall in claims due to general economic improvements up to this public health crisis.

Impact of COVID-19 on Redundancy Scheme

- Based on a significant increase in the number of collective redundancies notified to the Minister over the past number of months on foot of the Covid-19 pandemic (which is running at twice the number so far this year by comparison to the whole of last year), it is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in the number of redundancies processed this year.

- To date, with one or two notable exceptions, most redundancies announced are partial (i.e. a proportion of workers are being laid off but the business concerned is continuing to trade, albeit with a reduced workforce). In addition, the indications are that employers are funding the redundancies announced from their own resources.

- The provisions of Section 12 of the *Redundancy Payments Act 1967* (as amended) which relates to an employee's right to claim a redundancy following certain periods on temporary lay-off and short-time work were not considered adequate to deal with the current Covid-19 emergency situation. As a result of Covid-19, there have been immediate and unprecedented volumes of temporary lay-offs and short-time work. Under the existing timelines set out in Section 12 of the Act, this could result in a large number of redundancies over a very short period of time. Employers are obliged to pay redundancy entitlements to employees who have been temporarily laid off after the periods of time currently provided for in Section 12. For these reasons, emergency legislation was recently enacted to ensure the future viability of businesses and to help prevent further permanent job losses. The existing provisions of Section 12 have effectively been suspended from 13th March 2020 to 10th August 2020. All other provisions of the *Redundancy Payments Act 1967* remain unchanged

Re-introduction of the rebate scheme as a support to employers

- The question of reintroducing the rebate in a full or partial way has been raised on a number of occasions during the Covid-19 crisis.

- An earlier scheme existed, whereby a rebate payment was made to employers but this was abolished in 2013. That decision to cease with rebates was made because of the high cost of the rebate and its impact on the financial sustainability of the Social Insurance Fund during a time of economic crisis.

- Furthermore, the rebate to employers was paid regardless of a company's financial situation and ability to pay, thus benefitting viable and profitable companies, including multinational companies. It was not a targeted use of the resources of the Social Insurance Fund and was abused by some employers.

- The redundancy payments scheme as it now operates benefits employees whose employers are unable to make statutory redundancy payments. The scheme takes into account both an employer's ability to pay redundancy payments and the possibility that the Social

Insurance Fund can be reimbursed in the future, through debt repayment if an employer's financial position improves.

- Reintroducing the rebate scheme would have very significant budgetary implications, particularly at the moment with a significantly higher level of jobs at risk of redundancy than before the pandemic.

Insolvency Payments Scheme

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon Principal Officer: Siobhán Lawlor

- The purpose of the insolvency payments scheme is to protect certain outstanding pay-related entitlements due to employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer. These include wages, holiday pay, sick pay, payment in lieu of minimum notice and certain pension contributions. Various other statutory awards made through the Workplace Relations Commission and the Courts are also covered by the scheme.
- As with the Redundancy Payments Scheme, the scheme is funded from the SIF.
- Payments are based on the employee's reckonable earnings subject to a limit of €600 per week. Arrears of wages, sick pay, holiday pay and minimum notice are limited to eight weeks.
- The Minister becomes a preferential creditor against the assets of an employer in respect of most amounts paid under the insolvency payments scheme.
- In 2019, 2,114 claims were processed with expenditure of €5.5m. Fully completed claims are processed within the target of six weeks.

Employer debt management, recoveries and write-offs

- When the Department makes a payment under either the Redundancy or Insolvency Schemes, a debt to that value is raised against the employer. At 31st December 2019, the total employer debt to the SIF stood at €395m for approximately 11,500 employers. €160m of this employer debt originated prior to 2014.
- A dedicated debt management unit is responsible for recovering as much debt as possible in line with the Department's debt management policy. The unit seeks repayment of debt either directly from the employer (typically by means of an agreed repayment schedule) or from a liquidator if the company is in the process of winding up. Debt notification to employers was temporarily suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic with consideration now being given to the timeliness of the reinstatement of such debt notifications and reminders.

- Most of employer debt relates to insolvent companies. In company insolvencies, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners are preferential creditors. The amount recoverable depends on the funds available when the liquidation process is complete.

- In 2019, €12.7m of employer debt was recovered by the Department. €54m was written off as not collectable.

- The Department is currently reviewing its employer debt policy and practices, considering the best practice guide for collection of debt by public bodies published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

(iii) Illness, Disability and Carers Payments and Supports

Illness, Disability and Carers Policy

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Helen McDonald*

- The Department provides a range of income support payments to address the contingency of falling ill or having/acquiring a disability. The primary objectives of these supports are:

    - To provide income support to address the income contingency faced by people of working age who are unable to engage (either fully or partially) in economic activity arising out of a health or disability -related condition, and
    - To encourage and assist people with disabilities and long-term illnesses to identify and take up employment, training, educational and other employment related self-development opportunities, where appropriate.

- Combined spending on these schemes (excluding SWA sickness related payments) in 2019 is expected to amount to €3.09 billion.

- Unlike most other countries, there is no Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) provision in Ireland obliging employers to pay employees to cover a minimum period of illness. By comparison most countries provide that employers must cover illness pay during at least the first two weeks with many requiring a much longer period of cover – six weeks in Germany, 26 weeks in the UK, up to three years in the Netherlands. This reduces the draw on the social insurance funds in those countries and has been shown to reduce the rate of sick absence. In Ireland the SIF starts funding payments after a waiting period of six days (no waiting days in relation to Covid Illness Benefit). Each week of SSP would reduce the draw on the SIF by about €35m per week.

- The Department also provides a wide range of work-related supports for people with disabilities, which play an important role in supporting increased participation in the labour force by people with disabilities. These include the Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Reasonable Accommodation Fund for People with Disabilities and a supported employment programme - EmployAbility. The cost of DEASP employment support programmes for people with disabilities is estimated to be €38.5 million.

- Illness and disability related payments are made to a very diverse group who have widely different needs. At one end of the range are those with short-term illness, who may need promptly-paid income support for a brief period until they can return to work. At the other end, there are people with profound disabilities who will have a range of income support and service needs.

Illness Benefit Operations

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Ann Marie O'Connor*

- Illness Benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy prescribed PRSI contribution conditions. One of the PRSI conditions is that a person must have a minimum of 39 reckonable contributions paid or credited in the governing contribution year.

- Expenditure on Illness Benefit in 2019 amounted to €607 million in respect of approximately 200,000 claims. The estimates provision for 2020 is just over €611 million. The Department's target is to process 90% of IB claims within seven days of receipt. In 2019, over the course of the full year, the Department processed just over 80% of claims within seven days of receipt.

COVID-19 enhanced Illness Benefit

- Temporary enhancements to the Illness Benefit scheme were introduced at the start of the Covid-19 crisis. Under the first piece of emergency legislation, the H*ealth (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2020* and subsequent regulations, to mitigate the effect of the spread of Covid-19, an entitlement to illness benefit for persons who have been diagnosed with, or are a probable source of infection with Covid-19 was provided for.

- The rate of payment of the enhanced Illness Benefit payment in respect of COVID-19 is higher than the normal maximum personal rate of Illness Benefit. The measures were designed to ensure that where a registered medical practitioner diagnoses a person with COVID-19 or identifies him or her as a probable source of the infection, that person can comply with medical advice to isolate, while having their income protected. This was essential to limit and slow down the spread of the virus, to keep the number of people affected to a minimum, and to reduce a peak of cases which would cause extreme pressure on the health system.

- The purpose is to encourage people to not go to work due to financial constraint when they should be in isolation.

- The rate of payment is higher than the normal maximum personal rate for a limited period from 9th March 2020 until 10th August. A personal rate of €350 per week can be paid for a maximum of 10 weeks of certified COVID-19 illness following diagnosis. After that period the normal rate of Illness Benefit will apply if the person is still unable to work.

- Additional payments are also made in respect of dependent adults and children.

- Where a person is diagnosed with COVID-19 or is a probable source of COVID-19, they will not be subject to the usual waiting days' provision. Normally a person is not entitled to Illness Benefit for the first six days of any period of incapacity for work. These days are known as 'waiting days'.

- The contribution conditions have been changed so that the maximum number of employees will be covered, including those in seasonal, part-time or casual employment.

- Self-employed people do not normally qualify for Illness Benefit. In these limited circumstances, they are eligible for the enhanced rate of Illness Benefit.

- By 29th May 2020 there were 36,020 COVID-19 IB recipients. Expenditure on COVID-19 Illness Benefit was €26 million at that date.

- In recognition of the concerns raised by individuals and support groups in relation to those cocooning on health grounds, the Department introduced a policy change in May.

- Where a person is not eligible for the enhanced rate, standard Illness Benefit payment may be payable subject to normal certification and eligibility criteria to a person with a serious health condition, where a medical practitioner certifies that a person is incapable of work due to the medical condition. This may be paid for an extended period, depending on the person's continued eligibility.

Invalidity Pension

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard Principal Officer (Operations): Brian Molloy

- Invalidity Pension (IP) is a payment for people who are *permanently incapable* of work because of illness or incapacity and for no other reason and who satisfy the PRSI contributions conditions.

- 58,168 IP claims were in payment in December 2019. Expenditure on the scheme in 2018 was €694 million and the figure for 2019 expenditure was €728.1 million. €739.2 million has been provided for 2020. Usually 200 new claims are received each week. (There has been a reduction in the number of new claims being received due to the Covid Pandemic – currently approximately 140 new claims are received each week.)

- At the end of May 2020, there were 58,908 people in receipt of IP with 6,043 qualified adults and 12,578 qualified children. Over the last number of years, the number of recipients of IP has increased gradually. From the start of 2017 to the end of April 2020, the number of recipients has increased by 6%, from 55,532 to over 58,908.

- The COVID-19 outbreak has seen significant changes to the operational model within the IP team but this has not impacted on the quality of service provided to IP recipients or applicants. In 2020 to the end of May, 4,368 new applications for IP were received compared to 4,880 over the same period 2019. This is a reduction of 10.5%. However, it

is anticipated this will be a temporary reduction and we will see an increase in applications in the coming months.

- There are two elements involved in establishing entitlement to IP - PRSI contributions and medical eligibility. The process to establish medical eligibility can be time-consuming which adds to the overall claim adjudication process. There has been no impact on the processing times for medical eligibility arising from the Covid Pandemic.

Invalidity pension claims received, cleared and pending

Year	Number of Claims Received	Number of Claims Cleared [4]	Pending Year end
2011	14,621	12,829	6,814
2012	11,510	17,775	3,662
2013	9,640	18,792	2,013
2014	9,240	13,561	2,034
2015	9,454	13,800	1,559
2016	9,134	12,348	2,133
2017	10,458	14,562	1,653
2018	10,967	13,254	2,188
2019	10,336	13,849	2,253

- The number of applications for Invalidity Pension increased by 5% in 2018. However, there was a 5% decrease in the number of applications in 2019.

- In May 2020, 88% of all claims were processed within the target timescale of 10 weeks (with an average time of 6 weeks to award). In 2019, 60% were processed within the target time-frame. While many new claims are straightforward and can be decided within a few weeks, the average time is skewed by the fact that that some claims - notably EU & international cases - have a significantly longer processing time.

Disability Allowance Scheme

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard Principal Officer (Operations): Brian Molloy

- Disability Allowance (DA) is a means-tested payment for people with a specified disability who are aged between 16 and 66. The disability must be expected to last for at least one

[4] The number of claims cleared recorded from 2012 onwards includes not only all first-time decisions, but also any subsequent decisions made in relation to the same claim e.g. following a review (typically when the claimant provides additional information) or a formal appeal. As a result, the number of claims recorded as cleared significantly exceeds the number of claims received. It is not currently possible to disaggregate these figures.

year and prevent them from undertaking work of a kind which, if the person was not suffering from that disability, would be suited to that person's age, experience and qualifications. The allowance is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test.

- In May 2020, there were 150,445 people in receipt of DA. This compares to 142,727 at the end of May 2019, an increase of near 5%.
- A total of 24,017 applications for DA were received in 2019. The COVID-19 outbreak has seen a significant reduction in the number of applications for DA. In 2020 to the end of May, 8,268 new applications were received. This is a reduction of 20% compared to the same period in 2019.
- The average time taken to award new DA applications in 2019 was 13 weeks and in May 2020 it was 7 weeks.
- Expenditure over the five year period from 2015 to 2019 has grown by over 35% and numbers in receipt of DA have grown by 23% over the same period.
- Provision for the DA scheme in 2020 is €1.77 billion.
- The spike in unemployment caused by the COVID-19 outbreak has impacted on those DA recipients who were previously working. Over 4,400 have received at least one week of COVID-PUP payment having lost their jobs during the outbreak.
- The processing time for individual DA claims vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main criteria – medical condition, means, and habitual residence. It is a feature of the scheme that persons who are disallowed (particularly on medical grounds) will typically send in additional evidence and request a review. There are also a high number of appeals.

Expenditure and number of recipients on DA

Year	Expenditure (€ 000)	Number of recipients
2015	1,281,589	119,042
2016	1,357,989	126,203
2017	1,469,440	133,929
2018	1,586,255	140,835
2019	1,705,777	146,755

Occupational Injuries Benefit Scheme

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Ann Marie O'Connor*

- The Occupational Injuries Benefit Scheme is a group of benefits for insured workers who are injured or incapacitated by an accident at work or while travelling directly to or from work. The scheme also covers people who have contracted a disease as a result of the type of work they do.

- Injury Benefit provides income support for a maximum period of six months. The total number of Injury Benefit claims registered in 2019 was 16,007 (11,155 excluding withdrawn claims). The Injury Benefit expenditure for 2019 amounted to €13.6 million. In 2019, an average of 62% Injury Benefit claims was processed in one week. Medical Care covers the cost of certain medical expenses that are not covered by the HSE or the Treatment Benefit scheme. The total number of people who claimed medical care expenses in 2019 was 301, incurring expenditure of €108,450.

- Disablement Benefit may be paid where an insured employee suffers a loss of physical or mental faculty because of a work-related accident. Payment is made where the level of disablement following the accident or disease is assessed at 15% or more. Payment may be in the form of a gratuity, a non-taxable lump sum or by way of a weekly pension.

- Where a customer is found to be incapable of work as a result of their occupational injury or disease and does not qualify for another weekly social welfare payment, they may be entitled to an Incapacity Supplement which is paid as an increase on their Disablement Benefit.

- Where an applicant suffers a 50% or greater loss of faculty as a result of an occupational injury or disease and they require constant attendance to help with their personal needs, they may be entitled to a Constant Attendance Allowance.

- Disablement Benefit is not affected by any other social welfare payments, other than Occupational Injury Benefit, and is not affected by any other income a customer may have.

- At the end of 2019, Disablement Benefit was in payment to 14,922 people. Of these, 812 were in receipt of an Incapacity Supplement.

- Since 2012, for new claims, payment is made only for loss of faculty of 15% or more. Expenditure in 2016 was €78m. Expenditure in 2018 was €76.5m. The expenditure for 2019 was €72.7m.

Death Benefit

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Brian Molloy*

- Death Benefit may be paid where an employee dies as a result of an accident at work, an accident travelling directly to or from work, or a prescribed disease contracted at work. It also may be paid where, immediately before death, the deceased was in receipt of a Disablement Pension for a 50% or greater loss of faculty.

- Death Benefit is generally paid in the form of a weekly pension to a surviving spouse or civil partner. This pension is paid instead of the Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (WWSCP) Pension and is payable at a higher rate than WWSCP pension. Alternatively, where there is no surviving spouse or civil partner, Death Benefit may be paid in the form of a weekly pension to any orphan(s) of the deceased.

- Death Benefit may be paid in the form of a grant for funeral expenses to the personal representative of the deceased or any next-of-kin.

- At the end of 2019, there were 748 customers in receipt of a Death Benefit to a widow, widower or surviving civil partner. The expenditure for 2019 was €10.1m. The average claim processing time in 2019 was eight weeks.

Blind Pension

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Anne Marie Cassidy*

- Blind Pension is a means tested payment paid to blind people and certain people with low vision, aged between 18 and 66 and who are habitually resident in the State.

- The number of Blind Pension recipients has been in decline with 1,481 recipients in April 2012 compared with 1,120 in May 2020. Expenditure for 2019 was €12.9m and the estimated cost for 2020 is €12.9m.

- The 'Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities' report recommendation that all Blind Pension claimants are entitled to an earnings disregard of €120 per week has been implemented since January 2019. It is no longer a requirement to have employment of a rehabilitative nature.

- On average, it takes 10 weeks to award a Blind Pension from receipt of application.

Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB)

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Ann Marie O'Connor*

- The Partial Capacity Benefit scheme was launched in 2012. Its aim was to respond to the reality that some people with disabilities will have a capacity to engage in open market employment while continuing to need some income support from the State. The scheme is designed to incentivise such people to return to the workplace without fear of loss of their disability-related social welfare benefits.

- The scheme is open to people who currently:

  - are in receipt of Illness Benefit (IB) for a minimum of six months, or
  - are in receipt of Invalidity Pension (IP).

- PCB allows a person to return to work (if they have reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a payment from the Department. There is no restriction on earnings or number of hours they can work. Participation in the scheme is voluntary.

- When a person applies for PCB, a DEASP medical assessor assesses the restriction on their capacity for work. A person will qualify if the restriction on their capacity for work is assessed as moderate, severe, or profound. If it is assessed as mild, they will not qualify and their continued eligibility for IB or IP will also be reviewed.

- The average turnaround time on decisions for new applications is currently approximately four weeks.

- The personal rate of payment is based on the assessment of the restriction on their capacity for work and the underlying welfare payment.

Medical Assessment of restriction for payment of Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension	% rate of payment
Moderate	50%
Severe	75%
Profound	100%

- Any increase being paid in respect of a qualified adult or of qualified children will not be affected. Subject to the normal reviews, payment of PCB will continue as long as the person has an underlying entitlement to payment of IB or IP.
- A recipient of PCB can opt to revert to IB or IP if, for example, their employment ceases or they find they cannot continue to work. At the end of May 2020, there were 3,019 PCB claims in payment.
- A review of the PCB scheme was completed in 2015. The review found that the outcomes for PCB clients have been largely positive.

Work-related supports and services for People with a Disability

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Helen McDonald*

- The Department provides a number of supports and services to assist persons with disabilities to seek and take up employment opportunities. The objective is to encourage and assist people with disabilities and long-term illnesses to identify and take up available employment, training, educational and other self-development opportunities.

Intreo Service - People With Disabilities

- The Department has rolled out its full activation support service to people with disabilities who wish to avail of the service on a voluntary basis. The service is now available in 63 Intreo centres.
- Training has also been delivered to over 60 Case Officers to provide specialised support to people with disabilities presenting at Intreo Centres.
- The Department is currently developing proposals for utilising funding under the European Social Fund (ESF) PEIL programme to enhance engagement with people with disabilities through the Intreo service.

EmployAbility Service

- The EmployAbility service is a specialist service (delivered under a contract arrangement in 24 locations around the country on behalf of the Department) that works with the Intreo service. The service supports people with disabilities through providing dedicated job coach support. This service provides both pre-employment and in employment supports and assistance. The 2020 Estimate provides €9.9 million to run the service.

- An evaluation of the EmployAbility Service, undertaken by Indecon Economic Consultants, was completed in 2016. The review concluded that the service faces a number of challenges in responding to increased demand and maximising progression outcomes in a cost-effective manner.

- The representatives of the EmployAbility service are engaging with the Department in the implementation of the recommendations, by focussing on those relating to indicators and performance reviewing.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

- The Wage Subsidy Scheme is an employment support to the private sector for the employment of people with disabilities. The purpose of this demand-led programme is to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities and so increase the numbers of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market. The scheme operates by allowing employers to claim a subsidy of up to €10,748 p.a. in respect of each person with a disability employed. Additional payments of up to €30,000 p.a. are also payable in respect of additional supervisory/employee assistance costs incurred.

- At the end of 2019, there were 1,785 employers claiming a Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) subsidy and 2,865 employees participating in this scheme. The estimated spend on the Wage Subsidy Scheme in 2020 is over €24.5 million.

- A focussed policy review of the scheme is planned for later in 2020 when data for one year on BOMi is available and the transition to Welfare Partners has been completed. (WSS has recently transferred onto these new IT platforms). The review will look at the validity of the objectives set for the WSS. It will also examine the performance, cost-effectiveness, efficiency and potential of the WSS to encourage and facilitate jobseekers with a disability to enter full-time employment, in the context of the Department's overall policy approach to providing supports to jobseekers with a disability.

European Social Fund – Disability Activation

European Social Fund (ESF) **P**rogramme for **E**mployability, **I**nclusion and **L**earning (PEIL)

- PEIL is the only ESF programme in Ireland for the 2014 to 2020 period. The Programme involves a total investment of €1.157 billion; over €544 million each from the ESF and the Irish Government and a special allocation of just over €68 million from the EU's Youth Employment Initiative.
- €16 million is available under the PEIL 2014 – 20 for Disability Activation activities. Half of this funding will come from the ESF and matching funding will be provided from the Exchequer. This funding is being used for the Ability Programme over a three year period.
- The Ability Programme is being administered by Pobal on behalf of DEASP and will support over 2,600 young people with disabilities aged between 15 and 29 years.
- The aim of the programme is to help bring young people with disabilities who are not work-ready closer to the labour market through engagement in training and personal development activities, which would be followed by an incremental exposure to work. The programme is being delivered by 27 community and voluntary groups nationwide.
- The projects being funded have been designed to assist young people in their transition from school to further education and employment. This is being undertaken using person-centred, case management approaches that support participants to achieve their desired employment goals.
- A programme evaluation, aimed at evaluating the extent to which the programme has met its stated policy objectives, is being undertaken. A contractor (Quality Matters) has been appointed by Pobal to undertake this work.

Other supports

- The Department provides a range of grants under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme to assist both jobseekers with disabilities and private sector employers seeking to employ or retain a person with a disability. The objective of these schemes is to assist jobseekers with disabilities to gain access to the open labour market by providing grants to support employers.
- Through the Discretionary Fund for Innovative Projects, the Department funds two significant disability projects directed by the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability:
    - WAM (Willing Able Mentoring) – a programme that builds on the experience and confidence of graduates with disabilities and employers through a mentored, paid (by the employer) work placement programme.

- Get AHEAD – a training programme and forum for students and graduates with disabilities making the transition from third-level education to full time employment to discuss their experiences of education and employment.

Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for People with Disabilities 2015 - 2024

- The aim of the CES is to increase the numbers of people at work and the proportion of people with disabilities in a job. To this end, the CES sets out a ten-year strategy for ensuring that people with disabilities who can and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so. The **CES** was published in 2015 and is led by the Department of Justice and Equality.

- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has lead responsibility for over 20 actions in the Strategy which includes:

  - Expanding the Intreo service as a gateway to employment activation on a phased basis to cater for people with a disability

  - Enhancing engagement with people with disabilities

  - Devising early intervention strategies to address drift into ill-health

  - Leading and supporting an interdepartmental group on Making Work Pay for People with Disabilities (see below).

- The Department of Justice and Equality published a revised action plan in December 2019 to support the delivery of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy objectives. The revised plan sets out a range of actions across various Government departments and agencies and was agreed following consultation with the CES Implementation Group chaired by Fergus Finlay.

- Progress in implementing these actions is regularly reported by the Department to the Comprehensive Employment Strategy Implementation Group. In his first progress report, the Chair of this Group, Fergus Finlay, noted the work advanced by the Department to build the capacity of its Intreo service to better support persons with disabilities who want to pursue further education, training or work opportunities.

Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities – report of interdepartmental working group

- In April 2017, the interdepartmental group published Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities report. The report provides very strong evidence supporting early intervention at a number of levels. The report sets out 24 key recommendations aimed at improving the employment and retention of people with disabilities. Work in relation to the Make Work Pay recommendations is on-going. However a number of the report's recommendations, relating to DEASP, have already been implemented, for example:

    - People with a long-term disability who take up employment will retain their Free Travel Pass for a period of five years, which is more generous than the three years which was recommended in the Make Work Pay report.

    - There is now a fast-track return to Disability Allowance in situations where the employment does not work out

    - A 'Benefits of Work' calculator for persons with a disability is now available on DEASP's website to help people calculate the net benefit of entering or returning to work.

    - The requirement that work must be of a 'rehabilitative' nature, where a person in receipt of Disability Allowance wishes to undertake employment, has been removed from legislation.

    - The Make Work Pay Report also recommended change with regard to the medical card means assessment. The Department of Health introduced a significant increase to the medical card earnings disregard from €120 to €427 per week for persons in receipt of Disability Allowance.

Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities Recommendations 9 and 10

- The *Making Work Pay for People with Disabilities* report made two recommendations (numbers 9 and 10) that addressed significant issues around the design of the main income supports schemes. These related to a proposed reconfiguration of Disability Allowance (from the current starting age of 16 to 18 years) and an implementation of the principle of early engagement for young persons on Disability Allowance and on all illness and disability payments.

- The then Minister for Social Protection indicated that the Government wanted to consult with persons with disabilities and their families in relation to some of the recommendations.

- A wide-ranging consultation exercise was conducted with persons with disabilities, and representative groups in relation to these recommendations.

- The national consultation process gathered a large amount of material and a draft report has been prepared together with the key stakeholder focus group. The report has been completed in "plain English" and accessible formats such as, an easy to read report, ISL videos (with both Irish and English voice over and captioning), audio files (Irish and English) and braille.

- Under the current round of actions (2019-2022), the Department has committed to developing an implementation plan for the processes around early engagement with people with disabilities through the Intreo service. The plan will address the key principles identified as part of the consultation process and provide for further input from the relevant stakeholders.

Strawman Proposal

- The Roadmap for Social Inclusion committed to an action to 'Develop and consult on a strawman proposal for the restructuring of long term disability payments to simplify the system and take account of the concerns expressed in the *Make Work Pay* report.'

- The Department is developing a strawman proposal for public consultation to examine the possible restructuring of disability and illness income supports.

- The purpose is to simplify the system and to meet the commitments made in the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities*, the *Make Work Pay* report and the *National Disability Inclusion Strategy*.

- Any proposed change will draw on best international practice in terms of supporting people with disabilities in the most appropriate way.

- Preparatory work on the strawman will draw on a review of legislation, existing reports, and international practice and will involve consultation with stakeholders. The process will also, where appropriate, take into account recommendations from a cost of disability report commissioned by the Department which is due to be completed during 2020.

Cost of Disability

- The 'cost of disability' can be defined as the amount it costs a person with a disability to achieve the same standard of living as a person without a disability. It is recognised nationally and internationally that people with disabilities may incur many extra living costs as a result of their disability such as: heating, disability aids & equipment, medical and drug costs as well as the cost of care and transport.

- The issue of the 'cost of disability' was raised by stakeholders at the Department's annual pre-budget forum held in advance of the preparation for Budget 2019. In response to this, research into the cost of disability has been commissioned and is now underway. The research is being carried out by Indecon Consultants.

- It will analyse what would be a reasonable estimate of a "cost of disability" in varying circumstances for people living in Ireland, as well as the implications for public policy and service delivery.

Recovery of Certain Benefits and Assistance

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Ann Marie O'Connor*

- The *Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2013* included provisions which enable the Department to recover the value of certain illness-related social welfare payments from compensators[5].

- A compensator must apply to the Department for a statement of recoverable benefits (RBA), before making any compensation payment to an injured party. Once the request has been received, the Department must issue a statement of recoverable benefits to the compensator and the injured person within 25 working days.

- In 2019, the total number of applications for a statement of recoverable benefits was 70,700 (including renewals and additional compensators for an existing case). The scheme recovered €24.76 million in 2019.

- COVID-19 has seen a reduction in the average number of RBA applications received. Throughout January and February of 2020, on average 1,300 applications were received a week. From the 16th March 2020, an average of 575 applications are received a week.

Medical Referral & Assessment

Chief Medical Officer: Dr. Devesh Singh *Deputy: Dr. Teck Tai*

[5] A 'compensator' is the person who is liable to any extent in respect of a personal injury suffered by another person. Typically, the 'compensator' will be the insurance company paying the compensation

- The Department has its own Medical Referral and Assessment Service (MRAS) with a Chief Medical Officer, Deputy Chief Medical Officer and 32 Medical Assessors (MAs) for the provision of medical opinions to assist Deciding Officers in the assessment, processing and review of applications and claims for its short-term and long-term illness and disability schemes.

- The main illness, disability and carer's schemes are Illness Benefit, Disablement Benefit, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Partial Capacity Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Support Grant, Companion Free Travel Pass and Blind Pension.

- The provision of medical opinions relate to:

    - the assessment of illness/injury with regard to its severity, resulting degree of disability, estimated duration and/or resultant care requirements.

    - the assessment of disabilities relevant to occupational injuries and disease and the evaluation of the resultant loss of faculty.

- These medical opinions are based on an evaluation of relevant information provided by the client and/or by his/her own doctors and the application by the Medical Assessor of the DEASP medical proformas.

- Medical opinions are arrived at in one of two ways:

    - Those derived solely from document-based evidence are referred to as 'at desk' assessments.

    - Those which involve face-to-face meetings between the Medical Assessor and the client are referred to as 'in-person'. The in-person assessments are conducted in dedicated Departmental medical centres.

- The Medical Assessors team is also responsible for assessing cases for our partners in EU/Bilateral schemes.[6]

- This section was involved in developing the EESSI - Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information form for medical reports to citizens of other EU countries. DEASP is one of the five core Member States who was actively involved in the design of the EESSI- Detail Medical Report.

- In addition to the core duties, MRAS led by the CMO has carried out research and development to enhance the knowledge and improved efficiency of the service. This has included:

[6] The DEASP has a number of Bilateral Agreements with EU countries and is required as part of these agreements to carry out medical assessments on people resident in Ireland who are claiming benefits from another country. The DEASP medical assessor conducts an assessment of functional capacity, and completes the specific form which is returned to the country of origin.

- Renaissance Project – Early engagement in simple low back pain.
- Closed Certification Guidelines for Medical Certifier – evidence-based research of recovery duration for common health conditions to assist with certification.
- ICD (International Classification of Diseases) - Full capture of ICD 10 codes in all medical-related schemes since 2017. This practice allows for more accurate identification of medical conditions and observes the trend of change over time. It is also used to exclude certain medical conditions from being reviewed unnecessarily.
- Customer service improvement - reviewed and revised application forms in order to ensure the information gathered is appropriate and pertinent to the scheme applied for, thus allowing for fair and efficient assessment and the correct opinion being provided to the Deciding Officers. The examples are the Care report for Carer's Allowance (CR1) and MR99 (Customer's health/functional questionnaire).

Medical Assessors

- All Medical Assessors are fully registered medical practitioners with a minimum three years of post-graduate experience on recruitment.
- A number of Medical Assessors have at least one post-graduate specialist qualification.
- The specialties of Medical Assessors are General Practice, Psychiatry, Surgery, and General Internal Medicine with speciality in Rheumatology, Rehabilitation Medicine and Public health medicine.
- All Medical Assessors undergo a comprehensive training programme in disability assessment and evaluation. Furthermore, they are encouraged to attain Licentiateship of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (LFOM). At this juncture, ten Medical Assessors have attained LFOM and two are in currently on the course.
- The majority of medical assessments are conducted at desk. In 2019, some 75,239 desk assessments and 5,295 in-person assessments were recorded.

GP Panel

- MRAS manages and maintains a panel of approximately 3,000 General Practitioners who provide medical certificates for Illness Benefit/Occupational Injury Benefit and medical reports with regard to eligibility to illness/disability schemes.
- The system of closed certification for short-term illness, introduced in March 2019, provides defined average periods of expected recovery and return to work for certain common medical conditions and common surgical procedures. This GP assessment covers the Illness Benefit certification for the expected full duration of absence from work instead of the former weekly certification process.
- A system of e-certification is available on GP Practice system (Socrates, HealthOne and Helix) and is now in use by over 2,000 of the GPs. E-certification enables GPs to send the Illness Benefit certification directly to the Department through their practice management system.

GP payment costs

- Expenditure for medical certificates and reports for 2019 was €30.8 million.
- An estimate of €30 million is provided for medical certificates and medical reports in 2020. The estimate at the time took account of the new fee structure for the introduction of closed certification. As a result of COVID-19 the number of medical certificates received for Quarter 1 2020 (1 March – 31 May) were higher than anticipated when the budget was profiled (Estimate: €7m – Cost: €10.5m). Prior to March 2019, GPs certified customers weekly in respect of illness absences and were paid a fee of €8.50 per sick certificate issued. Since then, a new fee of €50 was introduced per sick certificate issued in respect of closed certification. A reduced fee of €10 is paid where the customer has been placed on monthly, three monthly or six monthly certification patterns by the Department. There had previously been no change in GP fees since 2004.

Impact of COVID-19 on Medical Assessment Services

- As a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic in Ireland and the Public Health and Safety restriction measures introduced by the Government on 12th March, Medical Assessment Services have been impacted in several areas.
    - Suspension of all face to face examinations – affecting schemes such as Illness Benefit & Occupational Injury benefit.
    - Though the majority of long term schemes such as Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension and Carers Allowance which are processed by way of computer systems could continue, several schemes which are processed on paper, saw a reduction in processing i.e. Occupational Injury Benefit reviews.

- Adaptions & innovations in work processes enabled continued medical assessment & services for EU partnership arrangements for the EU claimants, by way of computerised processing.
- Collaborative working & flexibility introduced during the restriction period led to adaptive & alternative processes enabling continued, albeit at reduced capacity Medical Assessment Services, e.g. telephone assessments of suitable claimants on Illness Benefit.
- All medical schemes (bar Covid-IB) saw a significant reduction in claim applications, possibly as a result of customers being unable to avail of medical reports or deferring applications.
- During the whole period, MRAS maintained a proactive channel of communication & fast track process for customer applications where the stated medical condition was of a serious or critical nature.
- Plans are in place to resume paused work in July on a phased basis, such as in-person assessments with infection, prevention and control measures in place.
- In summary, the overall impact on medical assessment services, besides a general reduction of applications, has been mainly on the Illness Benefit Review assessments

Carers' Payments and Supports

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard Principal Officer (Operations): Christine Gilligan

- The Department provides a range of supports to those caring for people who are incapacitated either due to illness or disability. They aim to provide an income support for those who cannot work full-time as a result of their caring responsibilities; to enable carers to remain in touch with the labour market to the greatest extent possible and to empower carers to participate fully in economic and social life.

- The Department actively engages with carers' representative groups, including Family Carers Ireland.

- The number of hours that carers can work or study outside the home was increased from 15 to 18 ½ per week with effect from 1st January 2020, at an estimated cost of €11.6m. This accommodates increased participation by carers in work or training to strengthen their connection with the labour force, while also serving the additional purpose of reducing the social alienation experienced by many carers.

- Total Expenditure on carers (Carers Benefit, Carers Allowance, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Carers Support Grant) has increased from just under €752 million in 2010 to an estimated €1,395 million in 2020. This is an increase of €643 million or 85% since then.

Carers Benefit (CARB)

- Carers Benefit is a social insurance payment for carers who have to leave the workforce or reduce their hours of work to 18.5 hours per week or less. It can be paid for up to 104 weeks for each person being cared for. The benefit may be claimed as a single continuous period or in any number of separate periods up to a total of 104 weeks.

- Payment is made at a set weekly rate of €220. Where a person is caring for two or more care recipients, the rate of payment is increased by 50%.

    - At the end of May 2020, there were 3,501 people in receipt of Carer's Benefit. This compares to 2,724 at the end of May 2019, an increase of almost 29%.

    - Claims received in 2019 (4,693) have increased by 14% over the 2018 figure (4,101). It is likely to increase at a similar pace in 2020 with 2,016 applications received up to the end of May 2020. The average time taken to award a new CARB claim at the end of May 2020 was five weeks. This has significantly reduced from an average of 12 weeks in 2019.

- Expenditure on CARB in 2019 was €43m, up by over 19% on 2018 (€36m). Over €43m has been provided for 2020.

Carers Allowance (CA)

- Carer's Allowance is a means-tested payment for people who are providing full-time care and attention to one or more persons who need this level of care. Applicants for CA must satisfy the habitual residence condition.

- Where a person is caring for two or more care recipients, the rate of payment is increased by 50%. CA is also payable in cases where two carers provide care on alternate weeks or where a carer provides care on alternate weeks while the care recipient attends a residential institution every other week. In these instances, the allowance is halved.

- At the end of May 2020, there were 87,270 people in receipt of Carer's Allowance, including 53,260 increases for qualified children. Over the last number of years, the number of recipients of CA has increased steadily. From the start of 2019 to the end of May 2020, the number of recipients has increased by 21% from 79,914 to 96,413.

- Expenditure on CA in 2019 was €862m, up €67m on 2018 (€795m). €919m has been provided for 2020.

- 19,402 claims for Carer's Allowance were received in 2019. Up to the end of May 2020 7,497 applications were received. This is a reduction of 15% compared to the same period in 2019. It is anticipated that this is a temporary reduction due to Covid-19 and that that the number of applications will increase over the coming months.

- The average time taken to determine new CA applications in 2019 was 14 weeks. This has reduced to 6 weeks in May 2020.

- A half-rate Carer's Allowance can be paid to carers in some cases in addition to their primary social welfare payment (e.g. a person in receipt of a pension caring for a partner can also receive a 'half-rate' carer's payment). Similarly, where the carer is a qualified adult on a welfare payment, the Qualified Adult Increase may be retained in addition to half-rate Carer's Allowance.

Expenditure and number of recipients on CA & CARB

	Carer's Allowance		*Carer's Benefit*	
Year	Expenditure	Number of recipients	Expenditure	Number of recipients
2015	€611,139	63,003	€30,117	2,240
2016	€653,667	70,459	€32,746	2,710
2017	€729,449	75,264	€36,377	2,762
2018	€795,361	79,914	€35,930	2,750
2019	€862,448	84,028	€43,296	3,177

Carer's Support Grant

- The Carer's Support Grant is paid automatically to carers who are receiving Carer's Allowance (whether full rate or half rate), Carer's Benefit, or Domiciliary Care Allowance. It is also available to other full-time carers who are not receiving any of these payments. This Grant (formerly called Respite Care Grant) amounts to €1,700 in respect of each care recipient. 114,000 carers benefited from this grant in June 2020.

- The estimated expenditure on the Carer's Support Grant this year is €237.32 million.

Dormant Accounts Funding (Carers and People with Disabilities)

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Helen Mc Donald*

- In recent years, the Dormant Accounts Fund has been used to assist 12 projects across the country providing training, information and related support services for family carers. The purpose of this measure is to assist carers to provide the best care possible to the care recipient, to reduce the risk of injury to the carer and care recipient and to help family carers cope with the emotional turmoil of their role.

- €5 million has been secured in 2020 for projects supporting young carers and people with disabilities. Pobal are currently working on the specifications for a 'Call for Submissions' which will be submitted to the Minister for review and consideration.

Treatment Benefits

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Tony Kieran*

The Treatment Benefits scheme consists of three separate benefit types:

- Dental Benefit
- Optical Benefit
- Medical Appliance (e.g. Hearing Aid) Benefit

- The scheme offers assistance towards the provision of dental/optical treatment to those who satisfy certain qualifying PRSI conditions and to their dependent spouses/partners in some cases.

- Prior to Budget 2010, a wide range of dental treatments were available and optical benefits included either free glasses or a contribution to more expensive frames. From 2010 to 2017, treatments available were significantly restricted, with a consequent reduction in expenditure on the scheme from €86m in 2009 to a low of €18.8m in 2013. Expenditure in 2017 rose to €32.8m due to the extension to the self-employed and the re-introduction of certain benefits, with 695,000 claims paid. In 2018, over 1.2m claims were paid at a cost of €92m as the re-introduced treatments became widely availed of once again. In 2019, 1.3m claims were processed at a cost of €92.7m.

- The audiological scheme continues to offer a 50% grant for hearing aids subject to a fixed maximum amount of €500 for each hearing aid every four years.

- Services carried out under the Treatment Benefit Scheme are delivered by a panel of private practitioners under agreements entered into with the Minister. There are approximately 2,360 Dental practitioners, 479 Optical practitioners and 126 Hearing Aid suppliers on the Department's panel.

- An increase in fees for both the Optical exam and the Dental scale and polish treatment were introduced from October 2017.

- The Department has experienced an increase in the number of eligibility queries across all three schemes (dental, optical, hearing aids). Over 2 million eligibility checks are carried out on-line each year by service providers to see if their patients are qualified for Treatment Benefit, using the WelfarePartners self-service portal. Over 97% of claims are submitted and fully processed online via this portal.

- Dental and optical practices were closed in the period mid-March to end May, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, with dentists dealing with emergency cases only. Understandably, claims in this period have dropped off considerably but are expected to increase now that clinics are re-opening.

(iv) Older People

- The Department provides a range of income support payments for older people and for widows/ widowers/surviving partners:

    - The contributory state pension, where payments are based on a person's record of social insurance contributions.
    - The means-tested state pension - State Pension Non-Contributory (SPNC)
    - Widows, Widowers & Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension (WSCPCP);
    - Widow/Widower & Surviving Civil Partner's Non-Contributory Pension (WSCPNCP)

- State pensions account for the single largest block of social welfare expenditure. In 2019, approximately €8.041 billion was spent on pensions, representing 39.2% of the Department's total current expenditure. Expenditure on pensions is increasing by approximately €1 billion every three to four years because of demographic pressures.

- The Department has policy responsibility for the pensions' system in Ireland which comprises the contributory and non-contributory State pensions as well as voluntary supplementary pensions provided through a variety of arrangements and regulated by the State[7]. These are pensions sponsored by the employer, or personal pensions such as Retirement Annuity Contracts (RACs) and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs).

- The overall objective of the Irish pensions' system is to provide an adequate basic standard of living through direct state supports and to encourage people to make supplementary pension provision to improve the level of their income on retirement.

Pensions

Assistant Secretary (Policy): Tim Duggan *Principal Officer (Policy): Alan Flynn*

- The Department is responsible for policy and legislation in relation to all pensions matters except Public Service Pensions which are the responsibility of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

- The World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Labour Organisation advocate a multi-pillar approach with each pillar complementing the others to reduce risk and improve total retirement income. Broadly speaking, this multi-pillar approach entails a publicly managed 'first pillar' - the State pension, a 'second pillar' consisting of occupational pensions and a 'third pillar' consisting of private, individual, pension plans funded from personal savings.

Pension Age

[7] Occupational pensions policy is underpinned by the provisions of the Pensions Act 1990 (as amended) and associated regulations.

- People are living longer lives. For example, based on CSO figures, a 65 year old man in 1996 would have had life expectancy of 13.8 years (i.e. they could expect, on average, to live to 78.8), whereas by 2011 this had increased to 17.7 years, an increase of over 28%. Over the same period, the life expectancy of a 65 year old woman increased from 17.4 years to 20.6, an increase of over 18%. In other words, average life expectancy rose by over 23% in a period of just 15 years. These changes, while very positive, also result in significantly increased pension costs.

- As a result of this demographic trend, the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which is currently increasing by approximately €1 billion every three to four years (without taking into account the effect of Budget rate increases). For example, the cost of pension payments rose from €7.1 billion in 2016 to €7.75 billion in 2018, an increase of €650m (or 9.2%) in two years. For comparison, the Consumer Price Index rose by 0.5% in the two-year period from January 2016 to January 2018, and by 1.1% in the period from December 2016 to December 2018.

- This trend is not expected to cease. In the coming decades, the ratio of people of working age to pensioners is set to halve, from about five workers for each pensioner, to about two and a half workers per pensioner. This clearly has significant implications for the viability of the state pension system, rooted as it is on a pay-as-you-go basis.

- The purpose of increases to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy.

- Sustainability is vital so that the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive an adequate pension themselves when they reach retirement age. To this end, the *Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011* provided that State pension age would be increased gradually to 68 years. If it is to remain at 66, primary legislation will have to be amended.

- Countries all over the world are grappling with similar issues.

- Any reduction in the state pension age would add to total pension expenditure and therefore would put pressure on the sustainability indicator of the Medium Term Objective set for Ireland under the EU's Stability and Growth Pact.

- There is no single fixed retirement age in the State and the age at which employees retire is generally a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. An employer may have a retirement age in a contract of employment but must be able to objectively justify it, e.g. a helicopter winchman has a mandatory retirement age of 55 on health and safety grounds. If an employee is compulsorily

retired and does not accept the employer's justification, s(he) may pursue a case under the Employment Equality Acts to the Workplace Relations Commission.

- **State Pension (Transition)** was paid to people aged 65 **who had retired from work** and who had enough social insurance contributions. It was not means-tested. It was paid up until age 66, at which time the person would be eligible for State Pension (Contributory). State Pension (Transition) was discontinued from 2014.

Pensions Costs Scenarios

- The following sets out the Department's best current estimates in relation to Pensions Costs under a number of possible future scenarios.

Number of Pension Recipients

- Because of demographic pressures, the number of pensioners will continue to rise over the next 5 years. The current pension recipient population will increase from 677,000 in 2020 to 810,000 in 2025, based on the current State Pension Age (SPA) of 66 years. If SPA increases to 67 years in 2021, the 2025 pension recipient population will reduce to 757,000. If SPA reduces to 65 years in 2021, the 2025 pension recipient population will increase to 855,000. If State Pension Transition (SPT) is made available, it is estimated that there will be an additional 20,000 pensioners for each year SPT is payable.

Additional Pension Costs

- The annual cost of pensions with an SPA of 66 years (including Christmas bonus but NOT increases in rates of payment), will increase from €8.9 billion in 2020 to €10.8 billion in 2025. This increase in expenditure of approximately €1.9 billion in 2025 is directly related to the demographic changes in the pension population. These demographic pressures alone mean that total expenditure on pensions over the five years from 2021 to 2025 will increase by €5.5 billion, without any payment rate increases.

- If the rate of payment increased by €5 per week each year over the next five years, the 2025 annual costs will be an additional €1.1 billion higher, resulting in overall expenditure of €11.9 billion in that year. A €5 per week rate increase, would increase the five year spend in total by €3.2 billion extra.

- Therefore, in leaving the SPA at 66, the combination of demographic pressures and a projected €5 per week each year for the next five years would bring the total increased spend to €8.7 billion.

- Based on a revisiting of the Actuarial Review of the SIF 2015, not proceeding with the legislated SPA changes would result in the Net Present Value of projected future shortfalls to the Social Insurance Fund out to 2071 increasing by €42 billion - from €335 billion to €377 billion.

Cost of State Pension Age Options

- The options for SPA in public discourse generally are (i) retain SPA at 66 years (ii) increase SPA to 67 years as currently provided for in legislation or (iii) reduce SPA to 65 years.

- Broadly speaking: Retaining SPA at 66 will cost an additional €550 million in 2025 – as the figures change each year, a general estimate is that leaving the SPA at 66 rather than increasing it to 67 would cost an extra €400 million per year (and this would continue to increase). This is in addition to the extra €2.4 billion required to fund pensions for those over 67 years; Reducing SPA to 65 would cost an extra €3.5 billion in 2025 v 2020 costs.

- The re-introduction of SPT on the same basis as it was available up to 2014 would have a net cost of c.€127 million each year and this would also increase over time (on an approximate pro-rata basis).

- The following tables set out the net estimated costs in € billions of the options considered:

2025 ANNUAL ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE (€ bILLIONS)

SPA	66 Years	66 Years + SPT for 65 - 66	67 years	67 Years + SPT for 66 – 67	67 Years + SPT for 65 – 67	65 Years
Net Cost*	11.9	12.1	11.4	11.6	11.7	12.6
of which:						
increase caused by demographic growth in numbers	1.9	2.0	1.4	1.6	1.7	2.4
increase relates to €5pw rate increases from 2021-2025	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2

TOTAL ESTIMATED EXPENDITUE OVER 5 YEARS 2021-2025 (€ BILLIONS)

SPA	66 Years	66 Years + SPT for 65 - 66	67 years	67 Years + SPT for 66 – 67	67 Years + SPT for 65 – 67	65 Years
Net Cost*	53.5	54.4	51.4	52.2	53.0	56.0
of which:						
increase caused by demographic growth in numbers	5.5	6.1	3.9	4.5	5.1	7.5
increase relates to €5pw rate increases from 2021-2025	3.2	3.3	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.3

***Gross pension expenditure plus additional ancillary cost for household benefits, etc., and taking account of +/- for costs/savings on working age schemes and offset by +/-for changes in PRSI income.**

Costs are provided on the assumption that existing pension rates and eligibility rules continue to apply and that compensating measures (such as actuarial reductions/ enhancements) aren't applied.

The Roadmap for Pension Reform

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer: Alan Flynn*

- Pensions reform is a priority. Ireland has benefited from a relatively young population compared to other European countries. However, the age profile of the population is now changing.
- The coming decades will be marked by a transition towards a much older population structure. The number of people at State pension age and older will double from approximately 640,000 to 1.3 million over the next 30 years. This has profound implications for the sustainability of our pension system.
- In order to ensure that the pension system continues to be fit for purpose, the State pension system must be reformed to better reflect the level of social insurance contributions. In parallel, personal retirement savings must increase to supplement a pensioner's State pension income.
- The Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 sets out a timeline for reform of future State, private and public service pension provision. It covers six strands including:
    - Reform of the State Pension
    - A new Automatic Enrolment Savings System
    - Improving Governance and Regulation
    - Measures to support the operation of Defined Benefit Schemes
    - Public Service Pensions Reform
    - Supporting Fuller Working Lives.

The Total Contributions Approach to the State Pension

- The Total Contributions Approach (TCA) is intended to be a fairer and more transparent system where the person's lifetime contribution will be more closely reflected in the benefit received. A public consultation on the design of the TCA involving a wide variety of stakeholder groups, including workshops with representative bodies, briefing and Q&A for Oireachtas members was conducted in 2018. Nearly 300 submissions covering a range of issues including the number of years required for a full pension, provision for home-caring and the self-employed, were received.

- Officials in the Department have developed and costed a number of different models, all of which include significant recognition for home-caring periods, and detail on the potential impact of the change for the sustainability of the system and for payments to future pensioners.

- Once agreed by the Minister and the Government, the Department would then set about introducing the reform by developing the necessary legislation, ICT systems, administrative processes and, crucially, a comprehensive information campaign for the general public. The Roadmap stated that the introduction of TCA would happen in Quarter 3 of 2020. However, this work is now delayed – arising from the public debate that has been taking place about the State Pension in recent months, and diversion of resources to deal with the measures required for COVID-19.

Legislation Governing Defined Benefit (DB) Schemes

- Supplementary private pensions fall into two types, Defined Benefit (DB) and Defined Contribution (DC) which together account, in Ireland, for about €110 billion of member assets under management. Historically, in DB schemes, the amount of contributions was determined by the pre-defined pension that would become payable on retirement and the level of returns (after administration costs) on invested contributions. In contrast, in DC schemes, the pension that is payable is not pre-defined but is determined by the level of contributions together with the level of investment returns (again after administration costs). Assuming appropriate contribution periods and contribution rates, the level of investment returns is key to determining whether or not the target pension level can be achieved and indeed, in DB schemes, whether or not the scheme itself is sustainable.

- Over the last number of years, pension legislation has been amended to address challenges and protect DB scheme members, including:

    - The *Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act 2013* provided for a fairer and more equitable distribution of assets in the event of the wind-up of an underfunded DB scheme. It also facilitates greater risk-sharing between the beneficiaries in an underfunded scheme, while still providing for priority protection of pension benefits.

    - The *Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Act 2018* provided entitlement, in certain circumstances, to spousal benefits for civil partners and same sex spouses who are members of occupational pension schemes.

    - In addition, the *Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017*, which was published in May 2017 but now lapsed with the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil, contained a number of key measures for DB pension schemes. It was intended that these measures would act to support existing provisions in the *Pensions Act 1990* by providing for further protection of members' benefits and enhancing employer responsibilities for their schemes. This Bill was at Committee Stage at the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil. It is a matter for the 33rd Dáil as to whether that Bill should be

restored to the Order Paper (at Committee Stage). Alternatively, any DB related provisions could, following Government approval, be introduced by way of a new Bill.

EU Legislation relating to occupational and supplementary pensions

IORP Directive

- The over-arching objective of the Directive (Directive (EU) 2016/2341) (known as "IORP II") is to facilitate the development of occupational retirement savings in the EU. Many of the provisions contained within the IORP II Directive will support positive reform of the Irish occupational pension sector. The Directive provides for a range of new requirements concerning :
    - governance,
    - management standards in schemes,
    - safekeeping of assets,
    - the need for clear and relevant information to members,
    - the removal of obstacles to cross-border provision of pension services, and
    - the facilitation of cross border transfer of schemes.
- There are also provisions that will enhance the powers of the Pensions Authority for effective supervision of occupational pensions.
- While many of the provisions of the Directive are already transposed into Irish law, Regulations under the *European Communities Act 1972* are necessary to fully transpose the Directive. The deadline for transposition of the IORP Directive into Irish law was 13th January 2019. In July 2019, The EU Commission issued a 'Reasoned Opinion' against Ireland in relation to the failure to transpose the Directive by the deadline. As the deadline for transposing the Directive has already passed, the Department maintains ongoing liaison with the relevant officials of the European Commission and keeps them abreast of the position in relation to ongoing work to transpose the Directive via Statutory Instrument in conjunction with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC).
- Some of the delay was as result of a legal case against its transposition. This is a substantial Directive and work by the Department, in conjunction with the Pensions Authority and the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, is ongoing and at an advanced stage to finalise and settle the Regulations. It is hoped to transpose the Directive as soon as possible.

Climate Action Strategy

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer: Alan Flynn*

- The Department is responsible for two actions under the Climate Action Strategy:
    - To consider how a requirement could be placed on pension providers to disclose what portion of any fund is made up of fossil fuel assets and to provide an option for pension holders to opt for a fund which does not include fossil fuel. A report was provided, on schedule, to the Minister in Q4 2019.
    - To target potential returners to the workforce as part of the Department's communications campaign to advise them of case officer services available to help them progress into employment. The Department's Employer Relations Team has engaged with employers, ETBs and other organisations and ran an advertising campaign in December 2019 / January 2020.
- The Department is also committed to undertaking an impact assessment on the current and projected future increases in carbon tax on low income families and shall bring forward a report on same in the first half of 2020.

Automatic Enrolment

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer: Roshin Sen*

- While the State pension provides a basic level of income and an effective protection against pensioner poverty, it is not designed or intended to secure full pension adequacy for all retirees in the sense of replacing employment income in retirement. To achieve pension adequacy, the 'first pillar' State pension should, in most cases, be combined with supplementary individual retirement savings in the form of 'second pillar' occupational pensions and/or 'third pillar' personal pensions.
- The proportion of employees in Ireland with supplementary pension cover, which includes both occupational and personal pensions, is low by comparison with countries that have mandatory/quasi-mandatory systems. The rate of supplementary pension coverage in Ireland is just over 50% of the working population and this reduces to 35% when the private sector is considered in isolation (CSO, Pension Coverage Survey 2019).
- Ireland's supplementary pension coverage rate has remained relatively static over the last 20 years, despite significant State incentives being available through tax relief to employers, employees and the self-employed. As a result, many retirees may suffer an unanticipated reduction in living standards in the future, particularly if the trend towards a higher proportion of people renting rather than owning homes continues.
- To address this low coverage rate, particularly among those on lower incomes, the Roadmap for Pensions Reform contains proposals for the introduction of an 'Automatic Enrolment' (AE) retirement savings system by 2022. AE will see a transition from the current voluntary supplementary pension system to one which will automatically enrol

employees, subject to certain parameters, into a quality-assured retirement savings system, with freedom of choice to opt-out.

Public Consultation Process for Automatic Enrolment

- A public consultation process for an Automatic Enrolment Retirement Savings System took place between August 2018 and March 2019. To inform the consultation process a Strawman proposal was drafted setting out a proposed approach to the design of an AE system with the intention of generating discussion and improving ideas.
- The consultation process resulted in significant engagement from a diverse range of stakeholders including employer and employee representatives, advocacy groups and interested individuals. Overall, the consultation process found that there is an overwhelming acknowledgement of the need to reform the current purely voluntary nature of Irish supplementary pensions and that there is almost universal support for the introduction of an AE retirement savings system. However, stakeholders also advanced a diverse and often conflicting range of views around the precise manner in which the system should operate and its interaction with current pension provision. A series of reports on the findings of the consultation process were published on the DEASP website.

Economic impact assessment of introducing AE

- A macro-economic and micro-economic impact assessment of introducing AE has been conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).
- In relation to the macro-economic impact, the ESRI found that the introduction of contributions to an AE retirement savings system would lead to lower levels of economic activity in the short to medium-term because of lower household disposable income as a consequence of pension contributions being made to retirement saving funds. However, in the longer term, the introduction of an AE system is likely to have a positive effect on the economy as consumption is smoothed over the life course.

Government Decision – October 2019

- Taking into account feedback from the consultation process and the findings from additional research, including the macro and micro economic impact analysis of AE conducted by the ESRI, the Government approved, in October 2019, significant elements of the design of the AE system.
- Key decisions were made in relation to a range of issues, including the target membership, the contribution rates, the policies in relation to opting-out and re-enrolment, the administrative arrangements and organisational approach and the investment options. Some of the key features that were agreed include:

Target membership

- Current and new employees aged between 23 and 60 years of age and earning €20,000 or above per annum (across all employments) will be automatically enrolled.

- Those earning below €20,000 per annum (across all employments) and those employees aged under 23 and over 60 will be able to 'opt-in' to the system.

- Employees who are existing members of a pension scheme/contract which meets prescribed minimum standards and contribution levels will not be automatically enrolled for the employment to which that pension relates.

Contributions

- During the phased roll-out of AE, employees will be required to make initial minimum default contributions of 1.5% of qualifying earnings, increasing by 1.5 percentage points every three years thereafter to a maximum contribution of 6% at the beginning of year 10.
- Employers will be required to make a matching (tax deductible) contribution on behalf of the employee at the specified contribution rate.
- Employer contributions will be limited to a qualifying earnings threshold of €75,000 – which will be reviewed over time.

Policy for opt-out and re-enrolment

- Contributions during the first six months of membership will be compulsory.
- Member opt-out of the system will be facilitated in a two month 'opt-out window' (between the start of the 7th and the end of the 8th month).
- Members who opt-out during this opt-out window will receive a refund of personal contributions paid up to the point of opt-out.
- Members who opt-out will be automatically re-enrolled after three years but will have the ability to opt-out again under the same circumstances outlined above.

Administrative arrangements and organisational approach

- A Central Processing Authority (CPA) will be established by the State and will be responsible for sourcing, on a competitive basis via an open tender, a limited number of Registered Providers to provide a defined suite of retirement savings options.
- Employees will be automatically enrolled with the Central Processing Authority by their employer on commencement of employment.
- Employees (rather than employers) will be responsible for selecting a provider and a savings fund option. In the absence of any savings decision, the enrolled employee will be automatically allocated to the default fund of one of the Registered Providers on a carousel basis.

- The CPA will seek to set annual administrative, management and investment charges of no more than 0.5% of assets under management. This charges cap will apply to all providers.
- Member account portability between employments will be facilitated by a 'pot-follows-member' approach. In other words, a person will be able to maintain one pension pot throughout their working life regardless of the number of separate employments they may have or the number of times they move from one job to another.

Current work programme

- There are five main areas in the design of AE, where work is continuing to produce design options for Government to consider. These areas are related to the design of:
    - the scope and role of the Central Processing Authority;
    - the nature and functions of the Registered Providers, including an examination of the inclusion of a public body as a Registered Provider;
    - the investment framework and funds to be offered by Registered Providers, including the design of the default fund, and also the pay-out phase;
    - the State financial incentive; and
    - the phasing of implementation.

- The Department is receiving technical support from the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS), which provides support to national Governments for the preparation and implementation of growth-enhancing administrative and structural reforms. A project team has been established comprising policy/operational experts from Denmark and Sweden, project management from Northern Ireland Cooperation Overseas and representation from the European Commission, in addition to officials from the Department.

- The project team is currently working out options for the Central Processing Authority, the Registered Providers, the State financial incentive and the phasing of implementation and proposals on these areas will be available by Q3/Q4 of this year. Additional support, recently approved by the European Commission, is being provided to develop proposals on the investment framework, the design of the default fund and the pay-out phase and the work on these areas is to be completed in the first half of 2021.

State Pension (Contributory)

Assistant Secretary (Operations): Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer (Operations): Nora Durcan*

- State Pension (Contributory) (SPC) is a social insurance payment for people aged 66 or over who satisfy certain social insurance contribution conditions. The pension (personal

rate) is not means-tested, or affected by any other income a claimant may have such as ongoing earnings or an occupational pension.

- Expenditure on the SPC in 2019 was €5.6 billion and the estimated cost in 2020 is €5.81 billion. There are currently 431,224 primary recipients of SPC, plus an additional 59,944 adult dependants (spouse/civil partner/cohabitant) who are beneficiaries of a means-tested increase for qualified adult (IQA) on those pensions.

- The performance target for new (Irish resident) SPC claims is set at 90% by date of entitlement (the applicant's 66th birthday). An average of 97% was achieved in Q4 2019.

- International claims are processed to a target of 90% within 16 weeks. This cohort includes new claims from people living outside the Republic of Ireland (who apply through the competent institution in their country of residence) as well as Irish residents who may improve their rate when social insurance contributions from employment outside the State is taken into account. The processing time is dependent on cooperation from other jurisdictions.

State Pension (Non-Contributory)

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Anne Marie Cassidy*

- State Pension (Non-Contributory) (SPNC) is a means-tested payment for people aged 66 or over, who do not qualify for State Pension (Contributory) based on their record of social insurance contributions. Claimants are required to provide details of all income and assets at application stage, and also to notify, at any time after they are awarded pension, any changes in circumstance which may affect their pension entitlement. The SPNC scheme area maintains an ongoing programme of risk-based control projects. The scheme's Estates team processes post-death pension entitlement reviews and, where necessary, raises overpayments for repayment by the Estate of the deceased.

- There were some 95,213 customers in receipt of SPNC at 31st May 2020

- SPNC expenditure in 2019 was some €1.04bn and the estimated cost in 2020 is the same.

- The number of SPNC recipients has gradually declined over the past decade, from 97,000 to 95,000. This reflects increased participation in insured employment and self-employment, resulting in more people qualifying for State Pension (Contributory).

- The average processing time from January to May 2020 was 7.2 weeks due to the assignment of additional resources to this work during the Covid19 crisis period.

Widow's, Widower's and Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Nora Durcan*

- Widow's, Widower's & Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension (WSCPCP) is a social insurance based payment, payable to both men and women, on the death of their spouse or civil partner. It is not means-tested and entitlement is not affected by any other income a person may have.
- A Widow's pension was introduced in 1936. It was extended to widowers in 1994 and to surviving civil partners on the introduction of civil partnership in 2010.
- At the end of 2019, there were just over 122,600 recipients of WSCPCP. Approximately 85% of recipients are female and 15% are male.
- Expenditure on the WSCPCP in 2019 was some €1.56bn, with a similar estimate for expenditure in 2020.
- The full rate for recipients is €208.50 for people under 66 years of age and €248.30 for recipients aged over 66.
- The number of people receiving WSCPCP increases by about 1,000 annually. The average processing time for a new WSCPCP application is approximately three weeks where all the requisite information and documentation is available to the Deciding Officer.

Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant

- The Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant is a once-off payment of €6,000 automatically paid to a person in receipt of Widow's, Widower's Or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension, who is entitled to an increase on their pension for a qualified child following the death of their spouse or civil partner.
- The Grant was introduced in 1999 and extended to surviving civil partners on the introduction of civil partnership in 2010.
- In 2019, 1004 people were paid a Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant.
- Expenditure for 2019 was €5.6m with an estimate of €5.76m for 2020.

Widow/Widower's non-Contributory Pension/Surviving Civil Partner's Non-Contributory Pension

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Anne Marie Cassidy*

- This is a means-tested payment payable to a widow or widower or surviving civil partner up to age 66 who does not satisfy the contribution conditions for the equivalent contributory pension (WSCPCP).

- This pension is not payable where the applicant has dependent children. In such cases, the more appropriate payment is the One-Parent Family Payment. The provisional outturn for 2019 was €13.9m and the estimated expenditure for 2020 is €12.7m.

- In January 2019, there were 1,459 customers receiving Widow(er)'s Non-Contributory Pension. The number of recipients continues to decline – (1,352 in May 2020), reflecting the fact that most widows and widowers now qualify for a contributory pension.

- On average it takes 10 weeks to award a Widow(er)'s Non-Contributory Pension or Surviving Civil Partner's Non-Contributory Pension.

Deserted Wife's Benefit and Allowance

- In addition to the primary pension payments, this Department also pays Deserted Wife's Benefit and Deserted Wife's Allowance, two payments now closed to new applicants.

- *Deserted Wife's Benefit* is a social insurance payment made to a woman deserted by her husband. Entitlement to payment is based on social insurance contributions paid by the wife or by her husband.

- Deserted Wife's Benefit was closed off to new applications with effect from January 1997 when the One-Parent Family Payment was introduced.

- In December 2019, there were 5,784 customers receiving Deserted Wife's Benefit. The expenditure for 2019 was € 71.9m. The estimated expenditure for 2020 is €68.5m.

- As the scheme is closed there are no new applicants and the number of claimants reduced by approximately 401 in 2019. At end May 2020 there were 5,626 customers.

- *Deserted Wife's Allowance* is a means tested payment made to women under the age of 66 years who have no dependent children, who were deserted by their husband and who do not qualify for Deserted Wife's Benefit.

- Deserted Wife's Allowance was closed to new applications in 1997 when the One-Parent Family Payment was introduced.

- Former Deserted Wife's Allowance recipients who had been transferred to Lone Parent's Allowance (now One-Parent Family Payment) in 1990 and who cease to be eligible for One-Parent Family Payment because they no longer have a dependent child may re-qualify for Deserted Wife's Allowance once they are aged 40 years or over.

- As at end May 2020, there were 88 customers.

- Expenditure for 2019 was €0.96m and the estimated expenditure for 2020 is €0.82m. As the scheme is closed, there are no new applicants so the number of Deserted Wife's Allowance recipients continues to decline.

Free Travel

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officers: Anne Marie Cassidy (Operations) & Alan Flynn (Policy)*

- The free travel scheme was established in 1967 and is available to people over 66 years, to carers and to people in receipt of certain disability payments. Since 2017, under the *Make Work Pay for people with disabilities* initiative, people with a long-term disability payment, who move off the payment to get a job, will retain their free travel pass for a period of five years.

- The scheme permits travel for free on most CIE public transport services, Luas and some 80 private operators. Free travel is also available on cross-border journeys and within Northern Ireland (if over 66).

- There are currently 976,441 customers in receipt of Free Travel. Between 2017 and 2019, the number of Free Travel recipients increased by 7% from 902,513 to 966,206.

- Funding for the free travel scheme was increased by €10m in 2018, which enabled the Department to put Bus Éireann–Expressway on an equal footing with other commercial operators participating in the free travel scheme by reducing the amount of discount required from the company from 40% to 30%. Budget 2019 saw another €5m added to the free travel budget to allow for new participants into the scheme (e.g. Go Ahead), bringing the total budget for 2019 to €95m. There was no increase in the Free Travel provision for 2020.

- In recognition of the difficulties that the Covid crisis presented to travel operators, most of whom had to cease operation, the monthly Free Travel payment was made in advance for the months of March and April. From May 2020, payments are continuing on a monthly basis.

Payments under the Free Travel Scheme in 2019

- The Department makes a block payment to the CIÉ group and the apportionment of payment between the three constituent companies, Bus Éireann, Bus Átha Cliath and Iarnród Éireann is a matter which the CIE Group determines. This payment reflects a range of factors negotiated over the years including fare increases, peak time access to free travel, service improvements, changes and enhancements. A discount of 30% is applied to reflect the fares foregone nature of the scheme.

- Payments to private travel operators participating in the scheme are determined by way of a survey of their passenger numbers. An average fee is agreed on foot of surveys undertaken over a six month period and based on the operator's own fare charges. The same discount applied to CIE is applied to the private operators.

- The following is a breakdown of payments made in 2019:

	€ million
CIE (Including Bus Eireann-Expressway)	€68.95
Private Operators	€14.80
National Transport Authority / POBAL Rural Transport Programme	€4.50
Luas / Transdev	€3.90
Cross Border Travel/ All Ireland Free Travel	€1.70
Total	**€93.85**

PSCFT – Public Services Card - Free Travel Variant

- Since May 2015, the paper based free travel pass is no longer being issued and is being replaced by the Public Services Card Free Travel (PSCFT).
- Currently over 93% of all Free Travel customers nationally have received their PSCFT.
- Due to the interruption of services during Covid 19 crisis, there are delays getting PSCFT cards renewed where the card had expired. An interim arrangement is in place with transport providers to accept expired PSCFTs where presented by Free Travel customers.

Discussions regarding future funding of free travel scheme

- [redacted]

Household Benefits Package (HHB)

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Anne Marie Cassidy*

- The Household Benefits Package comprises the Electricity/Gas Allowance (€1.15 per day) and the Free Television Licence Scheme (€160 per year) – a total value per year of €580.
- The HHB package is available to those -
  - aged 70 or over regardless of means and household composition;
  - in receipt of Carer's Allowance who are living with the person they are caring for;
  - aged between 66 and 70 and in receipt of a qualifying payment (e.g. State Pension Contributory, State Pension Non-Contributory) from the Department or who satisfy a means test and if applicable, live with a qualifying spouse, civil partner or cohabitant.

- aged under 66 and in receipt of a disability-related qualifying payment (e.g. Invalidity Pension, Disability Allowance) and if applicable, live with a qualifying spouse, civil partner or cohabitant.

- The Household Benefits Package is paid to some 461,284 customers, mostly elderly or those with a disability. The package is either paid as a monthly credit on the customers' utility bill if they are customers of Electric Ireland or Bord Gais or as a cash payment if they are with other providers.

- In Budget 2020, the qualifying household condition for HHB was eased. With effect from January 2020, a claimant living in a household with another adult - other than his/her spouse or partner – will no longer be disqualified from receiving HHB.

- The 2019 provisional outturn for the Household Benefits Package was €248 million. The estimated expenditure for 2020 is €264 m. In 2019, the number of Household Benefit applications increased to 72,381 from 69,703 in the previous year, an increase of 4%. The average number of weeks to award a claim has improved in recent years taking one week to award, compared with two weeks to award in 2016.

- In 2013, the arrangements governing the electricity/gas allowance were changed from a unit based allowance to a credit based allowance. Customers can now get the electricity/gas allowance as a credit on their bill (and can require the supplier to refund any unused portion of that credit) or as a monthly cash payment. As a consequence, customers are no longer tied to a specific supplier and can now more readily switch between suppliers to take advantage of the best value in the market. At the time of the change, there were some 328,000 customers receiving their allowance as a credit on their bill with some 77,000 receiving a cash payment. Since the change, the number of customers receiving credit has reduced to some 277,052, while the number in receipt of cash payments has increased to 179,300. This indicates that the change may have facilitated some level of customer switching.

- A new online application service for HHB has been developed and is expected to go live in early July 2020. The new service will simplify and modernise the application process for HHB customers.

National Fuel Allowance Scheme

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officers: Anne Marie Cassidy (Operations) & Alan Flynn (Policy)*

- The Fuel Allowance Scheme is means-tested and assists pensioners and other welfare-dependent households towards their heating costs during the winter season. The allowance represents a contribution towards a person's normal heating expenses. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. The scheme currently operates over the winter season (increased to 28 weeks in Budget 2019) at an estimated cost of €261.35 million in

the 2019/2020 season. The allowance was increased from €22.50 per week to €24.50 per week in Budget 2020, effective from 6th January 2020.

- The option to receive the fuel allowance in two lump sums was introduced in the 2017/2018 fuel season, to facilitate those wishing to buy oil/turf in bulk and able to benefit from special offers, where available. In October 2018, 59,526 (16%) of customers opted for payment via lump sum. By May 2020, this figure has risen to 67,667, representing 18% of recipients.

- Only one Fuel Allowance is paid to a household. It is payable to those who are in receipt of a long-term social welfare payment (i.e. those in receipt of, for instance, Illness Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance for less than 15 months are ineligible), who satisfy a means test.

- An applicant in receipt of a means-tested qualifying payment is automatically deemed to have satisfied the means test for the Fuel Allowance.

- As the live register had continued to decrease for long term unemployed, the number of fuel recipients had also decreased. At the end of the winter fuel season 2018/2019, there were 372,259 customers entitled to Fuel Allowance which had reduced to 367,362 customers in May 2020. However, this trend may be reversed for the winter fuel season 2020/2021 following the impact of Covid 19 on employments levels.

- To support vulnerable households during the COVID-19 crisis, the 2019/2020 fuel season was extended by four weeks for existing eligible customers on a once-off basis. This extended the payment of €24.50 per week from 10th April until 8th May 2020.

- The estimated expenditure in 2020 is €295m.

Telephone Support Allowance

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Anne Marie Cassidy*

- The Telephone Support Allowance was announced in Budget 2018. The Allowance is paid automatically to those in receipt of a qualifying primary payment as well as Living Alone allowance plus Fuel Allowance.

- In June 2018, the allowance was paid to 124,600 customers. The customer base has continued to rise. At end December 2018, 129,244 (3.7% increase) customers were in receipt of the allowance; in December 2019, the figure stood at 131,562, and at end of May 2020, the number of customers was 132,753.

  The value of the weekly allowance is €2.50 (€130 annually). The cost of the scheme in 2019 was €17.2m. The estimated cost for 2020 is €17.5 million.

(v) Supplementary Welfare Allowance

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Des Henry*

- The Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme offers '*a safety net to the safety net*' within the overall social welfare system by providing assistance to those whose means are insufficient to meet their own needs and those of their dependants.

- The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance to people in certain circumstances. This assistance is generally provided to those people with a specific contingency which is not covered by payments under other state schemes or who are awaiting a decision in respect of a payment on another scheme.

- Supplementary Welfare Allowance can consist of a basic weekly payment (known as Basic Supplementary Allowance)) and/or a weekly/monthly supplement in respect of certain expenses a person may not be able to meet.

- The scheme also includes payments to help with the cost of any exceptional needs of a once-off nature (e.g. purchase of a household appliance) and urgent needs (e.g. arising from a flood or fire in a person's home).

- The SWA scheme is administered by the Community Welfare Service of the Department.

- In May 2020, there were some 40,000 SWA claims in payment:*

Payment type	**Number of claims**
Basic weekly payments	14,600
Rent Supplements	21,100
Diet Supplements	1,900
Heat Supplements	1,150
Other Supplements (including approximately 600 former Mortgage interest supplement cases)	1,670

** This figure will include some people who are in receipt of more than one form of SWA payment e.g. basic weekly payment plus rent supplement.*

In addition, there were 30,000 once-off Exceptional Needs Payments made up to May 2020.

Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance

- The Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance (Basic SWA) is a weekly allowance paid to people who do not have enough income to meet their needs and those of their families and is payable at the weekly rate of €201 (personal rate) and €134.70 for a Qualified Adult.

- €128.2million has been provided to meet the costs of the payment in 2020. At the end of December 2019, there were approximately 17,000 recipients. Provisional expenditure in 2019 was € 120.2 million.

- Basic SWA may be paid to customers awaiting the outcome of a claim or an appeal for a primary social welfare payment. Payments issued under the SWA scheme are fully recouped, where possible, from the primary social welfare scheme on award.

- Apart from a number of excluded categories, anyone in the State who satisfies the habitual residence condition (HRC) and a means test, has registered for employment (unless they have a disability impeding work) and can prove unemployment may qualify for SWA.

Reduced Rate payments for those under 25

- Payment rates for persons under 25 mirror those of the Jobseeker's Allowance scheme.

- Persons aged 25 were previously paid a reduced rate. This was amended in the most recent budget, with effect from January 2020.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance rates 2020

Age	Maximum personal rate	Increase for an adult dependant	Increase for a child dependant From 6 January 2020
Aged 25 and over	€201	€134.70	€36 for a child aged under 12, €40 for a child aged 12 or over
Aged related rate for those aged 18-24	€112.70	€112.70	

Exemptions from the age-related rates:

- Those aged 18 - 24 years inclusive with a qualified child(ren).
- Persons aged 18 - 24 who were in the care of the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) during the period of 12 months before they reached the age of 18.
- 18 to 24 year olds who are living independently of the family home and are in receipt of certain housing supports (Rent Supplement, Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and social housing support).

Rent Supplement

- Rent Supplement is a demand-led scheme, the purpose of which is to provide short-term income support to assist with accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation. The 2019 outturn for Rent Supplement was €125.3 million, with the scheme supporting approximately 19,800 recipients per month throughout the year. The provision for 2020 is €164.6m.
- There are 6,741 cases in payment that have been awarded since 13th March. The average monthly tenancy cost is approximately €695.
- The strategic policy direction is to return Rent Supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support scheme. Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to those with a long-term housing need is transferring to Local Authorities, under the auspices of the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government. The underlying procedure to achieve Rent Supplement's withdrawal from long-term housing provision is to identify those customers in receipt of support for more than 18 months, and to request them to contact their Local Authority to have their housing needs assessed/addressed under the Housing Assistance Payment scheme.
- Housing Assistance Payment transfers from Rent Supplement are continuing in line with forecast; as at end of May, there were 14,382 Rent Supplement cases in payment that were awarded before 13th March (15,900 Feb 2020). The expected 2020 end of year (pre-Covid) recipient base will be in the region of 11,700 customers.
  - There are currently about 55,900 Housing Assistance Payment tenancies in place, of which 10,900 (0.6%) were recorded as direct transfers from Rent Supplement.

Rent Supplement: Recipient Numbers & Expenditure 2012 – end May 2020

Year	Recipients	% Change	Cost €000	% Change
2012	87,684		422,536	
2013	79,788	(-9.0%)	372,909	(- 11.7%)
2014	71,533	(-10.3%)	338,208	(- 9.3%)
2015	61,247	(- 14.4%)	311,059	(- 8.0%)
2016	48,041	(- 21.6%)	275,294	(- 11.5%)
2017	34,378	(- 28.4%)	230,566	(- 16.2%)
2018	24,303	(- 29.3%)	175,024	(- 24.1%)
2019	16,800	(-30.8%)	125,256[8]	(28.4%)
May 2020 Total	21,123	25.7%	€122,669	

[8] Forecast outturn for 2019

Rent Limit Review

- Historically, Rent Supplement support is subject to a statutory limit on the amount of rent that an applicant may incur. Increased limits for rent supplement were introduced in all areas of the country with effect from July 2016.
- The underlying finding, which remains the case now, is that the costs associated with increasing rent limits to attract significant additional levels of supply (taking into their account their impact on all three main schemes; Housing Assistance Payment, Rental Accommodation Scheme and Rent Supplement) would be extremely prohibitive.
- Increasing limits would also subsume a significant proportion of the limited levels of supply of private rental stock currently available, thereby considerably worsening overall rental market conditions.

Ongoing flexibility in rent supplement administration

- With less substitute housing stock for Rent Supplement recipients at least prior to the public health crisis, the Department has undertaken a targeted, flexible, case-by-case approach where rents may exceed the maximum limits. This approach has been set down under the National Tenancy Sustainment Framework.
- A protocol is in place with Threshold which operates in the areas where supply issues have been particularly acute – Dublin, Cork, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow and Galway City.
- Since the introduction of flexibility in 2014, approx. 15,600 persons at imminent risk of homelessness have been supported through increased rent supplement payments.
- The continued flexible case-by-case approach together with the recent reforms to the private rental sector, notably the 4% cap for annual rent review uplifts in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZ), has provided increased certainty and security for Rent Supplement tenants.
- The Department's response to the current emergency provides for the inherent flexibility of the Scheme to be available. Currently, the enhanced Rent Supplement scheme has been extended and remains under review in the context of the Government's continued response to the Covid emergency.
- Specific measures have been put in place to ensure that there are no undue delays in processing applications despite the large number of new cases received in a relatively short timeframe. This includes a redesigned five page application form and ensuring resources are in place for areas with expected high levels of demand. The standard time for applications to be processed is 2/3 working days. The quick turnaround of applications received ensures customers do not experience arrears build ups.

Exceptional Needs Payment

- Under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, Community Welfare Officers can make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. Those who qualify for an ENP are normally in receipt of a social welfare payment.

- €44.2 million was provided for the Exceptional and Urgent Needs schemes in 2020. The Department issued a total of 92,200 of these payments in 2019 at a cost of €43.2 million

- ENPs are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme, taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance. Recommended guidelines amounts are provided to ensure a consistent service but do not affect the statutory discretion available to officers administering the scheme in issuing a payment to assist an individual or household in any particular hardship situation which may arise.

- The main items eligible for assistance under the scheme include household appliances, house "kit out" items e.g. flooring, essential furniture when moving into a new home, beds, (where the landlord does not provide) clothing, prams and assistance with funerals costs.

- Support is also available to assist persons under this scheme towards rent deposits or rent in advance. In 2019, the Department made a total of 1,900 payments of rent deposits/rent in advance at a cost of almost €1.4 million.

Urgent Needs Payments

- An Urgent Needs Payment (UNP) is a payment made to persons who would not normally qualify for Supplementary Welfare Allowance but who have an urgent need which they cannot meet from their own resources or an alternative is not available at that time (e.g. in the aftermath of a domestic fire where the immediate needs, such as for food, clothing, fuel and household goods, of the people affected may be met by a UNP).

- Persons in full-time education or in full-time employment do not qualify for SWA payments including ENPs. Urgent Needs Payments may however be considered in these situations.

- There were 1,700 payments in 2019 at a cost of €473,000.

ENP & UNP Payments and Expenditure 2014 -2019

Year	Number of payments	Change in payments %	Expenditure	Change in expenditure %
2014	107,000	-20%	€30.1m	-12%
2015	101,000	-6%	€30.9m	+3%
2016	100,000	-1%	€32.2m	4%
2017	103,000	+3%	€38.2m	+19%
2018	112,000	+9%	€42.3m	+11%
2019	92,000	-18%	€43.2m	+1%

Other Supplements

- Under the SWA scheme, a weekly or monthly supplement may be paid to assist people whose means are insufficient to meet their needs in certain circumstances. €5.5 million was provided for these schemes in 2020, compared to €6.56million in 2019 (provisional outturn).

- The main supplements paid are Diet supplement, Heating supplement, Travel supplement and Crèche supplement.

- **Diet Supplement** may be paid to qualifying persons who have been prescribed a special diet as a result of a specified medical condition. The scheme has been closed to new applicants since 2014. The numbers in receipt of the supplement have been decreasing steadily in recent years. There were almost 12,000 recipients in 2006, 6,000 at end 2012 and currently there are approximately 1,900 recipients.

- **Heating Supplement** may be paid to a person who lives alone or only with a qualified adult or child(ren) and who has exceptional heating needs due to ill health or infirmity. There are approximately 1,200 people in receipt of this payment.

- **Travel Supplement** may be paid in exceptional situations where the circumstances warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned. There are approximately 310 people in receipt of this payment.

SWA Supports during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Community Welfare Service has provided significant support through the Exceptional and Urgent Needs payments of the SWA scheme. These payments are not subject to the habitual residence condition that applies to other social assistance payments.

- The Department has seen an increase in applications for assistance from people who are affected by the Covid-19 crisis but who are not eligible for DEASP primary payments due to the restrictions of their immigration stamp (e.g. holders of stamp 2 and stamp 1G student and graduate visas). The Department has also seen an increase in the numbers of 'undocumented' people seeking financial assistance. A person must first register for a PPSN and can then make an application under the SWA Scheme. Where the Community Welfare Service is engaging with a customer who has applied for a PPSN and who is in need of financial assistance but has not yet been allocated a PPSN, the officer can request prioritisation of the PPSN application.

- Where a person has an ongoing need for financial assistance the officer has discretion to award ongoing payments. More than one Exceptional Needs Payment can be made to a person in respect of essential needs.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

- The Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government is the lead Department for severe weather emergencies and the Office of Public Works has responsibility for capital flood relief activities. However, DEASP has an important role to play in assisting households in the immediate aftermath of flooding.

- The humanitarian assistance scheme, administered by the Department, can be activated in order to assist affected householders following severe flooding to restore their home to a habitable condition. The scheme has been activated numerous times in recent years, most notably in response to the widespread flooding during Winter 2015/2016, flooding in Donegal and Laois/Offaly in 2017 and in the aftermath of Storm Eleanor in 2018.

  Since 2015, over €3 million has been spent under this scheme. In dealing with events of this nature, DEASP generally adopts a three stage approach:

  - Stage 1 is to provide emergency income support payments (food, essential clothing, personal items, hiring dehumidifiers and fuel to heat homes/maintain water pumps) in the immediate aftermath. A relatively small amount of financial assistance is provided initially with payments ranging from €100 to €500.
  - Stage 2 generally involves the replacement of white goods, basic furniture items and other essential household items.
  - Stage 3 is to identify what longer term financial support or works are required when houses have dried out which could take several months. Works can include plastering, dry-lining, relaying of floors, electrical re-wiring and painting.

Supports for persons in Direct Provision

- Applicants for International Protection accommodated under the system of Direct Provision operated by the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) of the Department of Justice and Equality are provided with full board accommodation and other facilities/services.

- The Government decided to opt-in to the *EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive*, with effect from 30th June 2018.

- By opting in to the recast Directive, the system of direct provision has been placed on a statutory basis. The term 'material reception conditions' is used to describe the housing, food and associated benefits, together with a daily expenses allowance and clothing provided by way of financial allowance, provided to international protection seekers.

- SWA Policy Unit represents the Department on the High Level Group on Direct Provision and has ongoing engagement with staff in the IPAS to ensure that protection applicants have timely access to weekly payments and Exceptional Needs Payments and to address any operational issues that arise.

- The Expert Group on the Provision of Support, including Accommodation, to Persons in the International Protection Process (Asylum Seekers), was established in late 2019 by Ministers Flanagan and Stanton, chaired by Dr. Catherine Day, former Secretary General of the European Commission.

- It followed on the work of the Working Group chaired by Judge Bryan McMahon (Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements in the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Support to Asylum Seekers), which reported in June 2015 and issued substantive recommendations on improvements necessary within the international protection process and the direct provision reception system.

- A Briefing Note on Progress of the Expert Group on Direct Provision issued in early June, and includes a list of measures, identified so far, which would immediately improve the situation of those currently in direct provision and signals that more far-reaching changes will be made.

- Ministers Flanagan and Stanton have instructed their officials in the Department of Justice & Equality to have proposals on these issues ready to be considered by the incoming Government.

- The Group was due to have its work completed by the end of 2020. However, Dr Day has indicated that they aim to complete by end-September.

Daily Expenses Allowance

- The rate of the allowance, which is for incidental personal expenditure, was increased in Budget 2019 from €21.60 per week per adult and per child to €38.80 per adult and €29.80 per child.

- The Government has provided €13.1 million for this allowance in 2020. Expenditure on the scheme in 2019 was €11.2 million. There are currently over 4,200 awarded claims (with payments issuing in respect of some 6,800 adults and children).

Additional Supports

- Protection seekers do not satisfy the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) and therefore have no entitlement to most weekly social protection payments including Child Benefit.

- Additional supports are provided to protect seekers under the Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) scheme and Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. DEASP also provides registration for PPSNs and Public Services Cards.

- In 2019, over 18,600 ENPs were made to persons living in direct provision centres to cover costs such as those associated with adult and child clothing, travel and child related items such as prams and buggies, at a cost of €1.6 million.

- ENPs are also paid to support the move from direct provision accommodation into the community including assistance towards rent deposits and items associated with setting up home.

Right to Work for Protection Seekers

- The EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive provides that applicants for international protection who have not received a first instance decision on their application within nine months can apply for a renewable permission to take up employment / self-employment and have full access to the labour market.

- The Regulations also provide that protection applicants in employment for a reasonable period (defined as 12 weeks) can be required to make a contribution towards the cost of the services provided in the direct provision accommodation (to be administered by the Department of Justice and Equality).

- When the applicant has permission to access the labour market they can also engage with the Department's case officers and activation services.

- Where a protection applicant with children is in employment, they may qualify for the Working Family Payment subject to the rules of the scheme. This payment is not subject to the habitual residence condition.

After the grant of status

- When a person has been granted status, they may apply for social welfare payments appropriate to their circumstances, including Child Benefit, subject to the rules of the particular scheme.

- While a person with a right to remain continues to reside in direct provision accommodation, the value of the non-cash benefits which they receive, i.e. accommodation, food and other services, is assessed in the means assessments for various social welfare schemes subject to the legislation governing the means test for each scheme.

- As required under the *EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive*, the social welfare regulations were amended to provide for a continuation of the assessment on the non-cash benefits while the Department of Justice and Equality progresses appropriate arrangements for people with status to move to accommodation in the community. The updated provisions are a temporary measure and these regulations will expire on 30th September 2020, to be replaced by a charging regime under the Department of Justice and Equality.

- There are approximately 1,000 people with leave to remain living in accommodation provided by the International Protection Accommodation Service. There is a significant focus on supporting these people transition to accommodation in the community.

Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP)

- In September 2015 the Irish Government approved the establishment of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme and agreed that Ireland would accept up to 4,000 persons seeking protection under the EU Relocation and Resettlement programmes. A new phase of the Programme was announced by Government in December 2019 which will see up to 2,900 refugees being resettled in Ireland between 2020 and 2023.

- DEASP is represented on the Irish Refugee Protection Programme Taskforce and continues to engage with officials in the Department of Justice and Equality to support the implementation of the programmes.

- Persons arriving in Ireland under this programme are accommodated initially in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) provided by the Department of Justice and Equality and receive full board, meals and other services. The Department provides financial support to persons arriving in Ireland under the Daily Expenses Allowance or through the relevant social welfare payment once refugee status is granted. DEASP also provides registration for PPSNs.

- In the case of people who have been granted protection (either before arrival in Ireland or afterwards), the person may apply for any social welfare payment appropriate to their circumstances, subject to the rules of the particular scheme. While the person is resident in a reception/accommodation centre provided by the Department of Justice and Equality, the value of the non-cash benefits which they receive, i.e. accommodation, food and other services are assessed in the means assessments for the various social welfare schemes,

subject to the legislation governing the means test for each scheme. Once a person moves into the community, the rate of payment they receive would generally increase.

- The resettlement of refugees within the community is led by the relevant Local Authority which chairs a local inter-agency working group. The Department is represented on this group and ensures that there is timely access to weekly social welfare payments and to payments under the Exceptional Needs Payment scheme to support the families when setting up home.

Employment Services

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon *Principal Officer: Dermot Coates*

Pathways to Work

- The Pathways to Work strategy, (PtW) first introduced in 2012, represents the Government's overall framework for employment services policy in the State. It complements *Future Jobs Ireland*, the economic framework to stimulate productivity and employment growth, while preparing the Irish workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.

- A key focus of PtW was to integrate the delivery of employment services and jobseeker income supports as is now standard in Public Employment Services (PES) in most OECD countries. This was achieved through the development and implementation of the Intreo service.

- As part of the Department's Intreo services jobseekers are supported by a case worker to prepare a personal progression plan. Specific supports available as part of the Intreo Service include job search assistance and advice (directly or via contractors), support with starting a business (e.g. Back to Work Enterprise Allowance), referral to work experience placements (e.g. the Youth Employment Support Scheme – YESS), referrals to specific skills training (via Solas and ETBs), referrals to further education (e.g. Back to Education Allowance Scheme) and referrals to state employment schemes (Community Employment and Tús). The Department has also sought to build and deepen relationships with employers, recognising that ultimately we depend on employers to provide employment opportunities to people who are on the Live Register.

- Case work and referral services are provided either directly by the Department's own case officers or via contracted service providers including Local Employment Services, JobClubs and JobPath providers.

- PtW also sought to increase the capacity of the PES in Ireland by increasing case officer capacity to reduce the ratio of jobseekers to case officers from over 1,500:1 (in 2011/12) to 200:1, also in line with OECD norms.

- With a Live Register of about 200,000 pre-Covid-19, the total ratio of jobseekers to case worker averaged about 200:1. However the ratio of long-term unemployed jobseekers to

case officers was maintained at no more than 125:1 under JobPath and the LES. (PES in other countries typically provide services to long-term unemployed jobseekers with a ratio of 60:1 – 100:1)

- Pathways to Work 2016-2020 built on progress made under previous strategies and reflected a much improved economic landscape. It set out 86 actions/targets to be delivered by the end of 2020. The first objective of the PfW 2016-2020 was to continue to consolidate the progress made up to 2016, with a focus on people who are long-term unemployed and the young unemployed.

- PtW 2016-2020 also had the objective of extending the approach of labour market activation to people who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force. This includes qualified adult dependants of job-seekers, lone parents, those with a disability and carers (who can work up to 18.5 hours per week and claim carer's allowance).

- With over 93% of actions now complete or on target to be completed by end 2020, work is underway to develop a successor strategy, covering the period 2020-2025. The revised strategy seeks to continue the goal of ensuring that as many jobs as possible go to those on the Live Register while also ensuring that better labour market outcomes are achievable for other vulnerable groups in Ireland's society.

- The development of the revised strategy followed an extensive consultation process with both internal and external stakeholders.

- Since the consultation was completed, the Covid-19 crisis has changed the employment landscape dramatically. Whereas the focus of PTW 2020 – 2025 as it was being developed had been on increasing labour market participation and increasing supports to the most disadvantaged people, the sharp increase in unemployment means that a significant effort will now have to be on reducing the transition of people from short term unemployment into long-term unemployment.

- Furthermore, the Labour Market Advisory Council, which comprises an independent group of industry leaders and labour market experts, will provide advice to the Minister and Government on the policy responses required to support labour market and business recovery. The Advisory Council will shortly publish a policy paper which will set out some approaches on the retraining and re-employment of workers.

- The Advisory Council will also consider future challenges facing the Irish labour market, including: fast-tracking digital transformation in response to the COVID-19 crisis; the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on particular cohorts of the labour market; the challenges posed to many vulnerable sectors and regions by Brexit; climate change; population ageing and ensuring the availability of decent work for all.

Public Employment Services

- Intreo is the Public Employment Services (PES) of the State. The service delivered by **Intreo** to jobseekers has three main objectives:
  - Income Supports: To help sustain people who experience unemployment.
  - Public Employment Service: To provide a professional employment service to help unemployed jobseekers and others secure sustainable employment. Employment Services include the 'activation' of Jobseekers and the development of relations with employers.
  - Control: To help minimise fraud and error in the payment of income supports.
- Entitlement to a jobseeker payment is dependent on the customer being available for, capable of and genuinely seeking work. This reflects the concept of 'rights and responsibilities', whereby people who are unemployed have the right to an income support from the State and a right to be supported in their efforts to secure employment but also have a responsibility to seek employment and to engage with the employment services offered by the State. All jobseekers have access to and are offered the support of employment services. With the exception of people aged over 62, failure to engage can result in their payment being reduced or ultimately suspended. At any point in time, about 1% of jobseekers are placed on a reduced payment rate.
- The process through which jobseekers are engaged in employment services comprises:
  - Automatic registration, as part of the one-stop-shop model, of jobseeker claimants with the public employment/activation service.
  - Profiling of all new jobseeker clients to determine their Probability of Exit (PEX) from the Live Register to work within 12 months. The PEX scores facilitate segmentation of those who join the Live Register into those with a Low, Medium or High probability of exit to employment. The frequency of engagement by Case Officers with jobseekers is determined by the PEX bands, with those determined to be most at risk of long-term unemployment, together with all those aged 25 or younger, receiving most support.
  - Completion of a Record of Mutual Commitments (Social Contract) between all jobseeker claimants and the State at the point of making a jobseeker claim.
  - Prompt scheduling of new jobseeker clients for a group information meeting to outline the nature and purpose of the employment services and provide information on the range of supports available to clients to support their progression to full-time employment.
  - Following the group information meeting, jobseekers are, dependent on profile score, scheduled for an individual meeting with a Case Officer to agree and complete a Personal Progression Plan (PPP). The PPP sets out a series of jointly agreed undertakings and actions to enhance the employment prospects of the client.

- Regular review meetings are then scheduled with the Case Officer to review progress against agreed PPP actions.
- Referral to appropriate employment and training supports – e.g. Jobfairs, inclusion in job/candidate matching to vacancies notified by employers, Education and Training Board programmes, Community Employment, JobClubs, business start-up (self-employment) etc.
- Following a 12 month period of engagement with Department's own case officers, clients who are still unemployed or are not actively engaged in a programme (training etc.) are generally referred on to JobPath or LES advisors for subsequent more intensive engagement.

- The Department was presented with very significant challenges in dealing with a huge claimload over recent months, and is continuing to process substantial but decreasing claimloads. This work will continue to be a priority to ensure that payments continue to be made.
- With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the sheer necessity to deal with the huge volume of income support claims received, the Department ceased referrals of jobseekers to all contracted employment services, including JobPath and the Local Employment Services and Jobs Clubs on 12th March. The Department requested that these contracted service providers continue to engage remotely (phone and email) with our clients so as to provide what service they could to those clients already engaged.
- The job-search and activation services provided by staff in the Department's Intreo Centres also ceased from mid-March as all of these staff were required to assist the processing of the Covid-PUP claims. However, the Department's employer engagement service continued to provide some level of recruitment services through the Divisions and the central Employer Relations Team have led three significant recruitment campaigns to support the delivery of essential services during the Covid-19 pandemic. These campaigns included provision of recruitment services in the security, nursing home and horticultural sectors.
- Now that society and economy has begun to re-open, the Department is focusing on restarting its employment support and activation services for its clients and, in the first instance, will recommence work with those people who were already unemployed before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. The Department is working on plans on how it will do this, having regard to social distancing guidelines that are now required.
- The Department's case officers and activation support teams will be re-assigned back to their normal work and begin:
    - Providing jobsearch and activation supports through Intreo Centres;
    - Referring long-term unemployed jobseekers to the contracted providers: that is, the Local Employment Services, Jobs clubs and the JobPath contractors

- Referring clients to Community Employment and Tús schemes
- Engaging with employers and employer bodies to continue to identify recruitment opportunities – some of which work took place during the emergency period – recruiting for the horticulture sector working with Teagasc and recruiting for the care and security sectors.
- Matching and referring clients to work opportunities identified by its employer engagement teams and/or posted by employers on the Department's jobsireland.ie website.
- Referring clients to work opportunities available through the youth employment support schemes and work opportunities that can be assisted through the JobsPlus scheme.
- Referring clients to training and education provision in ETBs and other providers.
- Encouraging clients to avail of other back to education supports, such as the Back to Education Allowance
- Assisting clients explore self-employment opportunities and supports, including training support grants.

- The Department will also work to notify recipients of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) of new employment opportunities and provide support to any PUP recipients who wish to pursue, or take-up, new employment opportunities.
- Part of the Department's planning to restart employment support and activation services will require new approaches to engaging with clients. Among the plans being considered are:
    - The use of digital platforms to provide employment support information to clients, including the use of video technology; and
    - The use of telephony and email communications with clients.

Provision to Employment Services to Other Cohorts

- Employment Services are available to people not on a jobseeker's payment on a voluntary, walk-in, basis.
- In 2019, nine pilots were conducted whereby Qualified Adults of Jobseekers were invited to make contact with their Intreo Centre and offered the services of a Case Officer. The response rate was relatively low.

Contracted Employment Services

- To meet the Department's policy objectives of providing employment support services to jobseekers to assist them into employment, the Department contracts external employment services through four programmes - JobPath, Local Employment Services (LES), JobClubs and Employability.

- The Department is currently undertaking a review of the contracted employment services. These reviews build on external reports on LES, JobClubs and Employability and an econometric review conducted in association with the OECD. The Department has engaged the assistance of external consultants to assist in designing a new procurement model for contracted employment services for 2021 and beyond.

- The externally contracted provision provides the Department with additional employment support capacity and access to specialised skills to meet the job search support and employment services requirements of jobseekers. The Department has committed in a number of policy documents (the Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities Report, the Social Inclusion Strategy, and Pathways to Work) to extending employment support services to a wider range of cohorts including people with disabilities, lone parents and qualified adults. It is important that the Department maintains sufficient employment support capacity to meet current and future needs in order to be able to provide a high-quality service to these individuals and respond effectively and quickly to rises in unemployment like the one caused by the current public health crisis.

JobPath

- JobPath is the name given to the contracting-in of case-officer resources, on a payment-by-results basis, to augment and complement the work of the Department's own case officers and the work of the Local Employment Services.

- Whereas the capacity of the Department's own case officers and those provided by LES are fixed, the resource capacity of JobPath providers can be 'flexed' to respond to fluctuations in the level of demand for services. As a payment by result model, the cost to the State is entirely dependent on the performance of the contractor.

- JobPath services are focussed on people who are long-term unemployed – the service is designed to provide for a higher level of personal interaction between case officers/employment advisors and people who are long-term unemployed. JobPath service providers are remunerated based on the progression of the clients they serve into sustained, full-time, employment.

- JobPath services are provided by two companies:

    - Turas Nua: fully owned by FRS Recruitment (a co-operative business based in Roscrea) and

- Seetec (an employee-owned, not-for-profit UK-based provider of employment services).

- To date, over 264,000 jobseekers have engaged with the service. In accordance with provisions in the agreement, the Department has exercised its right to extend the contract for a further 12 months, with referrals due to cease in December 2020. The contractors will continue to provide a service for up to two years for those clients engaged with them at that point.

- The Department, in conjunction with the OECD, published the results of an econometric review of the JobPath service in April 2019. The evaluation provided clear evidence that the JobPath service is effective in terms of increasing employment and earnings outcomes for jobseekers compared to outcomes for jobseekers who did not go through the JobPath service.

- The evaluation shows:

  - participants improved their employment outcomes by 20% compared to a matched group of non-participants

  - participants who secured employment with the support of JobPath increased their average weekly earnings by 16% compared to a matched group of non-participants who also secured employment

  - the overall impact was that people on JobPath increased employment earnings by 35% compared to the matched group of non-participants.

- In summary, the study indicates that the JobPath service helps get people into work and at higher earnings than they would otherwise have received if they had secured employment without the support of JobPath.

- Jobseekers participate on JobPath for 12 months, during which time they receive intensive support and guidance to assist them to obtain and sustain employment. Supports, while in employment, may continue for a period of up to 12 months.

- JobPath contracts stipulate a significant number of requirements that both companies are required to meet. For example, the contracts have an in-built 'Service Guarantee' which means that each jobseeker will be guaranteed a baseline level of service. Jobseekers can also participate in further education and training while on JobPath.

- The Department selects jobseekers on a random basis for referral to JobPath and participants retain their Jobseeker's payment. Jobseekers who are engaged in another programme (e.g. CE), can continue to participate in that programme, while also availing of the JobPath service.

Local Employment Services (LES)

- Local Employment Services (LES) is a long-standing model of contracted service provision. Community based providers (mainly local development companies) deliver a case management/employment advisory service to people who are most distant from the labour market.

- For 2020, the Department has contracted for the provision of LES in 26 locations with 22 different contractors (21 local development companies (LDCs) and one community organisation) in a network of offices and outreach clinics located in designated areas. However, the LES is not State-wide, with significant areas of the State without a Local Employment Service

- There are approximately 283 full time equivalent posts in the LES of which approximately 160 are Mediator posts (case officer equivalents). It is the role of these Mediators to provide career/vocational guidance and support to clients of the service.

- LES are pre-funded to deliver resources and services. Payments are not based on performance.

- Services provided include:

  - assisting persons referred by the Department to return to employment through the provision of placement services and vocational/career guidance and the referral of clients onto education/training programmes as part of an agreed Personal Progression Plan; and

  - assisting those most disadvantaged in the labour market into employment by the provision of specialist high-quality support and locally responsive services. These supports include guidance, education/training and employment supports and mediation.

- The LES have been contracted to work more intensively with clients, increasing the frequency of engagement with a LES Mediator from once every two/three months, depending on the category of the client, to once every month for all clients.

- The LES have a target of 30% of all 'case closed' clients to be placed into employment of 30 hours+ per week. Unlike JobPath, there is no target for job sustainment. The average placement rate across all LES in 2019 was 29%.

Job Clubs

- The purpose of Job Clubs is to assist jobseekers to obtain employment in the open labour market, primarily through the provision of job search support, interview skills training and CV preparation.

- The Department has contracted for the provision of 40 Job Clubs with 37 different contractors (local development companies and community organisations).

- Contracts are valid for a maximum of one year only (January to December). There are approximately 81 full-time equivalent posts in the Job Clubs, of which 40 are Job Club Leaders.

- The services provided include formal workshops, which can vary from one to four weeks and individualised support, which allows jobseekers to avail of practical and personal support on a one to one basis e.g. pre-interview support.

- CV Preparation and a drop-in service, which allows jobseekers to avail of the facilities of the Job Club (e.g. internet, telephone, photocopying) is also provided.

EmployAbility Service

- The EmployAbility Service is a nationally provided employment service dedicated to improving employment outcomes for job seekers with a disability. The service currently comprises 24 limited companies, each with a specific geographical remit and each fully funded by the Department. Budget 2020 provides €9.8 million to run the service.

- An evaluation of the EmployAbility Service, undertaken by Indecon Economic Consultants, was completed in January 2016. The review concluded that the service faces a number of challenges in responding to increased demand and maximising progression outcomes in a cost-effective manner.

European Semester and EU employment policies

- *Europe 2020* is the EU's ten-year jobs and growth strategy. It was launched in 2010 to create the conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It sets out five agreed headline targets in the areas of employment; research and development; climate/energy; education; social inclusion and poverty reduction to be achieved by 2020. All Member States have committed to achieving the Europe 2020 targets and have translated them into national targets.

- A major input into the Joint Employment Report is the Employment Performance Monitor (EPM), analysing progress on the EU 2020 Employment target and key indicators on labour market performance to identify key employment challenges (KECs) and Good Labour Market Outcomes (GLMOs).

- The Employment Committee (EMCO) - (along with its two sub-groups on policy analysis (PAG) and indicators (EMCOIG)) - is the main advisory committee in the employment field for Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council (EPSCO). It signs off on the annual Joint Employment Report. The EMCO, PAG and EMCO each meet approximately ten times per annum.

Labour Market Research, Evaluation and Data Analysis

- As part of the Pathways to Work strategy, the Government committed to undertaking a multi-annual rolling programme of econometric evaluations of its reforms, with the support of an independent expert advisory body, the Labour Market Council.
- The Labour Market Council has been replaced by the Labour Market Advisory Council who will provide advice to the Minister and the Government on policies relating to the efficient operation of the labour market with a particular view to increasing participation rates, minimising unemployment levels and reducing average unemployment durations.
- The following evaluations have been conducted and/or are underway:

Project	Overview	Expected End Date
Intreo Process Evaluation	ESRI evaluation of Intreo Activation Services	Published in 2019
JobPath Interim Evaluation	Counterfactual Impact Evaluation of early phase of JobPath services (in conjunction with the OECD)	Working paper published 2019, updated paper to be published 2020
JobsPlus Evaluation	Evaluation of JobsPlus	Completed2019, to be published after presentation to LMAC
Back To Work Enterprise Allowance	Counterfactual Impact Evaluation of BTWEA (in-house)	Completed in 2017
JobPath + Jobseekers Customer Satisfaction Survey	Customer Satisfaction Surveys	Ongoing on an annual basis
Back To Education Allowance Qualitative Review	Follow-up focus groups and interviews of BTEA participants, providers and employers (contracted to BMG)	Completed in 2017
OFP-JST Evaluation	Independent review of policy changes to OFP since 2012	August 2017

- Since 2015, the Department has carried out customer satisfaction surveys to understand how its customers interact with unemployment supports and employment services offered to jobseekers via Intreo and JobPath contracted services.

- The roll out of a Performance Management tool for PES staff at local and Divisional level is underway to assess outputs and outcomes in relation to activation activity and to generate performance reports.

- Results have been positive year on year, showing high levels of satisfaction with the services provided by Intreo and JobPath contracted services. Following a procurement process, Behaviour and Attitudes have been selected to undertake customer satisfaction surveys until 2021, including a possible expansion of customer cohorts to include recipients of other welfare payments.

Working Age - Employment Supports Schemes (Community Employment, Tús, Rural Social Scheme and Jobs Initiative)

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon *Principal Officer: Kieran Lea*

- The Department offers a range of employment schemes and other supports to encourage long-term unemployed people to return to work. They are targeted at people who have been on unemployment or certain other social welfare payments for a specific period of time. A number of service-delivery partners work with the Department in the delivery of these schemes.

- The Community Employment scheme (CE) provides long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people with training and work experience through part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities.

- The Tús scheme (Tús) is a community work placement initiative providing work opportunities which benefit the community and are provided by community and voluntary organisations in both urban and rural areas. Unemployed people who are eligible to participate in the scheme are selected and contacted by the Department.

- The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) allows low-income farmers and fishermen/women who are unable to earn an adequate living from their farm holding or from fishing to earn a supplementary income. Local organisations are funded to provide participants in the scheme with part-time work that also benefits rural communities.

- The Job Initiative (JI) programme was launched in 1996 and was intended to provide full-time employment for a fixed-term period of three years to persons who met the programme eligibility criteria. Recruitment onto JI ceased from 2004.

Impact of Covid-19 emergency on Employment Support Schemes

- At the outset of the COVID-19 emergency, the Department took the decision to continue to fund all of the employment support schemes, CE, JI, Tús and RSS. This provided stability for the respective schemes and their employees.

- Sponsoring Authorities and Implementing Bodies were advised to undertake the necessary contingency planning and to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of their employees per the national guidelines.

- The Department agreed to extend participant employment contracts until further notice for those participants who were due to finish on their schemes during the emergency period. Additional recruitment of new participants ceased. Schemes due to renew their annual contracts during the period had their applications approved remotely.

- In early June following on from the Government's *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*, Sponsoring Authorities and Implementing Bodies were advised to recommence their recruitment processes with a view to having new participants starting from July 2020 onwards. The majority of participants who had their existing employment contracts extended for the period of the COVID-19 emergency will finish up on their schemes on a phased basis during July-August. However, Department officials will continue to work with Sponsoring Authorities and Implementing Bodies to ensure that previously agreed participant training and awards are completed in due course.

- The Department continues to liaise with other Departments to address sector-specific challenges where employment support schemes are in place. The Department is in ongoing discussions with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in relation to the childcare sector and the specific challenges to be addressed there.

Community Employment (CE)

- The Department assumed responsibility for the Community Employment (CE) Programme from FÁS in 2012.

- The aim of CE is to enhance the employability and mobility of disadvantaged and unemployed persons by providing occupational activity, work experience and training opportunities within their communities. It also helps long-term unemployed people to re-enter the workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return-to-work routine. The referral point for entry to the CE programme is through the Department's Intreo centres.

- CE schemes are typically sponsored by voluntary and community organisations wishing to benefit the local community. As the employers, these sponsoring organisations contract with the Department, on an annual basis, to provide jobseekers and other vulnerable groups with good quality work experience and training qualifications to

support their progression into employment. CE participants work 19.5 hours per week. Virtually all CE participants are engaged in some element of service support and delivery - e.g. amenities management, arts and culture, sports, tidy towns, childcare and health-related services.

- The rate of payment relates to the customer's underlying Jobseeker's Allowance rate with a minimum payment of €225.50 per week. Participants may receive increases in respect of a qualified adult and child dependents.

- The CE Drug Rehabilitation Programme Framework was implemented in January 2016 to facilitate the participation of individuals referred by drug addiction and treatment services. 1,000 CE dedicated drug rehabilitation places have been allocated for participants in recovery. Participants have access to multiple supports and specialist inputs as required from social, education and health services, as well as the supports provided by this Department. This integrated response is required to ensure effective outcomes for the participants. The programme provides access to recognised qualifications to support ongoing rehabilitation and re-integration into active community and working life. The CE inter-agency Drugs Advisory Group continues to support this initiative.

- In January 2019, the Government agreed to establish an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) to explore the most appropriate organisational arrangements particularly in respect of those CE schemes whose primary focus is social inclusion and delivery of social services.

- The report of the IDG contained a number of recommendations which included:

    - The schemes should not be split and should remain within the remit of DEASP and that research be carried out into the contribution of schemes such as CE to assess their effectiveness in tackling social exclusion.
    - The Department of Rural and Community Development and DEASP should complete their examination of the operational and systems issues involved in transferring the RSS from DEASP to DRCD.
    - The Jobs Initiative (JI) scheme should remain with DEASP

- This will require a decision from the new Government.

Community Employment (CE) Schemes - *industrial action by CE supervisors*

- CE schemes provide long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people with training and work experience through part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities CE schemes are typically sponsored by voluntary and community organisations wishing to benefit the local community. The community groups are the employer of the CE Scheme supervisors and are therefore liable for

pension provision, pay etc. However, CE Scheme Supervisors take a different view and think that the Exchequer should provide for their occupational pension. The Unions representing CE Supervisors (FÓRSA and SIPTU) have notified of a schedule of industrial action, to be delayed until a new Government is formed.

- The Unions have advanced three main arguments in this dispute:
  - Non-implementation of Labour Court Recommendation (LCR19293)
  - Refusal to honour an enhanced redundancy agreement (dating back to 2002)
  - Refusal of Department (DEASP and DPER) to engage with the unions in a High Level Forum

- CE supervisors and assistant supervisors have sought, through their union representatives, the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a 2008 Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme.

- A detailed scoping exercise was carried out with input from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) on the potential costs of providing Exchequer support for the establishment of such a pension scheme for employees across the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland. This exercise estimated a potential cost to the State of between €188 million per annum and €347m depending on the numbers involved, which is difficult to establish. This excludes any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payments of pension as sought, which could entail a further Exchequer cost of up to €318 million.

- Any explicit provision of State funding for CE supervisors and assistant supervisors would inevitably give rise to claims for similar schemes and funding provision on the part of those many thousands of workers in the broader sector. DEASP & Government has to have regard to the full potential Exchequer exposure associated with setting such a precedent.

- CE supervisors took their first industrial action on the 18th February 2019. The industrial action due to commence in May 2019 was deferred when the then Minister and the Department agreed to engage with representatives of CE supervisors to discuss issues arising for supervisors following the 2008 Labour Court agreement. This engagement continued throughout 2019.

- The matter of enhanced redundancy for CE supervisors is raised regularly by the Unions. The Department continues to honour the agreement between FÁS (who were responsible for the CE scheme until its transfer to the department in 2012) and the relevant trade unions which allows for the payment of enhanced redundancy if the situation arose due to a decision by the Department to reduce overall CE scheme numbers. It does not apply where the employer (i.e., the CE sponsor) is the instigator of the redundancy.

- It continues to be the Government's position that state organisations are not the employer of CE supervisors or CE participants and that it is not for the state to provide funding for employer-related occupational pension scheme provision for them. The Department has a number of cases in process with the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) at present.

Tús

- Tús is a work placement scheme, which commenced operation in 2011. It aims to provide short-term high-quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed while also assisting in providing certain services of benefit to communities. While the scheme aims to contribute to the work-readiness of the long-term unemployed, it also highlights those who are unemployed but may not be actively seeking work.

- Tús is delivered through 47 Local Development Companies (LDCs) and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The eligibility criteria require applicants to have been continuously unemployed for at least 12 months, and have been in receipt of a jobseeker's payment for at least 12 months. Persons in receipt of the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (former One Parent Family Payment recipients) are also eligible (no qualifying period applies to them).

- Participation is mandatory, with 80% of participants randomly selected by the Department and the balance through assisted referrals. Participants work for 19 ½ hours a week and the placement, which lasts for 12 months, is with local community or voluntary groups.

- The rate of payment relates to the customer's underlying Jobseeker's Allowance rate with a minimum payment of €225.50 per week. Participants may receive increases in respect of a qualified adult and child dependents. Pobal is engaged as the contracted payroll provider on behalf of the Department for Tús.

- The number of participants on this scheme at the end of December 2019 was 5,633, with 308 supervisors.

Rural Social Scheme (RSS)

- The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) commenced in 2004. It provides part-time employment opportunities for farmers or fishermen in receipt of certain social welfare payments and who are underemployed in their primary occupation. The work undertaken is primarily to support local service provision via community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations, provided that this does not displace existing service provision or employment.

- RSS is delivered through 35 Local Development Companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Participants must continue to be actively farming/fishing and retain entitlement to an underlying qualifying social welfare payment in order to retain eligibility for participation on RSS. Participation is by self-selection and is dependent on the availability of vacancies in the relevant locality.

- The rate of payment relates to the customer's underlying Jobseeker's Allowance rate with a minimum payment of €225.50 per week. Participants may receive increases in respect of a qualified adult and child dependents. Pobal is engaged as the contracted payroll provider on behalf of the Department for RSS.

- Participants work for 19½ hours a week. Since 2017, all new participants commencing on the RSS have to be over 25 years of age. A six year overall participation limit also applies. This allows other farmers and fishermen to avail of the scheme and keeps participants close to the Labour Market. However, RSS participants who commenced on the scheme prior to February 2017 will remain on the scheme as long as they continue to satisfy the eligibility conditions of the scheme.

- Since 2017, the number of places available has increased from 2,600 to 3,350. Overall this represents an increase of approximately 30% in the places available under the RSS. At the end of December 2019, there were 3,234 participants engaged on RSS plus 138 supervisors.

- The 2020 estimate for RSS expenditure is €54.07m.

Job Initiative (JI)

- Recruitment onto JI ceased in 2004. Contracts are renewed until pension age and the scheme will wind up naturally over time. There are currently 621 participants and 32 supervisors/team leaders on JI. Participants work 39 hours per week and are paid a rate of €441 per week. The JI scheme has a budget of €14.89m for 2020.

Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)

- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is the designated managing authority for the Operational Programme (OP) for the Fund for European Aid (FEAD) to the most deprived and has responsibility for the implementation of the programme in Ireland.

- FEAD supports EU Member States' actions to provide material assistance to the most deprived. €3.8 billion will be made available by the European Union via the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived between 2014 and 2020. Each Member State has to

match its allocation with a minimum of 15% national funding. The total value of the fund in Ireland is €26.7m, €4m of which will come from the Irish Exchequer.

- In Ireland, The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived supports activities that provide aid to the most deprived in our society. These activities are funded through the national Food and/or Basic Material Assistance Operational Programme.
- FEAD support will help people take their first steps out of poverty and social exclusion. The FEAD will help the most deprived people by addressing their most basic needs.
- 65% of available resources will be applied to the provision of food and 35% to the provision of basic material assistance. Accompanying measures funding will also be available to a maximum of 5% of the value of food or non-food items purchased.
- FoodCloud was selected as the primary Partner Organisation to deliver the food element of the FEAD Programme and they are responsible for the procurement and storage of the FEAD food items and coordinating collection of the FEAD food items by the other Partner Organisations (mainly community-based charities) from its hubs in Dublin, Cork and Galway.
- Following a procurement process a three year Framework Agreement for the supply of food to end of 2020 has been put in place. The food items consist of basic, non-perishable foods which are easy to transport and store.
- Over €11.5m has been spent through the FEAD fund on food since operations commenced in late 2016. There are over 150 Charities, approved as Partner Organisations and over 3,600 tonnes of food has been distributed to communities through these charities.
- In addition to food, the FEAD programme has funding for the distribution of basic material aid. Two projects have been rolled out on the distribution of this non-food aid:
- To date over 80,000 school stationery kits at a cost of over €2m have been distributed to children of FEAD food beneficiaries and also to the children who reside in Direct Provision Accommodation, Emergency Orientation and Reception Centres (EROCs) and those in Homeless Emergency Accommodation.
- The Irish Red Cross have been allocated €800,000 in direct funding to assist new migrants entering Ireland with hygiene kits and home start kits.
- The Department has submitted three claims to the EU and has received reimbursement of €7.8m to date.

- Applications from charities wishing to avail of FEAD can still be made. Information available on https://food.cloud/fead/

C. Employer Relations

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon *Principal Officer: Siobhán Lawlor*

- Employers are a primary client group for the Department. The strategic objective in this area is to build effective relationships with employers with the aim of increasing recruitment activity and, in particular, increasing placements into employment of the Department's clients.

- Employer Relations Division (37 staff whole time equivalent) leads and coordinates the Department's relations with employers, representative bodies and other stakeholders, including other Government Departments and agencies. In addition, each Division has a nominated employer engagement manager who co-ordinates the service at local level.

- The Department provides a wide range of services to assist employers in relation to their recruitment and employment support needs including:

    - **www.jobsireland.ie** is a free online jobs website that enables employers to post job opportunities and jobseekers to search and apply for these opportunities online.

    - Intreo case officers assist employers to identify potential candidates and can provide pre-screening and interview facilities.

    - The Employer Relations Division includes Seven Key Account Managers who provide a 'one point of contact' to employers and stakeholder groups to advise them of the various supports and services, while offering employers a bespoke recruitment service to fill their job vacancies and where priority is given to job seekers on the live register. They also work closely with the Divisional teams in providing a consistent and cohesive service to employers who are recruiting. This approach ensures that the service is prompt, responsive and adaptable in meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing environment, both in the live register and the economic labour market.

    - EURES Advisers, based in the Divisions, provide an international recruitment service to Irish and European employers, and advice to jobseekers who wish to work in the EU/EEA.

Intreo Jobs Week 2020

- The Department's seventh annual Intreo Jobs Week took place in March, 2020. Jobs Week is an important week in the Intreo calendar, providing a great opportunity for Intreo to showcase its employer and jobseeker supports. This year we adopted a thematic approach to events and activities to extend our reach as much as possible.

- Each Division was asked to have at least one large event and one themed event on each of the other days. This novel approach led to six careers fairs, six events specifically for refugees, 20 for those with disabilities, 25 events for 'Returners', 27 focusing on supporting enterprise include local LEOs and 16 for those who are under 25 years of age. 23 pre-Jobs

Week Preparation Workshops were delivered over January and February to ensure jobseekers were 'job ready' for interviews and with updated CVs. In total, 135 events were held throughout the country, with 127 taking place during the 5 days of Jobs Week, bringing together an estimated 19,664 people to help them achieve their career goals.

- A targeted media campaign for #JobsWeek2020 included five radio interviews and a strong social media presence to promote awareness of the events. In addition to an online recruitment fair supported by EURES (Europeanjobdays.eu), the seminars from Dublin Castle were streamed live from the event and were shown in a number of other local Intreo events and a number of local libraries.

Overview of recruitment during COVID-19 pandemic

- The Employer Relations Team has led three significant recruitment campaigns to support the delivery of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nursing Homes Ireland

- In conjunction with the Department of Health, Nursing Homes Ireland and Skillnet Ireland a pathway was identified for the recruitment of potential healthcare assistants. Nursing Homes Ireland surveyed their member businesses to identify the numbers, roles and locations for the vacancies.

- Arising from this, 242 jobseekers were identified as potential recruits for the nursing homes. 52 Qualified clients were matched with individual nursing homes and 187 Unqualified clients were identified for Skillnet Ireland online training for the Healthcare Assistant Induction Programme (HAIP)

Nursing Homes Recruitment Summary at 1st June:

	Numbers	As % of those contacted	As % of those who responded
Initial Recruitment emails	5,473		
Response level	242	4.4%	
Newly Trained (completed)	107	1.95%	44.2%
Recruited	13	0.24%	5.37%
Interviewed/Pending Interview	26	0.47%	10.74%

Security Recruitment

- The Department has run two recruitment campaigns for security companies to support social distancing requirements in retail outlets.

Security Recruitment Summary at 5th May 2020

	Numbers	As % of those contacted	As % of those who responded
Initial Recruitment emails	3,086		
Response level	124	4.01%	
Recruited	N/A	N/A	N/A

Harvest campaign

- A recruitment plan was prepared by the Department and agreed with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and the IFA. This included Teagasc inviting individual employers to register for participation in the recruitment through which they would identify the locations, roles and numbers of positions in order to generate matches for recruitment. 45 employers registered with Teagasc, identifying 743 vacancies.

- We have completed two waves of communication during this first phase of recruitment: Wave 1 focused on direct communication with clients for all areas. Wave 2 targeted an additional 18,000 direct communications which included references to the specific counties where the employers who are recruiting immediately are based.

Help2Harvest Recruitment Summary at 1st June 2020

	Numbers	% of those who were contacted	% of those who responded	Engagement Activity Levels
Phase 1, Wave 1 Communications	18,000			
Response level	433	2.40%		
Referred	309	1.71%	71.36%	219 phone calls 465 initial contacts 336 registration forms returned
Phase 1, Wave 2 Recruitment Communications	18,000			
Response level	511	2.83%		
Referred	395	2.19%	77.29%	340 phone calls 685 initial contacts 392 registration forms returned
Response level to date	944	2.62%	74.57%	559 phone calls 1150 initial contacts 728 registration forms returned

JobsIreland

- JobsIreland.ie is the Government's national free online recruitment website and is administered by staff in the Employer Relations Division of the Department. JobsIreland.ie provides an online vacancy advertising and candidate matching service for employers who wish to advertise Job vacancies, apprenticeships, Community Employment (CE) Schemes and the Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS). For candidates, the service provides the opportunity to register with and search for the latest jobs in the market place, including the facility to build their CV and be matched to hiring employers who are advertising through the jobsireland.ie service. Once registered, the system provides jobseekers with a printable CV ready to print and bring to interviews.

- For employers, JobsIreland.ie is a free vacancy advertising and candidate matching recruitment service that enables employers to advertise their job vacancies on the JobsIreland.ie website. The service is available to all employers irrespective of size or industry sector. These vacancies are targeted by the Intreo case officers to be matched and recruited by employers. JobsIreland.ie is also the key conduit through which jobs can be advertised across Europe on the EURES European Employment Portal. JobsIreland.ie and Eures run their own separate social media campaigns to support their activities.

- As JobsIreland.ie will be a primary customer facing service to assist jobseekers back to work following the COVID-19 crisis, a project is currently underway to enhance the website.

- In 2019, 80,207 vacancy positions were advertised on jobsireland.ie.

Vacancy Matching Service

- The Jobsireland.ie online matching facility allows employers with job vacancies advertised to view the profiles of matched candidates and to contact candidates to make arrangements to progress with their recruitment needs. Candidates can also view the vacancies that match their profile and apply directly through the website and make contact with employers.

European Employment Services of the Department of Social Protection (EURES)

- EURES Ireland, through its National Co-ordination Office and network of Advisors, provides a European recruitment service to employers and advice and support to job seekers who wish to work in the EU/EEA. EURES is a network for cooperation between the public employment services of Member States and the European Commission.

- As well as organising various international recruitment projects, Jobs Fairs and online events on behalf of Irish and European employers, EURES Ireland works with significant European employers to source vacancies of interest to unemployed Irish workers and with Irish-based companies to help satisfy their specific skills needs in areas such as ICT, language skills or nursing/medical.

- In March of this year EURES Ireland organised a major European Online Job Day event 'Careers in Ireland' which ran in conjunction with the Dublin Castle Careers Fair.

- In 2019, EURES Ireland worked in collaboration with EURES Spain and ran a dedicated onsite and online recruitment event for Irish based employers. Ten employers travelled over for the onsite event attracting over 400 jobseekers. In addition, a further 44 employers and 1,712 jobseekers participated online. It was planned to repeat this initiative in May 2020 and this is may still take place later in 2020. Similarly, in September 2019, 36 employers travelled to London to participate in an 'Irish Careers Fair'. It is expected that the event planned for early 2020 may also take place later in the year.

- EURES Ireland coordinates and implements a 'Co-Sponsored Placement programme' under the Youth Guarantee and a European Transmobility Scheme (TMS) which is an amalgamation of two previous mobility schemes i.e. 'Your First EURES Job' & 'Reactivate'. These offer jobseekers support in taking up employment, work experience and training across Europe by way of financial support towards travel to an interview, re-location, and language training etc. The schemes also support employers who are having difficulty recruiting staff with the specific skills required to work in their company.

- As a result of COVID-19, all EURES operations have been temporally suspended from April until June. It is expected that EURES Ireland will resume normal communications with Member States, Employers, jobseekers on a phased basis as travel restrictions and quarantine guidelines change over the coming months.

EURES Ireland/Northern Ireland Cross Border Partnership

- The EURES Ireland/ Northern Ireland Cross Border Partnership, established in 1993, is one of 12 such partnerships in Europe involving 19 countries. Partnership activities are 90% funded through the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). It addresses the obstacles that cross border workers, employers and jobseekers face, for example, providing information on cross border taxation issues, social security benefits and medical services, and by opening up recruitment opportunities in the cross border region through cross border job fairs, work shadow placements and employability programmes.

- The Partnership activities are guided by a cross-border Steering Committee led by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department for Communities, Northern Ireland. Following discussions between both Departments, it has been confirmed that the UK, post Brexit, will be in a position to provide funding for the EURES Cross Border Partnership to the end of 2021 (at least).

- Grant funding for the 2020 calendar year is €250,000 which includes the co-ordinators' salary, part salary for EURES Advisers and Partnership events and activities.

Youth Employment Support Scheme

- The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) was introduced in October 2018.

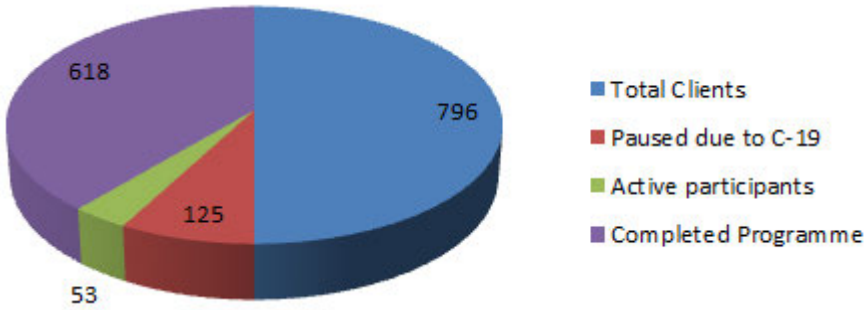
- The YESS is a work experience programme, targeted at young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or who face significant barriers to employment. The scheme aims to provide participants with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. Participation on the YESS is wholly voluntary for both jobseekers and Placement Hosts but both parties must satisfy certain eligibility and qualifying conditions to participate.

- To qualify for participation on the YESS, a jobseeker must be:

- aged between 18 and 24 and:
- have been out of work and in receipt of a qualifying payment for at least 12 months, or,
- if unemployed for less than 12 months, be considered by a case officer to face a significant barrier to work.

Take-up to date on YESS

- Take-up on YESS has been slow. On foot of a concerted effort at recruitment of employers and young people during August/September 2019, the numbers increased but maintaining the levels of participation is difficult. Participation on and recruitment to the scheme was largely suspended but recruitment drives will be renewed as part of the reopening of Intreo activation measures.



Total Clients	Paused due to C-19	Active Participants	Completed Programme
796	125	53	618

- As a result of the COVID-19 situation, a total of 147 YESS placements were temporarily suspended/ paused. Of these 22 have recently resumed, while overall there are currently 53 participants on the scheme.

- Sectors affected by COVID-19, such as hospitality, provide significant YESS placement.

- In order to consider how best to maintain and grow this YESS initiative, an internal review of the scheme was undertaken. The aim is to consider the effectiveness of the YESS against its objectives and to inform future policy decisions in relation to the scheme, with particular reference to the role of the YESS post COVID-19. The recommendations will be finalised shortly to be included as part of a revised Pathways to Work strategy.

- The qualifying payments for YESS are Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseekers Benefit, One Parent Family Payment, Jobseeker's Transitional Payment, Disability Allowance, Blind Person's Pension or Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

- YESS is aimed at the private and NGO sectors. Placements are for an initial three months, with the option to extend this further to six months, following a review by a Departmental case officer. Participants are required to attend their placement for 24 hours per week,

and are paid a weekly YESS allowance of €229.20 for same. Clearly defined learning and development outcomes for each placement are identified, while a Learning and Development Plan is agreed between all parties at the outset. A designated Departmental case officer is assigned to each placement to provide advice/support to both parties and the case officer will monitor the progress of the Learning and Development Plan.

- YESS is co-funded by the Irish Government, the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.
- Since the scheme's inception, more than 1,200 YESS vacancies have been advertised and 796 jobseekers have accepted the offer of a YESS placement.

National Development Finance Agency PPP (Social Clause)

- The Department works closely with the main contractors to identify suitable candidates to support implementation of the social clause of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) construction projects

Employment & Youth Activation Charter (EYAC)

- The EYAC is an initiative, established in 2014, whereby participating employers commit to:
  - consider potential candidates from the Live Register as part of the recruitment process;
  - provide training/work experience opportunities to unemployed jobseekers; and
  - provide employability supports including information sessions for jobseekers and advice/guidance in relation to job search, CV preparation and interview skills.
- There are currently 673 employers signed up to it.

Supports for Delivery of Services

(i) **Regional Divisions**

- The Department delivers services locally through a nationwide network of Intreo Centres and Branch Offices. Intreo centres are operated and staffed by the Department. Branch Offices are operated by private sector Branch Managers contracted by the Department to deliver its services in locations where the Department does not have an Intreo Centre.

- Services throughout the country are managed in the Department through a divisional management structure. Currently, there are eight divisional areas – see Appendix B1 and Appendix B2 for details.

- Divisions are headed up by Divisional Managers at Principal Officer level who, in turn, have responsibility for the delivery of localised services and all of the day-to-day operational issues for the provision of income support and employment & support services in Intreo Centres and Branch Offices.

(ii) Regional Support Units

The Department's regional divisions are supported by a number of HQ units:

- **The Regional Support Unit (RSU)** is the central support unit responsible for the development and coordination of operational policy with regard to welfare/income support services for the regions and divisions, and for the Social Welfare Inspectorate.

- **The Activation and Case Management Unit (ACMU)** is the central support unit responsible for the development and coordination of operational policy with regard to employment/activation services for the regions and divisions.

(iii) Digital Services Unit

Assistant Secretary: Niall Egan *Principal Officer: Donal Spellman*

This unit directs the design and development of quality online services for our clients and our business partners.

The overall objective of the strategy is to embed a culture of innovation and use of technology to deliver improved customer service and efficiencies across the organisation. The Department is conscious that our customer base is broad and varied, and that not all customers are prepared for, or capable of utilising online services. A key tenet of the strategy is to encourage the take-up on online services by customers on a 'Digital by Desire' basis.

Why is Digital important to our Department, Customers and Partners?

Looking to the future it is clear that, notwithstanding any economic recovery, the business demands on the Department will continue to grow. An ageing population, a more dynamic labour market composed of changing/'new' types of work, a shift in our approach in how we engage from a public employment service perspective with people with disabilities and other cohorts. Also, the potential for 'close to real time' data sharing (e.g. with Revenue in respect of earnings and work-hours) is likely to give rise to demands for services and payments that are more tailored to take account of a person's individual circumstances, but can be accessed easily and quickly by customers.

Role of Digital in response to the Pandemic

The current pandemic has highlighted the importance and role that the digital channel can play in delivering the services of our Department. The Department's Digital Channel allowed it to quickly design, build and deliver services to large customer numbers in an extremely short timeframe. In a time where traditional channels such as face-to-face were not accessible, customers turned to digital in large numbers to access services.

The scale of this shift is evident from the volume of activity recorded online over the period. For example, from March 19th to June 8th, over 500,000 online applications for a Pandemic Unemployment Payment were received. When all online activity on MyWelfare.ie in the three month period from December 2019 to February 2020 (almost 119k transactions) is compared with the three month period March 2020 to May 2020 (over 712k transactions), the magnitude of the channel shift is very evident. It is difficult to see how this scale of customer requests could have been accommodated in the absence of MyWelfare.ie during this emergency period.

Services were developed that can be accessed with a basic or with a verified MyGovID account so as to ensure maximum accessibility. Services introduced in response to the Pandemic included:

- Apply for COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (basic and verified)
- Close COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment claim (basic and verified)
- Apply for Jobseeker's payment (new basic level service)
- Apply for Illness Benefit (basic and verified)
- Change your payment method (verified only)
- Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) online - invited service only for specific customer cohort (basic and verified)
- Enhancements to Dashboard (to encourage basic level customers to move from a basic to verified user)
- Refinement to the Jobseeker application process (to direct customers, based on information they provide, towards Jobseekers Allowance or Jobseekers Benefit application)

The new "change payment method" was introduced for verified customers to allow them change from receiving payment to a Post Office to Bank Accounts so as to assist in restricting movements.

An existing platform service that provides the facility for customers to change their address has seen a massive increase in use during the Pandemic as has our payments statement service.

The Way We Work

If 'Digital by Desire' is the key tenet of our digital strategy, then customer-centric design is the cornerstone of all MyWelfare.ie development. Involving the customer in the digital journey from

the initial design phase pays dividends in short term, as the service will better fit their needs, and in the longer term, there will be shared ownership and commitment to new online services.

We follow Service Design principles in that we put the customer/end user at the centre of the design process and get input from them early and often. This means that before we start to build the online service, we develop prototypes of the proposed service and invite users to interact with them and give feedback on them. We do this with staff, customers, and customer representative groups and go through much iteration until we agree on a final service to build.

Overview of Services

MyWelfare.ie

In 2015, to enable our customers to access personalised and online welfare services, the Department built a secure, online customer facing portal called MyWelfare.ie. This is accessed via the MyGovID single, secure, online identity and access portal.

Customers with a verified MyGovID can currently apply online for the following:

- Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance
- Paternity Benefit
- Maternity Benefit
- Parents Benefit
- Child Benefit
- PRSI Refund
- Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance
- Illness Benefit
- COVID -19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)

Customers in receipt of a Jobseeker payment can also:

- close their claim online
- notify us that that they intend to take a holiday, and,
- in some locations they can certify online (pilot only).

There are also two **Benefit of Work Estimators**, one for people on Jobseeker's or One-Parent Family, and one for people on Disability Allowance, Blind Persons or Partial Capacity Benefit. They both show customers, in the form of a graphic, how income from employment may affect their payment and also shows them what additional income supports they may be entitled to while in employment.

Based on customer feedback, we began work on delivering the next platform level feature for the Department's transactional website – a customer dashboard.

While the Department already provides this type of service via its traditional channels of office, phone and post, the MyWelfare.ie customer dashboard allows us improve on this by allowing customers access this information 24/7 from the comfort of their home, or on their mobile device.

Giving our customers direct access to their information gives them greater choice in how they interact with the Department, delivers greater flexibility and transparency thus offering them an enhanced customer experience.

Welfare Partners

Welfare Partners (www.welfarepartners.ie) is a digital service for business partners of the Department. Welfare Partners has been designed to be fully accessible, secure and responsive and utilizes the Revenue Online Service (ROS) digital certificate for authentication and non-repudiation. Utilising the ROS digital certificate infrastructure on WelfarePartners allows us to leverage the current ROS infrastructure which is well established across the business community.

In 2019, Welfare Partners were nominated, and were the overall winners of two awards: The Civil Service Excellence & Innovation award and the Ireland eGovernment Health & Medical Award. The judges recognised the contribution to connected Government and the innovative use of the Revenue ROS digital certificate to authenticate users on WelfarePartners.

Community Employment Sponsors can complete Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for participants through the Welfare Partners site, submit wage and training budget claims and engage with the Department online - replacing the historical and labour-intensive paper-based practices.

Treatment Benefit delivered via our Welfare Partners site, in late 2017, is one of the most successful online services. Where 490,000 claims were manually processed in 2016, up to 1.2 million were processed in 2018 with the same human resources (95% online). In 2019, we processed 1.3 million claims totalling €92.8 million. Due to the pandemic, this is a significant reduction on numbers from last year. 97% of practitioners are using the online service.

In May 2019, the Department published its strategy for Welfare Partners which sets out the rationale, principles and the expected benefits this channel will bring to our business partners and the Department.

On 28 February 2020, Wage Subsidy Scheme on Welfare Partners was rolled out to all employers.

Digital Adoption Plan

In addition to the continued roll out of online services, Digital Services will also lead on the drafting and implementation of a Digital Adoption plan for the Department. The Department has already stated its ambition of 'serving 50% of our customer's activity online by 2023'.

In order to meet the stated target, activity must shift from traditional channels to online. The Digital Adoption Plan focuses on the actions our Department needs to take to assist our customers towards our online services and how we support our customers and our staff to assist in this transition.

We face challenges ahead in realising our Digital ambition as it involves a major change management programme encompassing people and technology. For example, significant increase in online services will increase pressures on existing ICT systems and architecture.

Communications & Customer Service Unit

Assistant Secretary: Niall Egan *Principal Officer: Sarah O'Callaghan*

The Unit supports the development and implementation of aligned communications and customer service strategies in the Department.

Communications

- The Campaigns Team works to deliver a range of public information campaigns of varying scale throughout the year, to help ensure that people in Ireland are well informed as to their social welfare rights and entitlements. It also advises the Department's Senior Management and business areas on customer communications, content, announcements, and on managing customer engagement.
- The Campaigns Team are also responsible for producing a range of customer information leaflets, information brochures, and customer guides to promote the services of the Department and to support key events such as JobsWeek or key Departmental policy or strategy announcements, across the various brand/services of the Department including MyWelfare, JobsIreland, Intreo, and the centralised government branding.
- In 2019, some 16 targeted advertising/information campaigns were undertaken including the National Minimum Wage, Woking Family payment, MyWelfare, Parents Benefits, and the Department's Christmas and New Year social welfare payments schedule. The Department uses a range of media depending on the target audience for each campaign including national and regional radio, print, social and digital media.
- The Internal Communications Team supports internal information flows in the organisation by helping and advising business units on how to disseminate important information to staff in a timely way through a range of formats and staff channels (staff magazine, intranet, email, events). It also manages how corporate level communications

are provided to staff. The unit is working on a new Internal Communications Strategy for completion by end Q3 2020.

- During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Communications Team has delivered eight related public information campaigns to promote information about income supports that have been introduced as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The Web Team is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Department's website which since late 2019 has moved from www.welfare.ie to a presence on www.gov.ie/deasp - the new all-of-Government Gov.ie website. All DEASP scheme content for gov.ie was developed in plain English, and the Department has been working with the NALA, the national adult literacy agency for some time to improve the accessibility of its information.

- In March 2019, a dedicated hub page for all DEASP COVID-19 related information was created www.gov.ie/deaspcovid19 . Total unique page views of gov.ie/DEASP content was 9.25m views in March 2020, 3.5m views in April 2020, and 1.5m views in May 2020.

Customer Service

- The Customer Information Team deal with general information queries via phone, email and Twitter. The Information Services Contact Centre (Lo Call 1890 66 22 44) dealt with 63,000 phone calls in 2019 and more than 35,000 e-mails from customers who contacted the Department via info@welfare.ie and support@mywelfare.ie. The Department also provide general customer information and advice via social media and received approximately 83,000 profile visits to its Twitter account in 2019.

- In normal times, this Customer Information Team also represents the Department at a series of large customer facing events throughout the year, such as the National Ploughing Championships, The Pregnancy and Baby Fair and the Over 50's Show.

- Customer Service Policy Team is also responsible for quarterly meetings with customer service representative groups on topical issues and changes of interest to them. This team will also be responsible for implementing the Department's Customer Contact Strategy to streamline customer service operations in the Department to standardise and improve the overall level of customer service.

- The Forms and Publications Team are responsible for the design and update of all the Department's primary customer application forms and for the delivery of external publications such as customer guides, including several in a number of language options, and the Department's annual report for 2019 which has recently been completed.

- Over the period 16th March to end May 2020, the Customer Information Team established and manged a new cross DEASP COVID-19 Income Support Helpline, with assistance from a geographically dispersed team of colleagues. They dealt with some

161,251 customer calls, 41,345 emails, and forms 9,409 forms requests during this period. This totals some 212,005-customer engagement in a 2.5 months period on this single new dedicated call centre.

- The Unit is also responsible for managing the provision of Translation and Interpretive services for Department customers (budget in 2020 is €775,000) and the administration of a legacy scheme of Grants for the Development and Promotion of Information and Welfare Rights (budget €690,000 in 2020).

Client Eligibility Services

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan Principal Officer: Mary O'Sullivan

- Client Eligibility Services (CES) is responsible for:
- The acquisition, update, maintenance and data quality of PRSI contribution records for all employees and self-employed contributors, with in excess of 3.5 million records received annually from Revenue.
- Working with Member States institutions in relation to the coordination of social insurance records across the EU/EEA, including special provisions for posted workers.
- Providing special PRSI collection arrangements for employees of Irish companies working temporarily overseas but who remain subject to Irish social insurance and for persons who are self-assessed for income tax purposes but classified as employees for PRSI purposes.
- PRSI data is transferred to the Department by the Revenue Commissioners which acts as the Department's collection agency in respect of employees engaged in insurable employment and self-employed contributors.
- The basis for the administrative and operational arrangements governing these data transfers between the two organisations is contained in primary legislation and implementation is governed by Data Sharing Agreements.
- In November 2019, the platform which CES used to maintain PRSI contributors records moved to the Department's strategic BOMi application platform. The change has facilitated the availability of more detailed PRSI information on a read-only basis to areas of the Department which require it for business reasons. In addition, as part of the Revenue PAYE modernisation project, a Real-Time-Look-Up of employee payroll data held by Revenue is available to officers of the Department to verify customer PRSI contribution details.

- CES also records details of credited contributions, which are awarded in respect of periods during which a person is unable to undertake insurable employment because of, for example, unemployment or illness.
- In addition, CES maintains a register of 'Homemakers', who may be entitled to have periods spent caring for elderly or incapacitated adults and/or full time caring for children taken into account for pension eligibility calculation purposes.
- CES administers a scheme for voluntary PRSI contributors which, subject to prescribed entry criteria, permit individuals to pay a PRSI contribution directly to the Department solely for pension purposes, over periods when they are either not paying PRSI from employment / self-employment, or are not in receipt of credited contributions.
- Approximately 1 million of the claims processed by the Department each year depend on data (PRSI contributions and credits) held in CES.
- Details of PRSI contribution history records were made available on request to over 20,000 individual contributors in 2019; while over 45,500 contributors availed of the MyWelfare service to access a copy of their contribution statement online during the year.

(vi) Services delivered for other Departments

Magdalen Commission Scheme

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Anne Marie Cassidy*

- The Magdalen Commission Scheme was set up under the recommendations of the Report of Mr Justice John Quirke for women who were admitted to and worked in Magdalen laundries. The report recommended the immediate implementation of an ex-gratia scheme comprising a combination of a lump sum equivalent payment and weekly pension payments. The Department operates the scheme payments on behalf of the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE).

- Applications for eligibility under Restorative Justice/Magdalen Commission scheme are made to the DJE and that Department decides on entitlement to payment under the scheme. The women are eligible for a lump sum equivalent payment of between €11,500 and €100,000 from DJE, depending on the length of stay in a relevant institution. As recommended by Judge Quirke, the balance of lump sum equivalent payments in excess of €50,000 is paid by weekly instalments, in order to provide an income spread over a longer period (lump sum equivalent payments).

- In addition, weekly pension payments up to €100 are made to those aged under 66 years and up to €248.30 for those aged over 66 years.

- 900 applications have been received by DJE to date. It is estimated that the total number of customers will eventually be in the region of 1,000. Applications are still being accepted by DJE.

- Since 2014, the Department has received details from the Department of Justice and Equality of 757 customers who are deemed eligible under the scheme to date i.e. these 757 customers had received a lump sum restorative justice payment from DJE.

- There are currently 428 customers receiving a weekly payment from DEASP under the scheme. 252 are receiving payments under the administrative pension scheme and 58 are receiving a lump sum equivalent payment (118 are in receipt of both payments).

- 187 customers currently have no entitlement to weekly payments under the administrative scheme as they are already on an equivalent or higher rate of DEASP payment. These cases are kept under review so that payments can be commenced if customer circumstances change.

- 139 customers have passed away since the scheme was introduced. Three customers have chosen not to receive payments.

- In respect of 2019, DEASP made weekly payments totalling €2,198,493 and lump sum equivalent payments of €640,150. The estimated expenditure for this scheme in 2020 is €3.29m.

Local Property Tax Deduction at Source

Assistant Secretary: Teresa Leonard *Principal Officer: Anne Marie Cassidy*

- The *Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2013* allows for a person who is liable for the local property tax, and who is in receipt of certain social protection payments (long term schemes, such as pensions), to have local property tax (LPT) deducted from their payments. Deductions cannot be taken from a customer's Social Protection payment where this would reduce their weekly personal rate below the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) personal rate currently set at €201.00 per week.

- Deductions to date have been made from scheme payments where the customer opts to do so and there have been no mandatory deductions.

- At end-May 2020, there are approximately 25,300 customers availing of the deduction at source facility to make payments towards their LPT liability from their weekly DEASP payments. This is a significant increase from July 2013, when the scheme commenced, when there were only approximately 11,350 customers with deductions.

- In 2019, approximately €6.9 million was deducted at source from customers' DEASP payments towards LPT liability.

- Based on current levels, it is estimated that €7 million will be deducted at source from 25,300 customer's payments toward their LPT liability in 2020. The average weekly deduction amount for Local Property Tax from a customer is currently €5.59.

Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy

Assistant Secretary: Kathleen Stack *Principal Officer: Eugene Walsh*

- The work of the Department impacts almost every household in the country. The vast majority of people who are supported by the Department claim and receive payments to which they are legitimately entitled. Similarly, the vast majority of staff discharge their duties effectively and honestly. However, as in every business, the financial resources in the custody of the Department are susceptible to leakage through error (client or departmental) or deliberate fraud.

- Social welfare loss through fraud or error also undermines public confidence in the entire social protection system; particularly among social insurance contributors and taxpayers. Given that social welfare payments are equivalent in value to approximately 40% of all tax receipts, the control of fraud and the prevention of abuse of the social welfare system are critically important to ensure that funds voted by the Oireachtas are properly disbursed to the purposes intended.

- The Department's approach in this area – set out in the current *Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2019 – 2023* - lays a strong emphasis on minimising the risks of fraud and eliminating incorrect payments. This involves appropriate checks at the point of claim, strengthened by systematic reviews of claims in payment and verification that the conditions for entitlement continue to be met, including means, residency and medical reviews. It also includes an annual programme of control surveys which allows the Department to identify risks and address any control weaknesses across the various scheme areas.

- Under the Strategy, the Department publishes an Annual Report and an Annual Target Statement. The 2019 Annual Report will be published in the first half of 2020 (currently being finalised).

- Control work is an integral part of the day-to-day operations of the Department. Members of staff who are involved in the administration of social welfare schemes are acutely aware of the need to implement appropriate controls at every stage of the process of administering claims from receipt through to payment.

- In addition, the Department plans to conduct some 700,000 claim reviews, inspections and investigations during 2020 – however, this is figure is likely to be lower because of the disruption to control work due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Control work across the Department is overseen and monitored by the Control Programme Board which includes representatives from the main scheme areas as well as Control Division and the Special Investigations Unit The Management Board also receives quarterly reports on progress towards achieving targets.

- Some 350 social welfare inspectors have powers to investigate claims and inspect employers. The central Control Division is based in Carrick-on-Shannon and has responsibility across the Department for directing general control policy and activities, debt management, procecutions, co-ordination of control surveys, awareness and specific anti-fraud training for the Department as a whole.

- The Unit is also responsible for:

    - monitoring activity and reporting to the Control Programme Board, Management Board, Minister and externally

    - dealing with reports of potential fraud received from the public

    - data matching with external agencies for control purposes

    - providing a specialised and dedicated National Decisions Support Unit for Special Investigation Unit cases

    - co-ordination of the Department's Control Survey programme

    - processing all criminal prosecutions involving employers and social welfare recipients

    - developing and implementing the Department's debt management policy and managing the Department stock of overpayments and

    - Overseeing the Liable Relatives Unit (based in Dundalk), which aims to recover some or all of the monies being expended on social welfare payments for lone parents and their children from the persons who are liable to maintain them, the (former) spouses or parents.

- **Impact of COVID-19**: The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the temporary redeployment of staff members in Control Division, and staff members around the Department who are normally engaged in control activity, to other vital work during the height of the emergency. This may impact Control Reviews and Control Savings for 2020.

Special Investigation Unit

Assistant Secretary: Kathleen Stack *Principal Officer: Kieran O'Dwyer*

- The main function of the Department's Special Investigation Unit (SIU), which comprises 114 officers (including 20 Gardaí on secondment), is to investigate and detect social welfare fraud. A memorandum of understanding was signed by the Department and An Garda Siochána in late 2018 outlining the general roles and responsibilities of the Gardaí on secondment. The purpose of the secondment is to help ensure the effective investigation of social welfare fraud.

- The Unit carries out a wide range of control activities and projects and works closely with Revenue staff in the Joint Investigation Units (JIU), with the Workplace Relations Commission Inspectorate and other compliance and enforcement agencies. The emphasis is on direct intervention, high visibility activity and direct engagement

Achievements in 2019 include:

- Control savings of €72 million were generated from the Unit's control and anti-fraud activities
- 3,536 case investigations resulted in social welfare payments being stopped or reduced as a result of fraud and 1,014 cases where overpayments were detected
- 86 cases were sent to An Garda Síochána for further investigation before being referred to the DPP for consideration to prosecute under the C*riminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001*
- 419 cases were considered for prosecution by the Department under social welfare legislation with 114 of these cases referred for prosecution for social welfare offences.

Scheme/Regional Division Control Staff

- Each major scheme section has a dedicated control unit which initiates, undertakes and co-ordinates all control activities within their respective areas. The scheme control units are mainly involved in data-matching projects in order to select cases for review. While some 'desk review' work is carried out at the scheme control units, the detailed investigations are sent to Inspectors, including the SIU.

- Each regional division has its own cohort of social welfare inspectors. These inspectors undertake reviews on behalf of the divisions (mainly Jobseeker and One Parent Family claims and employer PRSI inspections). In addition, they undertake reviews on behalf of the centralised scheme areas.

Control Savings

- A key measure of the Department's control activity is the value of control savings achieved by the Department on an annual basis. Control savings are an estimate of the value of various control activities across schemes in payment. They include both the actual value of past overpayments identified and the estimated value of expenditure that would have been incorrectly incurred were it not for the control activity identifying the fraud and/or error. The Department has a provisional target of achieving €520m in control savings in 2020. In 2019, reported control savings were €505m resulting from some 609,000 individual reviews/investigations of entitlements across all scheme areas.

Prosecutions

- Where the Department encounters serious fraud cases, our policy is to ensure that such cases come before the courts. While the Department can take such prosecutions under social welfare legislation, very serious cases of identity fraud or multiple claiming occur are generally referred to the Gardaí for prosecution under criminal justice legislation.

- In considering cases of social welfare fraud for legal proceedings, the Department follows best practice. This includes considering all aggravating and mitigating factors, including duration of the fraud, previous instances of social welfare fraud, severity of the offence, etc.

- During 2019, 505 cases were considered for prosecution:

  - 114 criminal cases were referred to Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO) for prosecution under Social Welfare legislation.
  - 305 cases were considered for prosecution by DEASP but was not initiated.
  - 86 cases were referred to An Garda Síochána for investigation and prosecution under Criminal Justice legislation.

- The main reasons a prosecution is not considered suitable are as follows:

  - Not in the public interest to proceed
  - Significant mitigating factors
  - Evidence would not meet the standards required to present a *prima facie* case and/or
  - A risk that the case is statute barred.

- At the end of December 2019, some 492 Social Welfare legislation cases (471 Criminal and 21 Civil) were in the courts system (i.e. on hand with the Chief State Solicitor/Local State Solicitor) and at various stages of the legal process.

Cases referred for prosecution: 2015 to 2019

	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Referred to the CSSO	202	181	170	101	114
Referred to An Garda Síochána	151	160	130	74	86
Total	**353**	**341**	**300**	**175**	**200**

- The Department finalised 98 criminal cases in Court during 2019. These relate to offences committed under the *Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005* only and do not include cases referred by An Garda Síochána to the DPP for prosecution under the *Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001*.

- **The cumulative value of fraudulent overpayments associated with those prosecuted in these cases was €1.8 million. Of the 98 cases finalised, the following outcomes are noteworthy:**

  - A prison sentence was imposed in two cases
  - Suspended sentences were imposed in six cases
  - Fines of varying amounts were imposed in 47 cases, ranging from €100 to €9,000;
  - The Probation Act was imposed in 26 cases where the overpayment amount relating to the charges before the court had been repaid in full.

Overpayments/DEASP Debt

- The Department holds a significant stock of overpayments. At end of December 2019, customer debt arising from overpayments was valued at **€459 million** in respect of 148,900 individual cases involving some 124,700 people.

Outstanding customer overpayments – as at end December 2019

	Number of Cases		Outstanding Balance	
Current debt status	**Number**	**Share %**	**(€m)**	**Share%**
Customer repaying debt	47,647	32%	€226.4	49%
Not Repaying	77,795	52%	€168.5	37%
Suspended	23,437	16%	€64.0	14%
Total	**148,879**	**100%**	**€459.0**	**100%**

- Effective debt management is a key part of the overall control work of the Department. Ensuring that persons who have been overpaid make an ongoing contribution to the recovery of their debts is a key element of this work.

- The Department actively pursues overpayments and works to secure repayment of any funds overpaid to customers as quickly as possible.

- Outstanding debts are monitored on an on-going basis and an annual statement is issued for each active debt component. Where debt cases are subject to appeal, a statement does not issue until the appeal is finalised.

- Overpayments may be recovered through regular periodic payments, deduction from the customers' on-going benefit payments or by way of a single payment covering the full amount owed.

- Overpayments can take a number of years to be fully recovered and the Department is obliged by law and is willing to take into account the personal circumstances of the person in determining the amount of money they can repay so as to ensure that their living needs are met.
- Most overpayments are recovered in instalments over a period of time rather than in a single lump sum. Typically, the rate of repayment is agreed to be a definitive weekly value of repayment.
- As part of the process of finalising a decision and assessing an overpayment, the Department engages with the customer to agree an affordable and realistic rate of repayment and, in each case, the customer must be given an opportunity to clarify any relevant matters.
- At any time, a customer may also seek to review the terms of any recovery arrangement(s) they have in place with the Department.

Predictive Analytics

- Data analytics modelling enables the risk profiling of individual records using large datasets and the development of models designed to increase the detection rate of non-compliant claims. At the end of 2019, there were predictive models in operation for several working age and pension schemes.
- The One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) model was put into production in January 2016. Some 2,100 OPFP cases were identified for investigation in 2019 and the model continues to perform well, with a detected non-compliance rate of approximately 21%. The Disability Allowance (DA) model was put into production in September 2016. Over 2,300 DA analytics cases were issued for investigation in 2019, with a detected non-compliance rate of approximately 21% also being realised.
- In 2019, over 9,400 jobseekers cases were selected for investigation. This achieved a non-compliance detection rate of 31%.
- A risk-based model has also been developed for Farm Assist Cases. Just over 1,000 cases were referred for review in 2019, with a non-compliance detection rate of 22% achieved.
- 5,500 cases for review of Qualified Adult State Pension Contributory scheme in 2019, achieving non-compliance detection rate of approximately 24%. A risk-based model has also been developed for Widow(er)s/Surviving Civil Partner' Pension, and while exact figures are not yet available preliminary results suggest that this approach is proving effective.

- The Business Analytics Unit is also working with the Employment Status Investigation Unit (ESIU) to assist them in defining criteria for the selection of employers for investigation of false self-employment.

- A specific analytics database for the Special Investigations Unit has also been developed to facilitate the unit in the creation of highly targeted and focused projects. The SIU database generated savings of €7.3 million in 2019.

- Overall, cases selected for reviews based on analytics returned savings of over €36m in 2019, a year-on-year increase of 67%. This increase in savings has been largely driven by the expansion of analytics to pension-related control projects.

- In 2019, the Unit was voted the winner in the Public Sector Category at the Analytics Institute's Annual Awards by their industry peers (including Google, Microsoft, etc.).

Data matching

- The Department conducts a number of systematic data matches with a range of agencies. Data is received securely from agencies such as the Revenue Commissioners (regarding commencement of employment, PRSI and related income data, and payment of DIRT); the Irish Prison Service (regarding prisoner data), the Higher Education Authority (in respect of student grants and records), the Commission on Taxi Regulation, Health Services Executive (mainly related to the Fair Deal Scheme) and others. Information is also received from the Department's equivalent in Northern Ireland and the UK.

Control Surveys

- The Department is committed to conducting a number of control surveys annually. These surveys estimate the level of suspected fraud and error at a point in time on the scheme surveyed. Two surveys were published in 2019 covering State Pension (Non-Contributory) and Back to Work Enterprise Allowance.

- As part of the Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy, the Department is moving from standalone, point-in-time Control Surveys of larger schemes, to a form of continuous and rolling sampling, assessment and reporting. The introduction of rolling Control Surveys commenced during 2019 with two batches of JA cases being surveyed.

- Under the new model, cases for divisional schemes, such as Jobseekers Allowance (JA), will be issued on a quarterly basis, in January, April, July and October of each year. Cases for centralised schemes, such as pensions, will be issued on an annual basis, in February of each year. The plan is for surveys to cover the areas of jobseekers, illness schemes and pensions. The pre-pandemic schedule of surveys for 2020 is shown in the table below. As mentioned above, the re-deployment of Control Division staff members to other work

during the height of the pandemic has meant that the surveys listed below as beginning in February and April have not yet happened.

2020 Control Survey Schedule

Scheme	January	February	April	July	October
JA	250		250	250	250
SPC		400			
SPNC		400			
WCP		200			
JB*				500	

Total (2020): 2,500 cases

**These schemes will be surveyed on a non-rolling basis*

- In addition to the quarterly rolling surveys, it is intended to conduct one stand-alone survey annually of a scheme that is not covered by the rolling surveys. In 2020, a survey of 500 Jobseekers Benefit cases will take place in Q3.

3 *PUBLIC SERVICE IDENTITY*

Assistant Secretary: Kathleen Stack *Principal Officer: Paul Scully*

SAFE Registration and the Public Services Card

- SAFE registration is the process used by the Department to establish and verify a person's identity.
- Completion of registration to SAFE Level 2 (i.e. substantial level of assurance of identity) is the minimum requirement for a PSC to be issued.
- SAFE 2 face-to-face registrations involve the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of identity data already held by the Department or provided by that person. It takes place countrywide in over 100 offices of the Department.
- Up to end-May 2020, 3.4 million people have been SAFE 2 registered.
- SAFE 2 Registration is required for individual applicants for a Personal Public Service (PPS) Number and people applying for or in receipt of social protection payments or benefits.
- The Department temporarily postponed the SAFE registration process in late March 2020 due to the COVID- 19 Pandemic. This decision was taken in order to comply with guidelines in respect of social distancing. Work is underway to resume the SAFE registration process in the Department's offices in July.
- Facial matching software has been in use since March 2013. It assists in detecting and deterring duplicate registrations by matching customer photographs against existing photographic records to identify if a person has already registered with the Department. Where a match or a potential match is identified, an investigation can be mounted.
- 231 possible match cases were detected and referred for investigation. These cases are at various stages of the investigation process. To date, the Department has prosecuted 41 cases, with 24 people receiving custodial or suspended sentences.
- The governing legislation is the *Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005* (as amended). Sections 263, 263A and 263B provide for the verification of identity to facilitate the issuing, use and cancellation of a PSC. Furthermore, Section 247C provides that an existing claimant must satisfy the Minister to his/her identity, sets out the process for doing that, and provides for disqualification where an existing claimant fails to so do. The process set out in the legislation is the SAFE 2 registration process.
- Given that the Department spends over €21 billion annually on supports and services, it is prudent to determine that people who access these services are the people who are

entitled to receive them. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask people to verify their identity to a substantial level of assurance.

- The purpose of the PSC is to enable individuals to gain access to public services more efficiently while, at the same time, preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible. The PSC is a physical token that demonstrates a person's identity has been verified to SAFE2 level.

- The PSC project is one which also assists the implementation of the e-Government Strategy 2017–2020 by allowing citizens to validate their identity in an on-line environment.

- Considerable progress has been made in the roll out of the PSC. As of 9th June2020, 4.337 million cards, including 1.342 million Free Travel Variants, have been produced.

- The Department published a Comprehensive Guide to SAFE registration and the Public Services Card in October 2017 and this has been issued to stakeholders and is available as a general information guide. The Department intends to update this guide before the end of Q3 2020.

- The PSC is currently the subject of an investigation by the Data Protection Commissioner (DPC). On 15th August 2019, the Department received the DPC's final investigation report concerning the processing of personal data by the Department.

- On 17th September 2019, the Department published the report of the DPC together with a summary of its own response to the findings of the report.

- On the basis of strong legal advice from the Attorney General's Office, the Department is satisfied that the processing of personal data related to the PSC does have a robust legal basis, that the retention of data is lawful and that the information provided to users satisfies the requirements of transparency.

- The findings in the DPC report did not have the force of law until such time as they were formalised in an Enforcement Notice. The Enforcement Notice was received on 6th December 2019. After considering its scope and terms, a decision was made to appeal the Enforcement Notice as provided for in the *Data Protection Act 2018*. The Department lodged its appeal on 20th December 2019. The matter is now before the Courts. Proceedings have been adjourned to 15th October 2020.

MyGovID

- MyGovID is a secure online identity verification service that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection carries out on behalf of bodies providing public services online.
- Holders of a basic MyGovID account can access the following services on the Department's online MyWelfare service:
  - book an appointment for Personal Public Service Number allocation,
  - book an appointment for registration for a Public Services Card, and
  - Access the JobsIreland website.
- Each body providing public services online sets the level of identity verification required for a particular service offered. Some services will be available at a basic MyGovID account level, but higher value services will require a verified account. Verified accounts are securely linked via data captured during SAFE registration.
- Services currently available to holders of verified accounts include:
  - Jobseekers Benefit claims (DEASP)
  - Maternity Benefit claims (DEASP)
  - Paternity Benefit claims (DEASP)
  - MyAccount (Revenue)
  - Drivers Licence online renewal (RSA)
  - Student grant application (SUSI)
  - Online access to Agfood.ie services (Dept. Agriculture, Food and the Marine)
  - Dublin City Council Voter.ie
  - Department of Children and Youth Affairs (National Childcare Scheme)
- As of June 2020, there are 1.92m MyGovID accounts, of which 656,000 (34%) are verified accounts.

CORPORATE AND CENTRAL FUNCTIONS

Legislative Programme

Assistant Secretary: Ciarán Lawler *Principal Officer: Orlaith Mannion*

- The Department is responsible for 18 different legislative codes. See table below:
    - the legislation underpinning the social welfare code
    - Occupational and Private Pensions legislation
    - Civil Registration and Gender Recognition legislation
    - Redundancy and Employer's Insolvency legislation
    - Citizens Information Board/Comhairle legislation
    - Some Employment Rights legislation

Citizens Information Act 2000 to 2011
Civil Registration Acts 2004 to 2019
Gender Recognition Act 2015
Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts 1973 to 2005
National Minimum Wage Acts 2000 and 2015
Organisation of Working Time Act 1997
Payment of Wages Act 1991
Pensions Acts 1990 -2014
Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Acts 1984 to 2019
Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003
Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001
Protection of Employees (Temporary Agency Work) Act 2012
Protection of Employment Acts 1977 to 2014
Protection of Employment (Exceptional Collective Redundancies and Related Matters) Act 2007
Redundancy Payments Acts 1967 to 2014
Social Welfare Consolidated Act 2005 (as amended)
Terms of Employment (Information) Acts 1994 to 2014
Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 - 2015

- The Department's normal legislative cycle involves the enactment of two or more Social Welfare Bills each year:

(a) a Bill in December to implement the annual social welfare changes announced in the October Budget, and

(b) a Bill in spring/early summer to provide a legal basis within the social welfare code for policy, administrative and operational changes

- The *Pensions Act 1990* is also amended on a regular basis to provide for changes in the regulatory and supervisory structures to reflect developments in pensions and financial environments.

- The *Civil Registration Act 2004* has also been significantly amended (the most recent amending Act was in May 2019).

Recent Legislation Enacted

Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020

- There were two Parts in the second piece of emergency legislation linked to this Department. One involved changes to the *Redundancy Payments Act 1967*. In order to prevent mass redundancies, part of that Act is temporarily suspended until 10th August 2020. The other Part of *Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020* relevant to this Department was to the Civil Registration code – provision was made to temporarily remove the obligation to attend a registration office in person to register a birth or a death during the public health crisis.

Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2020

The first piece of emergency legislation introduced the enhanced Illness Benefit for people diagnosed with Covid-19 or diagnosed by a doctor to be a probable source of infection for same. It also temporarily waived waiting days for Jobseeker's Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance. Normally Jobseekers have to wait six days before claiming payment. This allows jobseekers to receive payment straight away until the economy recovers.

Social Welfare (No. 2) Act 2019

- This Act gives legislative effect to a range of Social Welfare measures announced in the Budget on 8th October 2019.
- The Act also provided for a number of technical changes to the *Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005* to ensure that certain provisions are updated (for example, to reflect the establishment of TUSLA insofar as it affects the application of income disregards for people who are engaged in fostering) or to bring legislative measures into line with policy and practice (e.g. in relation to the treatment of payments after death).
- Drafting of the Budget Bill begins immediately after the Budget announcement every year and it must be enacted by the end of the year to enable increases in payments, or other measures (e.g. PRSI changes), which are to be implemented in January.

Social Welfare Act 2019

- This Act mainly provided for the introduction of a new social insurance scheme - Jobseeker's Benefit (self-employed) - to provide an income safety net to people setting up or running their own businesses.

Civil Registration Act 2019

- This Act amended the *Civil Registration Act 2004* to facilitate commencement of existing legislation that provides for registration of births of donor-conceived children. This will allow both partners in a same-sex female relationship to have their details registered in the register of births. It also makes it less onerous on a woman to rebut automatic paternity of her estranged husband in registering a birth. It also provides a role for family members in registering a death in cases involving a coroner as well as provisions that allow the Central Statistics Office to comply with EU Regulations concerning data collected in death registrations.

Parent's Leave and Benefit Act 2019

- This Act amended the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act to allow parent's benefit (a social insurance benefit) to be paid at the same rate as maternity/paternity benefits. Parent's leave is the policy responsibility of the Department of Justice and Equality.

Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018

- The Employment Rights portfolio moved from the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (as it was then) to the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection in September 2017. This included managing the passage of the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill through the Oireachtas. The key elements of this Act are

that employers shall give employees their core terms of employment within five days of starting work, the prohibition of zero hour contracts in most circumstances, the introduction of a new right for employees whose contract of employment does not reflect the reality of the hours they habitually work, and strengthened anti-penalisation provisions so that employees feel safe in invoking their employment rights.

Secondary Legislation

- 34 Regulations and Orders were made in 2019 in relation to the Social Welfare Acts. 15 were made so far in 2020.

Legal Advisers

- The Department has two Advisory Counsel on secondment from the Office of the Attorney General, for the purpose of providing legal advice. They advise the Minister and the Department on legal issues. They monitor and advise in respect of the Department's draft legislation and on-going litigation.
- The Legal Advisers liaise regularly with the Office of the Attorney General, in particular, when issues of constitutional or EU law significance or cross-Departmental issues arise.
- Significant litigation files in the Department at present involve issues such as data protection, child benefit and EU treaty rights.

Legal Project

Assistant Secretary: Ciarán Lawler *Principal Solicitor: Kevin O'Connell*

- Social Welfare law was first *consolidated* by the Oireachtas in 1981, bringing together legislation dating from 1908 to 1980. Statutory consolidation was undertaken again in 1993 and 2005. However since 2006 a programme of *Statute Law Revision* has been coordinated by the Law Reform Commission, on foot of which the Commission has to date prepared and published approximately 380 Revised Acts covering a wide spectrum of legislative codes. Until now the Social Welfare Acts (as well as the *Taxes Consolidation Act 1997)* were largely excluded from this process due to their overwhelming size. However, in 2019 a Departmental official (who is a qualified solicitor) was assigned to work closely with the Commission on the preparation of a Revised Version of the *Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (SWCA 2005)*.
- This will incorporate all amendments to the SWCA 2005 which have (to date) been made in 28 Social Welfare Amendment Acts and, to a lesser extent, in 17 other Acts of the Oireachtas. The Revised Act will also include editorial details of the several hundred Statutory Instruments made under the SWCA 2005, or made under earlier legislation but continued in force by Section 362(2) of SWCA 2005.

- The advantage of a Revised Act (over a new consolidation of social welfare law) is that the Revised Act can be kept constantly up-to-date and accessible to the public.
- Once preparation and publication of the revised SWCA 2005 is completed it is intended to proceed with work on the Pensions Acts 1990 to 2018.

Planning and Governance

Assistant Secretary: Ciarán Lawler *Principal Officer: Orlaith Mannion*

Planning Secretariat

- The Planning Secretariat administers the process of circulating Memoranda for Government and the subsequent compilation of Ministerial observations. It also provides an administrative support service to the Department's corporate functions e.g. compilation of this brief, reporting on Programme for Government commitments, organising the annual pre-budget and post-budget fora etc. The Department employs a librarian and subscribes to relevant publications.
- This Department has held an annual pre-Budget Forum for over 30 years. It offers a unique opportunity for the community and voluntary sectors, employee and employer representatives attending to present their views on what they feel should be included and prioritised in the upcoming Budget.

Corporate Planning Unit

Corporate Planning Unit has responsibility for:

- Co-ordination and preparation of monthly updates of the Minister and Minister of State's Priorities List
- Providing the Secretary to the Management Board
- Co-ordination and preparation of the Department's Statement of Strategy
- Co-ordination of the business planning and risk management process in the Department
- Co-ordination of the Business Continuity Programme (e.g. the process and procedures that are initiated if a major incident like cybercrime or a pandemic happens that could interrupt the Department's business).
- Updating of the Corporate Governance Framework
- Co-ordination, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Department's obligations under the Official Languages Act.

Business Planning and Risk Management

- Business Continuity Planning is the process to coordinate, facilitate and execute activities that ensure effectiveness by: identifying and mitigating operational risks before they

occur, responding to disruptive events for example the current pandemic, recovering mission-critical business operations after disruptive events and conducting an event postmortem to improve future recovery operations.

- The Business Planning and Risk Management process links annual business and risk management plans to the strategic objectives and actions set out in the Department's Statement of Strategy, and each staff member's role in the attainment of those objectives is clearly defined within the Performance Management & Development System (PMDS).

- Regular reporting and monitoring of progress made on business plan activities and associated risks are important features of this process. A new Statement of Strategy will be created in line with the new Government's priorities.

Accounts & Audit functions

Assistant Secretary: Ciarán Lawler *Principal Officer: Ronnie Rice (acting)*

Accounts Division

- Accounts Division is based in Dundalk. Its primary functions are to reconcile all DEASP payments and receipts and bring them to account, produce the Department's annual accounts, and administer the payment of supplier accounts.

- The Division prepares the annual statutory and monthly management accounts for the Department. The two statutory accounts are the Appropriation Account for Vote 37 and the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) Account. The Oireachtas votes expenditure to the Appropriation Account, this expenditure covers departmental administration and social assistance payments. Income to the SIF account is mainly derived from PRSI contributions made by employers, employees and the self-employed, with expenditure incurred for insurance-based payments and associated administration costs.

- Accounts Division also pays DEASP supplier payments, some scheme arrears and manages the funding and reconciliation of all salary and customer payments. All expenditure is recorded and reported to Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on a monthly basis. The Division is responsible for facilitating, co-ordinating and overseeing the management of the Administration Budget and related processes within DEASP. The Division also has responsibility for payment delivery services and payment strategy in the Department. The Division manages and reconciles 31 bank accounts with Bank of Ireland, one GRO account with Ulster Bank and 2 cash accounts with An Post.

- The Division supports the Secretary General for his appearances before the Public Accounts Committee. Accounts Division prepares the statutory accounts and the

supporting audit files for both Vote and SIF and is responsible for liaison with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General on its audits of the statutory accounts.

- A project is currently underway to transfer responsibility for accounting systems, and accounts payable to the Shared Service function managed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Also, a project is underway to migrate the Departments bank accounts from Bank of Ireland to Danske Bank in 2020 as Danske Bank won the contract for the all-of- Government Banking Service.

Payment Delivery Strategy – An Post and Bank payments

- The Department provides two main options for payment method for its customers: payments in cash in post offices or payments direct to customer accounts in financial institutions (EFT). The Department intends, where possible, to continue to offer its many clients the choice of being paid in cash at the post office or directly into an account in a financial institution.

- In 2019, approximately 77.7 million payments with a total value of €19.3 billion were issued. 61% of payments were made via EFT, 38% at post offices with the remaining 1% by cheque.

- DEASP operates its contract for cash payment services with An Post. The current contract came into effect on 1st January 2020. This contract has duration of two years after which, the Department has the option to renew the contract on an annual basis for a further four years, i.e. to 31st December 2025.

- The Department is currently engaged in a migration project to move its banking services from Bank of Ireland to Danske Bank over 2020. This is in line with a Government decision to move banking services for all Government Departments and Offices to Danske Bank. The change of bankers will have an impact on most areas of the Department and is being managed by a dedicated Banking Services Programme Board. The move to Danske Bank will happen over the course of 2020.

- A series of measures were introduced to maintain social welfare payments while combating the spread of the Coronavirus. Fortnightly payments were introduced to minimise the need for people to attend and queue in banks and post offices to collect payments, so helping people restrict their movements to essential activities only. These were introduced on a 'payment in advance' basis so people did not have to wait two weeks for a payment.

Internal Audit Unit

Principal Officer: Seamus Quinn

- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection's Internal Audit Unit (IAU) is headed by a Professional Accountant/Qualified Internal Auditor with a total staffing of 16 and has its main base in Sligo.

- The IAU also uses an outsourced IT audit service on a drawdown basis for specialised IT audits. The IAU conforms to the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform Internal Audit Standards and to the International Standards & Ethics of the Institute of Internal Auditors. On audit and related matters, the Head of Internal Audit reports to the Secretary General and the Audit Committee.

- The IAU provides advice, assurance and insight to management on matters relating to the systems of business control, to quality of performance and to business risk by:

    - Carrying out audits and producing audit reports and reviews in respect of the Department's business control environment including scheme administration, Community Welfare Service, IT/computer areas, Intreo and Branch Offices, contractors and other areas of general administration.

    - Providing ongoing advice and assistance on a wide and varied basis to all areas and personnel within the Department and other areas of administration.

    - Undertaking ad-hoc work or projects.

- It also is the Audit Authority for the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) programme.

Audit Committee

- The Department's Audit Committee meets up to five times every year. It has six members, four of whom, including the Chairperson, are external members. The committee advises on matters relating to (a) the operations and development of the internal audit function and (b) the business control, risk management and governance environment. It conforms to the DPER Audit Guidance for Government Departments, Offices and other Vote Holders. Some meetings in 2020 will be held via video-conferencing.

Protected Disclosures

- The Department has a Protected Disclosures policy and procedures in place to encourage staff to bring information relating to any wrongdoing to the attention of senior management.

EU Funding Compliance Unit

- The role of EU Funding Compliance unit (which is separate from the main Accounts and Audit functions of the Department) is to:
  - Ensure compliance with EU regulations for the drawdown from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Globalisation Fund (EGF) within the Department. This role is carried out by issuing guidance to the relevant areas within the Department on the requirements for compliance with the relevant EU regulations. In addition the unit carries out reviews of systems and expenditure in the areas which are funded under these schemes.
  - Act as Certifying Authority for the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) programme.

Internal Investigation Unit

Assistant Secretary: Ciarán Lawler *Principal Officer: Aideen Mooney*

- The role of the Internal Investigation Unit, is to carry out control investigations on a proactive and reactive basis across all DEASP schemes and programmes. The Internal Investigations Unit (IIU) is responsible for:
  - Investigating cases of suspected data protection breaches at the request of the Data Protection Unit;
  - Carrying out internal control/fraud investigations across all DEASP schemes/programmes at the request of the Internal Audit Unit;
  - Carrying out investigations on behalf of the Personnel Officer;
  - Carrying out investigations at the request of the Protected Disclosures Group.

Investment Analysis

Assistant Secretary: Ciarán Lawler *Principal Officer: Ciaran Judge*

- In order to design effective policies and programmes to meet the needs of a rapidly changing Ireland, the Department needs to be able to assess the investment implications of various policy measures on an actuarial basis. This will include analysing options on pension reform, the short-term expenditure impacts and long-term impacts of policy

proposals, assessing the value for money of various programmes, and the impacts on the Social Insurance Fund of various policy choices.

The Investment Analysis unit is a new team created in 2020 to help answer questions like these by enhancing the Department's Cost-Benefit Analysis and modelling capacity.

- In 2020, the team will produce feasibility on the merits of evaluating policy and budget measures using an actuarial investment model such as used in the New Zealand Social Investment model).

EU & International Affairs including Brexit preparedness

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer: Dearbháil Nic Giolla Mhicíl*

The work of the unit covers (1) Brexit preparedness, (2) North-South cooperation, (3) EU issues (including legislation, court cases, and social policy), and (4) International issues (outside of the EU) such as the Council of Europe. The unit is also responsible for organising official foreign travel for the Minister and officials.

(1) Brexit preparedness and (2) North-South Co-operation

- The UK left the European Union on the 31st January 2020, with the Withdrawal Agreement having being ratified by both the UK and the EU. A transition period now applies until at least the 31st December 2020, during which time existing arrangements for social security between Ireland and the UK, and between the EU27 and the UK, will not change.
- As a result of a "Convention on Social Security" entered into by Ireland and the UK (please see below) which replicates the current reciprocal arrangements, these arrangements will continue for Irish and UK citizens within the Common Travel area following the end of the transition period.
- The Withdrawal Agreement also preserves the current arrangements for UK and EU citizens and their family members who have exercised their right to move between the UK and the EU27 before the end of the transition period and the UK retains access to the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI).
- The Withdrawal Agreement established the EU-UK Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights to monitor the implementation and application of these rights for EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU.
- The EU published on the 18th March its detailed Draft text of the Agreement on the New Partnership with the United Kingdom. This included a Protocol on Social Security Coordination, which proposed coordination across all branches of social security. [redacted]

- Because of the unique nature of the Common Travel Area and the associated rights and privileges which it provides and will continue to provide for Irish and British citizens in each other's countries, Ireland and the United Kingdom have formalised the pre-existing CTA social protection arrangements in a legally binding agreement.
- On 1st February 2019, the Convention on Social Security agreed between Ireland and the UK was signed at official level. The ratification processes in both the Irish and the UK Parliaments were completed during March 2019. The agreement will be required to take effect immediately at the end of the transition period.
- Under the terms of the agreement, all existing arrangements regarding social insurance entitlements will be maintained in Ireland and the UK. This means that Irish and British citizens living in either country will maintain the right to benefit from social insurance contributions made when working in either country and to access social insurance payments in either country as at present. Payments such as child benefit, which can be exported from Ireland to the UK (or vice versa), will continue to be exported.
- Ireland as an EU member state will continue to meet all its obligations, and will where necessary continue to recognise the contributions made by EU citizens while working in the UK, for the purposes of establishing entitlements to Irish social welfare benefits.
- A new Brexit Omnibus Bill for a range of cross-departmental measures required at the end of the transition period. DEASP provisions required for this new legislation are –
    - Part 15 containing amendments to the *Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005* to include references to the UK where there are references to EU Member States.
    - Part 16 amending the *Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act 1984* to ensure that employees who are employed in Ireland, and whose employer has been made insolvent under the laws of the UK, will continue to be protected by the insolvency payments scheme.
- In addition, the following draft Statutory Instruments (as required at the end of the transition period) have been prepared for the Minister's signature at the appropriate time –
    - S.I. to give legal effect to the Convention on Social Security
    - S.I. to enable the transfer of data for the purposes of the insolvency payments scheme post-Brexit
    - S.I. to amend the treatment benefit scheme to ensure persons can continue to be reimbursed for treatments received in the UK.
- The EURES Ireland/Northern Ireland Cross Border Partnership provides pathways to information required by people moving across the border, e.g., jobseekers that need information on employment and training opportunities on both sides of the border, on taxation and the social security systems. The Partnership also aims to assist employers by providing them with advice and access to a larger pool of labour, i.e., jobseekers living on both sides of the border. It is currently 80% funded through the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation. The continued participation of the UK in EU programmes, on appropriate terms, will be an important issue in the negotiations on the future relationship. A contingency plan has been agreed with the Department for

Communities in Northern Ireland to ensure the continued funding and operation of the Partnership in all scenarios.

- The Department is a member of the Border People Advisory Group which meets on a quarterly basis. The Group is co-chaired by North South Ministerial Council officials and supports the Border People Project which is managed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS). The project is predominantly a web-based signposting and practical information service which helps people who cross the border to live, work, study and retire. It provides a signposting service to a wide range of information sources, the most popular of which are in the areas of social security, taxation, welfare benefits, healthcare, pensions.
- The All Ireland free travel scheme allows senior "Smartpass" holders to travel for free on services in Ireland. The Department is making arrangements to ensure that there is no change to that scheme post-Brexit.
- Communications: Brexit information for staff members is on Stór (the Department's intranet, available to all staff), including an overview with Q&As covering pensions, child benefit, unemployment benefits, illness, maternity, free travel and the insolvency payments scheme. A similar overview for customers is available on www.gov.ie and on www.dfa.ie/brexit/.

(3) European Union

Participation at EU Ministerial Councils

- The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) debates and decides on EU business (both legislative and non-legislative) in the area of social policy. The agenda covers matters relating to employment, social inclusion, equality, as well as social protection issues. These areas span a number of different Government Departments. The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection is the lead attendee at the Council meeting. Usually, each six month Presidency holds two formal Council meetings in either Brussels or Luxembourg and one informal Council meeting in the Presidency Member State. It has a key role in the Semester Process (see next section)
- The unit co-ordinates the Minister's attendance at these meetings (in close association with colleagues at the Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels); coordinates all of the briefing required as well as Ireland's input into documents such as draft Council Conclusions.
- While the Covid pandemic has resulted in postponement of the on-site Ministerial meetings, three informal Ministerial video conferences (VC) to discuss the effects of the crisis in the social field and recovery actions have been held. A further VC is scheduled for 16th July.

European Semester

- The European Semester is the EU's annual cycle of economic policy guidance and surveillance.

- Each year, the Commission undertakes a detailed analysis of EU Member States' plans of budgetary, macroeconomic and structural reforms (the process includes bilateral discussions and fact finding missions to the Member States). The results are published in a Country Report for each Member State, and later, Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) are issued by the Commission. Following discussion at the various EU-level Committees (the Social Protection Committee, the Employment Committee and the Economic Policy Committee) and endorsement by Ministers for Employment and Social Policy, they are endorsed by the European Council in June or July.
- The Commission brought forward three CSRs for Ireland in 2019, which include the following elements of particular relevance to this Department:
    - "*Address the expected increase in age-related expenditure … by fully implementing pension reform plans*" and
    - "*Provide personalised active integration support and facilitate upskilling, in particular for vulnerable groups and people living in households with low work intensity".*
- Of the four CSRs brought forward by the Commission in 2020, none fall specifically within DEASP's remit.

Commission Work Programme & Building a Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions

- In mid-January, the Commission issued a Communication on 'building a strong social Europe for just transitions'. It sets out how social policy will help deliver on the challenges and opportunities of today, proposing action at EU level for the months to come, and seeking feedback on further action at all levels in the area of employment and social rights. Specifically, the Commission has set out planned initiatives that will contribute to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights[9]. Key actions in 2020 associated with the Social Pillar include –
    - Fair minimum wages for workers in the EU
    - A European Gender Equality Strategy and binding pay transparency measures
    - An updated Skills Agenda for Europe
    - An updated Youth Guarantee
    - Platform Work Summit
    - Green paper on Ageing
    - Strategy for persons with disabilities
    - Demography Report
    - European Unemployment Re-insurance Scheme

The Recovery package in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

[9] The European Pillar of Social Rights is a set of 20 principles and rights across the three categories Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; Fair working conditions; and Social protection and inclusion.

- The Commission has introduced two packages of measures known as "Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative" (CRII and CRII Plus) which changed the legislative framework applicable to the European Structural and Investment Funds to allow for a more effective response in the current situation and changed the Regulation on the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) to provide additional flexibility and liquidity for Member States to address the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The SURE (Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency) Regulation is a temporary loan scheme designed to help protect jobs and workers affected by the COVID19. The Department of Finance has the lead on this and in determining whether or not Ireland will apply for a loan under the instrument as well as the primary legislation needed for Ireland to sign up to the associated guarantee arrangements. The Commission further proposes to adopt additional measures, including increasing the resources and funding available for the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the FEAD.

EU Regulations 883/04 and 987/09

- The Department's main legal responsibility from membership of the EU relates to co-ordination of social security rights for migrant workers. This has given rise to a complex set of Regulations concerning social protection for persons moving within the Union (Regulations 883/04 and 987/09). These regulations do not harmonise the different social security legislations of the Member States but instead co-ordinate them to ensure that social security rights are protected in the event that a person exercises their right to free movement within the European Economic Area (EU plus Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland), as well as Switzerland.
- The Commission launched a substantial revision of a number of the provisions of EU Regulations 883/2004 and 987/2009 on the coordination of social security systems in December 2016 and these revisions relate to: (i) Access to social benefits for economically inactive EU citizens, (ii) Long-Term Care Benefits, (iii) Unemployment Benefits, (iv) Family Benefits, (v) Applicable legislation for posted workers, and (vi) Miscellaneous amendments.
- Ireland's key concerns with these revisions relate to three of these areas – Long-term Care Benefits, Unemployment Benefits and Family Benefits, and specifically –
    - the exportability of Carer's Allowance,
    - the extension in the period of export of Unemployment Benefits (UB) beyond three months,
    - the need to establish a reasonable connection with the labour market in the Member State in which the person is working before Unemployment Benefit can be claimed in that Member State on the basis of the aggregation of insurance from another Member State(s), and
    - the fact that no provision was included for the indexation of Child Benefit when exported.
- Following intense negotiations, a Provisional Agreement was reached between the Romanian Presidency and the European Parliament in late March 2019. While it did not

meet all of our concerns, Ireland indicated that it could accept it as the Council's position in relation to the coordination of Long-term Care Benefits was maintained. However, Ireland did not get the support of a qualified majority of Member States, with the key areas of difficulty relating to the revisions to Unemployment Benefits and the applicable legislation for posted workers. [redacted]

European Labour Authority

- Regulation (EU) 2019/1149 provides for the establishment of the European Labour Authority (ELA) to –
  - facilitate access for individuals and employers to information on their rights and obligations as well as to relevant services,
  - support cooperation between EU countries in the cross-border enforcement of relevant Union law, including facilitating joint inspections, and
  - mediate and facilitate a solution in cases of cross-border disputes between national authorities or labour market disruptions.
- Ireland is represented on the Management Board by an official from the Workplace Relations Commission while the alternate member is from DEASP. The ELA is expected to reach its full operational capacity by 2024 with c.140 staff and an annual budget of approximately €50 million. Each Member State is required to second a member of staff to the ELA for the role of National Liaison Officer. Expressions of interest for this role have recently been sought.
- The decision on the location of the ELA in Bratislava, Slovakia was taken by vote at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) on 13th June 2019. The European Parliament has initiated proceedings before the Court of Justice of the EU claiming that this decision should have been taken by the European Parliament and the Council as co-legislators (although it is not objecting to the choice of location of the agency). The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (with primary responsibility in this matter) sought Government approval to intervene in this case with 12 other Member States in support of the Council.

Transposition of Relevant EU Legislation

Legislative Provision	Transposition Date	Comments
Directive (EU) 2016/2341 on the activities and supervision of institutions for occupational retirement provision (IORPS II Directive)	13th January 2019	Transposition delayed – likely to be Q3 2020 when Regulations are ready for signing by the Minister. Reasoned opinion issued by EU Commission last July on this delay and responded to by Department setting out the work underway.

Posted Workers Directive (EU) 2018/957	30th July 2020	Work underway on transposition. See employment rights section
Directive (EU) 2019/1152 on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions	1st August 2022	Three year transposition period. See employment rights section
Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers	2nd August 2022	General three year transposition period, with two year extension to 2nd August 2024 to implement full two month period of paid parental leave. The Department of Justice and Equality has the lead role.

Possible Commission Infringement Proceedings

- The Commission has formally indicated that Irish public sector pension schemes should be covered by the provisions of the EU Regulations on the coordination of social security schemes, even though these schemes are occupational pension schemes. [redacted]

Interventions in cases before the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU)

- In May 2018, Ireland intervened in two joined cases, bringing to six the number of cases in which Ireland has intervened before the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) in relation to the binding nature of certificates issued in posted worker situations or where a person is working in more than one Member State. All six cases relate to the admissibility of documents (known as PD A1 certificates) and other supporting evidence which are provided in accordance with the EU Regulations by the social security authorities in one Member State to the social security authorities in another Member State indicating that a worker continues to be liable for social security contributions in the first Member State. The final ruling of the CJEU is still awaited.

Habitual Residence Condition (HRC)

- One of the requirements for eligibility for means-tested social assistance payments and Child Benefit is a habitual residence condition (HRC), aimed at restricting access to such payments by people who have little or no established connection with Ireland and to minimise the risk of so-called "welfare tourism". The HRC is provided for in Irish social welfare legislation and is in accordance with EU legislation and with European Court of Justice Jurisprudence. The HRC applies regardless of nationality or ethnicity. When determining whether a person is habitually resident in the State for social protection

purposes, all the circumstances of the case (relating to residence, absences, employment, future intentions and centre of interest) are considered. There are currently a small number of ongoing Judicial Reviews (at various stages) related to HRC covering child benefit; jobseeker's allowance; supplementary welfare allowance and disability allowance cases.

- In responding to some difficulties being experienced by a minority returning Irish emigrants, Safe-Home Ltd, a registered charity, has worked with the Department to draw up a check-list of a range of documents that will help a person demonstrate that they have returned to Ireland permanently.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EuroFound)

- The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency, whose role is to provide knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies. It is the only European Union institution with its seat in Ireland. The unit holds the Irish Government seat on its Management Board.

(4) International (non-EU) Issues

The Council of Europe's Revised European Social Charter

- The Revised European Social Charter (Charter) is a Council of Europe (COE) treaty to promote and protect socio-economic rights. DEASP coordinates Ireland's annual reporting obligations under the Charter. The next Annual Report is due in December 2020. The last Governmental Committee meeting took place in September 2019 at which Ireland had no issues of non-conformity with the Charter.

European Code of Social Security

- The Code aims at encouraging the development of social security in all member States of the Council of Europe in order that they may gradually reach the highest level possible. The Code fixes a series of standards which Parties undertake to include in their social security systems. Ireland has accepted the parts of the European Code of Social Security relating to sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, family benefit and survivors' benefit. Ireland's next report is due by 31st July 2020 and it will address eligibility issues which have been raised in relation to unemployment benefit and illness benefit. The Department has had detailed discussions with the International Labour Organisation and the Council of Europe on these matters and accepted an offer of technical assistance from the ILO.

Bilateral Relations with other Countries

- Ireland has concluded bilateral agreements on social security with several non-EU countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Quebec, Switzerland, USA, South

Korea and Japan. The agreements are limited to certain social welfare benefits, mostly pension-related. In 2019, a delegation from the USA visited to review that agreement.

- DEASP is currently developing a project with the aim of encouraging reciprocal relations with countries in Africa in which Irish Aid is active.

Transnational Organisations

- The unit is responsible for the co-ordination of the Department's response to various international organisations, e.g., the OECD, ILO, the United Nations and International Social Security Association (ISSA). This includes providing observations on draft resolutions, responding to questionnaires and preparing briefing for meetings.
- The unit represents Ireland on the OECD's Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (ELSAC). The overarching objective of that Committee is to foster comprehensive, cost-effective and innovative employment and social policies to promote strong, sustainable economic growth, high employment rates and enhance social inclusion in Members and, as appropriate, non-Members.
- The Department participates in the "Windsor Conference" which is a group of Social Affairs and/or Employment Affairs Departments from six countries (Ireland, UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada). The group meets approximately every 18 months to discuss issues and challenges of mutual interest.
- The Department is an active member of the Heads of Public Employment Services network – a network sponsored by the EU Commission and concerned with sharing knowledge and experience in the area of employment services delivery.

PRSI Policy

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer: Mary O'Sullivan*

The Social Insurance System

- The social insurance system is central to the provision of social security in Ireland.

- The basic principle underlying the system is that people, while they are economically active, make social insurance contributions at various rates. These contributions then fund benefits paid to contributors who subsequently experience one of a range of identified contingencies (illness, disability, caring responsibilities, unemployment etc.) It is an important vehicle of income redistribution and solidarity between generations and between those in work and those who are not. The main benefit funded by the social insurance system is the State contributory pension.

- PRSI contributions are payable by employees, their employers and the self-employed aged over 16 years and under pensionable age which is currently 66 years. These contributions are paid into the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) which funds social insurance benefits for contributors who satisfy the qualifying conditions for those benefits.

Social Insurance Contribution Rates and Benefits

- A combined PRSI rate of 15.05% is paid in respect of most (PRSI Class A) employees. This includes a 1% contribution to the National Training Fund.[10] These employees can then access the full range of long and short term social insurance benefits including pensions. The employee PRSI charge comprises 4% payable by employees and 11.05% by their employer (there is an 8.8% employer PRSI rate on weekly earnings up to €395).[11]

- Self-employed persons who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum payment of €500. PRSI Class S contributors are covered for the State Pension (Contributory), Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Pension (Contributory), Guardian's Payment (Contributory), Maternity and Adoptive Benefits, Paternity Benefit, Treatment Benefits (from March 2017), Invalidity pension (from December 2017), Jobseeker's Benefit (Self-Employed) (from November 2019) and Parent's Benefit (from November 2019).

- Class S contributors are not covered for Illness Benefit, Carer's Benefit and Occupational Injuries Benefits. Self-employed workers may, however, access social welfare supports by establishing eligibility to assistance-based payments such as Jobseeker's Allowance and Disability Allowance.

Improvements for the Self-Employed 2017 to 2019

- Following Budget 2017, Class S self-employed contributors gained access, for the first time, to the Treatment Benefit scheme which includes free eye and dental exams, and contributions towards the cost of hearings aids. This measure benefits over 300,000 self-employed workers and their dependants. Treatment Benefit entitlements were also extended from October 2017 so as to provide further dental and optical benefits for both the self-employed and employees. The cost of this measure was €9m in 2017 and €47m in a full year. Over 2.5 million workers, including those who are self-employed, benefited from these additional benefits.

- Self-employed Class S workers became eligible for the Invalidity Pension from December 2017. This was a major reform as self-employed people gained access to the safety-net of State income supports, without having to go through a means test if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability. It is estimated that approximately 1,400 self-employed persons qualified for Invalidity Pension in December 2017, giving rise to costs of €1.5 million in that year. The estimated 2018 and 2019 costs are €23 million and €38 million respectively, and will rise further in later years.

[10] The National Training Fund is administered by the Department of Education and Skills.

[11] In Budget 2016 the threshold at which the higher 10.75% (now 11.05%) rate of employer PRSI applies was increased from €356 to €376. This threshold was increased to €386 in Budget 2019, and further increased to €395 from February 2020. The increased threshold ensures that employers, whose employees benefitted from the increases in the national minimum wage, continued to attract the lower employer rate of 8.8%.

- In Budget 2019, Class S self-employed contributors gained access to Jobseeker's Benefit (Self-Employed) from November 2019. This additional entitlement means that self-employed contributors have financial support should they become unemployed. Many of the features of the existing Jobseeker's Benefit scheme which is available to employees apply to the new scheme such as its duration and rate of payment. Applicants have to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the scheme including a PRSI requirement.

- In Budget 2019, Parent's Benefit was extended to self-employed contributors. This benefit ensures that parents with a child born or adopted from November 2019 onwards can qualify for two weeks' paid leave each within their child's first year.

- It is worth noting that all of the measures for the self-employed announced in Budget 2017 and Budget 2019 and outlined above were introduced without any increase in the rate of PRSI contribution paid by self-employed workers. In its 2013 report, the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare on Extending Social Insurance Coverage for the Self-Employed suggested, inter alia, an increase of 1.5% in the social insurance rate for self-employed contributors to extend coverage to long term sickness and injury benefits. A survey of self-employed people in 2016 noted that 88% of respondents were willing to pay a higher rate of PRSI for at least one additional benefit. This matter will continue to require examination.

Social Insurance Funding

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal: Mary O'Sullivan*

- The Social Insurance Fund (SIF) operates on a pay-as-you-go basis, with the Exchequer acting as the residual financier of the SIF where there is a shortfall between PRSI contributions received and the cost of social insurance benefits paid.

- The SIF was established in the early 1950s and annual Exchequer contributions were the norm for over 40 years.[12] However, no Exchequer contribution was required over the period 1997 to 2007 inclusive as social insurance income exceeded SIF expenditure. At the end of 2007, an accumulated surplus of €3.6 billion had been built up.

- In 2008, the current operating balance of the SIF moved into deficit and the deficit accelerated rapidly in 2009 (€2.5 billion) and 2010 (€2.75 billion) as the recession took hold. This meant that the accumulated surplus built up over 11 years was exhausted in less than 3 years (driven by very large increases in expenditure on Jobseeker's Benefit and the ongoing rise in the number of pensioners).

[12] For example, in 1967, the State contribution was 38% of SIF expenditure and almost 29% in 1985.

SIF Income and Expenditure 2014 to 2020

	2013 outturn	2014 outturn	2015 outturn	2016 outturn	2017 outturn	2018 outturn	2019 Provisional outturn	2020 REV estimate
	€ Millions	*€ Millions*	*€ Millions*	*€ Millions*	*€ Millions*	*€ Millions*	*€ Millions*	*€ Millions*
SIF income	7,318	7,891	8,498	9,217	9,816	10,625	11,631	9,697
SIF expenditure	8,632	8,431	8,617	8,764	9,086	9,491	10,029	11,646
Surplus/ deficit	**-1,314**	**-540**	**-119**	**453**	**730**	**1,135**	**1,601**	**-1,949**

- A number of structural PRSI income measures were introduced over the period since 2009 which have had a positive impact on the funding of the SIF. These measures included increases in rates of some contributions, the abolition of the employee ceiling for charging PRSI, the abolition of relief from PRSI previously applied to employee pension contributions, the abolition of the employee PRSI-free allowance as well as the broadening of the base on which PRSI is charged through the abolition of exemptions.

- Over the same period, these revenue raising measures were accompanied by very extensive expenditure reducing measures including stricter contribution conditions for entitlement and reductions in duration of entitlement, most notably for Jobseeker's Benefit and Illness Benefit, removal of entitlement to concurrent social insurance payments, abolition of State Pension (Transition), changes in the level of entitlement to the State Pension (Contributory) where people do not have a full contribution history, and standardisation of the rates of Adoptive and Maternity Benefits. The Redundancy Payment scheme was also changed to cease the practice of refunding the redundancy costs of employers who laid-off staff (Ireland was the only OECD country which refunded redundancy costs).

- The annual SIF deficit declined significantly since 2014 and moved into surplus in 2016. A surplus of €1.6 billion was recorded in 2019. Although fund income exceeded fund expenditure since 2016, the fund incurred significant deficits, totalling some €11 billion, during the period 2008 to 2015.

Proposal to Attribute Social Insurance Contributions

- In March 2020, the Government introduced a number of emergency measures to assist employees laid off work and employers whose businesses were significantly disrupted by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The main measures relating to income support are the Pandemic Unemployment Payment operated by the Department and the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners.

- Ordinarily, insured persons who become unemployed and qualify to receive a jobseeker's payment would, subject to certain conditions, get a credited employment contribution on their social insurance record for each week on such a payment. These credited contributions act to help insured persons qualify for social insurance benefits in the future. However, as the Pandemic Unemployment Payment scheme is an emergency payment, it does not provide for the crediting of employment contributions to recipients.

- The legislation underpinning the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme requires employers, for the purposes of their PAYE obligations, to record a J9 PRSI class for each employee in respect of whom a subsidy is being claimed. This class of PRSI gives entitlement to occupational injury benefit only and not to a range of other social insurance benefits.

- In the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is the intention of the Government to ensure that former employees entitled to receive the Pandemic Unemployment Payment or employees in respect of whom a Temporary Wage Subsidy is claimed by their employers, do not have their social insurance contribution records interrupted or otherwise adversely affected. It is intended to bring forward legislative proposals to provide for the allocation of social insurance contributions at the same PRSI class as was paid immediately prior to the person qualifying for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment or becoming an employee in respect of whom a subsidy was paid. The Department is in the process of developing legislative proposals in this regard for consideration by the Government in the near future.

Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund

- Even without the public health crisis the SIF was likely to return to deficit in the medium term as the population profile is ageing. This will present a significant challenge to the financing of payments particularly given the commitments with regard to extending social insurance coverage.

- Social welfare legislation states that an Actuarial Review of the SIF is carried out every 5 years. The last such review was published in October 2017 in respect of the year ending 31st December 2015.

- This was the fourth Actuarial Review of the SIF. It was undertaken by external consultants KPMG.

- One of the key results from the Review is the net present value of future projected shortfalls which is €335 billion based on a real discount rate assumption of 1.5% per annum.

- The review indicates that in the absence of further action to tackle the shortfall, the excess of expenditure over income of the SIF will increase significantly over the medium to long term. The projected shortfall is expected to be €3.3 billion by 2030 and €22.2 billion by 2071. Expressed as a percentage of GDP, the shortfall is projected to increase from 0.9% of GDP in 2030 and 3.1% in 2055 before gradually reducing to 2.9% of GDP by 2071.

- In the longer term, sizeable Exchequer subvention will be required to meet ongoing expenditure requirements in the absence of reductions in expenditure levels or increases in PRSI income. The review projects that Exchequer subventions will need to increase in 2017 real price terms (from nil currently) to €1.7 billion by 2025; €5.6 billion by 2035 and €11.4 billion by 2045.

- The next Actuarial Review will be in respect of year ending 31st December 2020 and is expected to be published in 2022.

National Minimum Wage Policy

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: John O'Toole*

- The National Minimum Wage is the legally-binding lowest average hourly rate that can be paid by an employer to an employee. This rate is set and governed by the *National Minimum Wage Act 2000*, which applies to almost all employees, those on contracts for service as well as those on contracts of service including full-time, part-time, temporary and casual employees, with very few exceptions[13]. Over the last four years, the proportion of workers earning the National Minimum Wage has ranged between 6% and 9% of all employees.

- The *National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015* established the Low Pay Commission, an independent body which makes recommendations regarding the National Minimum Wage to the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Since its establishment, the recommendations submitted by the Commission have all been accepted by Government.

Low Pay Commission increases accepted and implemented by Government	
Rate at 1 January 2016	€9.15
July 2016 recommendation, implemented 1 January 2017	€9.25

[13] The exceptions refer to the remuneration of certain family members and those participating in an apprenticeship scheme

July 2017 recommendation, implemented 1 January 2018	€9.55
July 2018 recommendation, implemented 1 January 2019	€9.80
July 2019 recommendation, implemented 1 February 2020	€10.10

- With effect from 1st February 2020, the rate of the National Minimum Wage is €10.10 per hour for an adult worker.

Current rates of National Minimum Wage

Category of Employee	Minimum hourly rate of pay	% of minimum wage
Experienced adult worker	€10.10	100%
Under 18	€7.07	70%
Aged 18	€8.08	80%
Aged 19	€9.09	90%

- The National Minimum Wage approach seeks to find a balance between a fair and sustainable rate for low paid workers and one that will not have significant negative consequences for employers and competitiveness. It can be seen as a pragmatic approach providing a clearly defined minimum hourly rate for employers, giving them the freedom to pay higher rates, while concurrently providing a measure of security for low-paid workers. As it is legally enforceable, it provides protection for workers.

Employment Rights Policy Unit

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer-Vacant*

- Employment Rights Policy Unit transferred from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (now renamed as the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation) to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in 2017.

- As a result of the transfer of functions, this Department has a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) as the operations (WRC and Labour Court) are under the aegis of that Department.

- The primary role of the Employment Rights Policy Unit is:

- to ensure that the State's suite of employment rights legislation remains fit for purpose and is updated to reflect both national and international developments,

- The Unit is not responsible for industrial relations, which continues to lie with DBEI. The Unit is also not responsible for the inspection and enforcement of employment rights or for responding to queries or complaints from the general public in relation to workplace incidents. These functions continue to lie with the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which is under the remit of DBEI.

Clerys Department Store Policy Response

- Prosecutions in relation to the manner in which collective redundancies were conducted at Clerys Department Store were brought against a number of individuals in 2016. Two persons were successfully prosecuted while others were not. Following the Transfer of Functions in September 2017, these prosecutions moved from being the responsibility of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, who undertook a Judicial Review of the District Court decision to throw out most of the charges. The High Court found against the Minister in July 2019.

- An outstanding matter is the policy response to the Duffy-Cahill Report (commissioned by the Government in the aftermath of the Clerys closure). It was sent to the Company Law Review Group (CLRG) in 2016 for its consideration. The CLRG's report on the Protection of Employees and Unsecured Creditors was presented to the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in June 2017 and did not include the implementation of the Duffy-Cahill Report. The implementation of the recommendations in the Report give rise to a host of complex issues and any proposal to progress them requires further careful consideration involving consultation with many stakeholders. The Report has again been receiving attention in the context of the closure of Debenhams Retail Ireland and may, therefore, be a matter that the incoming Government will seek to progress.

LEEF (Labour Employer Economic Forum)

- The Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) was established in 2016 to bring together employer representatives and Trade Unions with Government Ministers to exchange views on economic and employment issues as they affect the labour market and which are of mutual concern. This Department has responsibility for two of the LEEF sub-groups: (1) Employment legislation/regulation and (2) Pensions.

- The purpose of LEEF has been to provide a point of consultation rather than to carry out decision-making. Some dissatisfaction was expressed by the social partners, particularly ICTU, in relation to the value and effectiveness of such a consultation forum. However, strengthening it is mentioned in the Programme for Government

Tips and Gratuities - Proposed Amendment to Payment of Wages Act 1991

- The previous Government gave permission to draft amendments to *the Payment of Wages Act 1991*. This was in response to the Private Members Bill National Minimum Wage (Protection of Tips) Bill having passed all stages of the Seanad and about to enter Committee Stage in the Dáil before that Bill lapsed at the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil. It will be a decision for the new Government whether it wishes to proceed to regulate tips.

  The Low Pay Commission has also been requested to examine the issue of service charges as part of its 2020 work programme.

Current EU Issues Serviced by Employment Rights Policy Unit

Revised Posted Workers Directive

- The text of the revised EU Directive on Posted Workers was adopted in June 2018. A posted worker is 'a person who, for a limited period of time, carries out his or her work in the territory of an EU Member State other than the state in which he or she normally works'. **The 2018 Directive is due for transposition into national law by July 2020.**

- It is intended to exercise the powers conferred on the Minister under Section 3 of the European Communities Act 1972 to transpose the Directive by way of Statutory Instrument rather than by primary legislation.

EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions

- The text of the EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions was agreed in June 2019 and must be transposed by August 2022. This transposition will be informed by the experience of the implementation of the *Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018*, which was in the same policy space, and was delivered with co-operation from both employer and employee representative groups.

Amendment of Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 – Gardaí and Defence forces

- Members of the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces need to be brought within the scope of the *Organisation of Working Time Act 1997*. Rulings of the Court of Justice of the EU and communications from the European Commission indicate that the current 'blanket exemption' of these employments from that Act is not in compliance with Directive 2003/88/EC on Working Time.

- The preparation of draft legislation is in train, in close co-operation with the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Defence who have policy responsibility for An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces respectively. This approach will try to ensure the proper recognition of the unique roles of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces and the necessity of flexibility in relation to working schedules. Legal advice is being provided by the Office of the Attorney General on an ongoing basis. Following a pause on progress due to Covid, this matter is expected to progress well by Q4 2020.

Scope – Insurability of Employment

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer: Clare Dowling*

Role of Scope Section

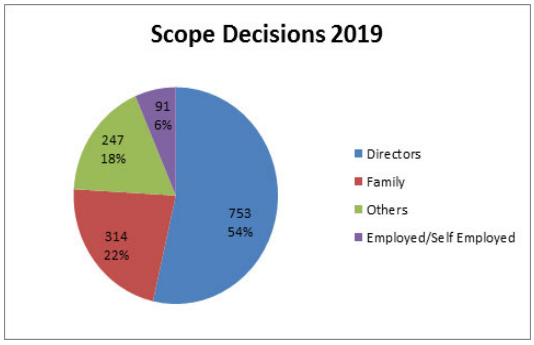
- Scope Section makes statutory decisions in relation to the insurability of employment for PRSI purposes under the Social Welfare Acts. It undertakes investigations on foot of requests from various parties, for example employees, self-employed individuals, employers, Social Welfare Inspectors or Revenue Commissioners.

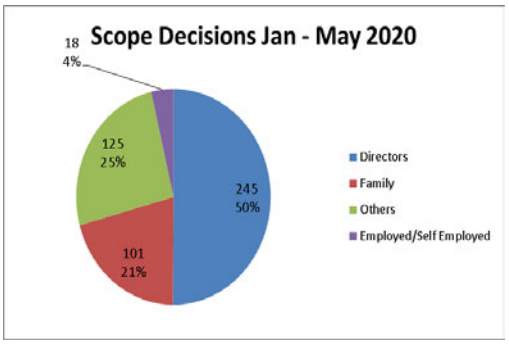
- Scope decisions cover a variety of situations, for example modified classes of PRSI for civil and public servants, family employments or insurability of Directors. The table provides a numerical breakdown of the types of decisions made over the past five years, and the subsequent charts represent the 2019 and 2020 (Jan to May) breakdown.

Table : Scope decisions 2015-2020[14]						
Type of decision	***2015***	***2016***	***2017***	***2018****	***2019****	***2020**** *(Jan-May)*
Working Directors	357	364	392	631	753	245
Family Employment	290	312	221	359	314	101
Others: public servants, office holders, subsidiary employment etc.	414	355	264	276	247	125
Employed/Self Employed				69	91	18
Total	1,061	1,031	877	1,335	1,405	489
***Since 2018, the Department's IT system captures a more comprehensive range of data on decisions.**						

Chart

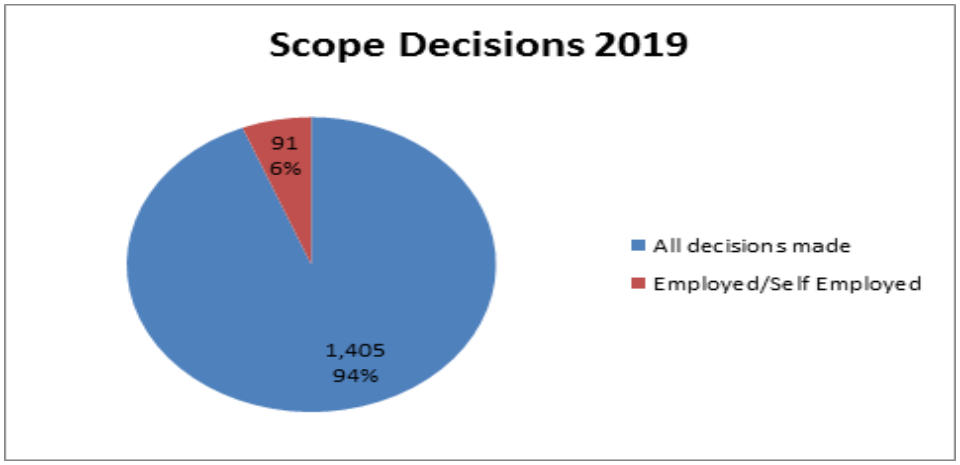
[14] This table includes formal and informal decisions made by Scope Section. Informal decisions do not include any change of PRSI class.





Employment Status cases ('False Self-Employment')

- Employment status cases involve situations where Scope is asked to make a statutory decision whether an individual is in fact an employee (i.e. insurable at Class A PRSI) or self-employed (insurable at Class S PRSI). Of all the decisions made by Scope, employment status cases constitute a small proportion (6% in 2019 and 4% in 2020 so far). Sometimes the misclassification of an employee as self-employed is based on a genuine misinterpretation of what can be a complex employment relationship and is not always done with the purpose of deliberately evading PRSI. The deliberate misclassification is what is often referred to as 'false self-employment'.



- There is no official national measure of false self-employment, but estimates can be gleaned from Scope statistics as well as the Central Statistics Office. Although estimates of bogus self-employment are low, the Department takes this issue very seriously as it can give rise to:

  a) Loss of employer PRSI contributions to the Social Insurance Fund;
  b) Potential loss of employment rights protections for employees as employees misclassified as self-employed may believe they cannot pursue a case in the WRC;

c) Loss of some social welfare protections for employees (self-employed individuals are not covered for Illness (except Covid-IB), Health & Safety, Partial Capacity, Occupational Injury and Carers Benefits).

Decision-making

Scope Section

- Scope Section has been expanded, with an increase in the number of Deciding Officers from five to eight. Specialised training was provided for Scope Deciding Officers as part of ongoing development.

- The number of formal Scope decisions on employment status[15] increased from 3.6% (43) of all Scope decisions in 2018 to 5% (60) in 2019. Due to the Covid-19 emergency, Scope staff were entirely redeployed to work on the PUP scheme from mid-March to early June 2020, and so 2020 statistics are not as meaningful for comparison purposes.

- [redacted]

[redacted]

- [redacted]

Guidance document

- Decisions are made by applying a number of tests established in Irish case law. These tests are set out in a document agreed between the three bodies in December 2019: *Guidance on determining employment status*. This was the result of an inter-departmental working group which worked over an 18 month period to update the existing Code of Practice in this area. The new Guidance document was circulated to ICTU and IBEC in December 2019 as part of the LEEF sub-group on employment legislation and regulation and legislative provisions are being drafted to place this Guidance on a statutory basis. It is intended to be brought forward as part of the next Social Welfare Bill going through the Oireachtas. [redacted]

[15] This figure relates to formal decisions only. No breakdown is available in relation to informal decisions, which generally do not involve any change of PRSI Class.

- If enacted, the intention is to publish the Guidance document as part of a national communications campaign to raise awareness among employers and workers of the requirement and benefits of ensuring correct classification of employment status.

Employment Status Investigation Unit (ESIU)

New inspection unit

- A new team of Inspectors was established in August 2019 which carries out employer inspections of employers and sectors where false self-employment is likely to exist. The new team – the Employment Status Investigation Unit (ESIU) – networks with Social Welfare Inspectors and the Department's Special Investigation Unit (SIU) resulting in an increased level of awareness of employment status issues and an increased level of employer inspections. It is intended that the ESIU will expand from its current five Social Welfare Inspectors (SWIs) to between 10-15 inspectors over time.
- [redacted]

General inspection work

- In addition to the ESIU work, over 3,000 general employer inspections were carried out by Social Welfare Inspectors and SIU in 2019 - an increase of almost 33% over 2018.
- A separate interdepartmental working group on false self-employment was established in 2018 and this group meets regularly with a view to enhancing co-operation and co-ordination between the Department, Revenue and the WRC in carrying out inspections.

Data

- Part of the ESIU's role is to improve how the Department captures data in relation to false self-employment and it will work with Business Analytics internally as well as external bodies such as CSO and Eurofound to achieve this.

Legislation

Policy proposals are being developed on

- New legislative provisions to introduce anti-victimisation protections for workers who approach Scope about whether they are misclassified
- A new offence in relation to employers who deliberately misclassify employees as self-employed.

PRSI Refunds

Assistant Secretary: Tim Duggan *Principal Officer: Clare Dowling*

- PRSI Refunds arise when contributions from employers and employees have been paid in error. Amendments to the social insurance record of the person involved may also be required. Any refund made will take account of any social insurance benefit paid as a result of the incorrect PRSI which may in turn be deducted from the refund. Any debt owed to the Department may also be deducted.

- The main categories of refunds are:
  - Employees over 66 years who continue to pay the full PRSI rate.
  - Persons whose class of insurance changes after a Scope insurability decision.
  - Separated persons who make enforceable maintenance payments.
  - Employees in receipt of Maternity Benefit and/or Illness Benefit payments.
  - Persons who enter insurable employment after age 56 and who have no entitlement to a State Pension (Contributory) and do not qualify for non-contributory pension.

- A refund application must be made within four years of the last day of the contribution year in respect of which the contributions concerned were paid.
- Applications for PRSI refunds can be complex and some may take longer to process depending on the circumstances and the level of engagement required with customers and employers.
- There are approximately 18,000 cases of people who are over pension age, still working, and paying Class A contributions who are entitled to a PRSI refund. Most of these people are unaware of their entitlement to a refund and are not applying for same. However, since early 2019, the Department has been proactively processing the refunds, completing 3,500 to date and reducing the backlog to 14,500. These cases are being processed as a special project alongside the normal PRSI Refunds caseload.

PRSI refunds applications and payments 2015-2019

	2015	*2016*	*2017*	*2018*	*2019*
Refunds created	11,621	5,581	4,036	4,861	7,905
No. of refunds paid	9,134	9,762	3,485	3,446	7,241
Amount paid	€23.7m	€25.5m	€18.81m	€13.83m	€21.02m

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Assistant Secretary: Michael Bunyan

Principal Officers: Stephen O'Neill, Louise McKeever, Kevin Coady, Daragh O'Connor, John Muldowney, Sean Gaffney, Willie Whelan

The Department's ICT systems are responsible for processing:

- over 2million income support applications & over 82million payments annually
- holding details on all social welfare beneficiaries and claims, past and present

The Department's Information Systems Division (ISD) supports:

- running and maintaining the existing schemes - processing, payment, activation and control
- the delivery and maintenance of a wide range of custom-built and commercial software applications over a range of platforms
- a country-wide telecommunications network to support 6,000 staff that connects DEASP headquarters, regional, local & branch offices (over 10,000 PCs) to its two primary datacentres with links to the Government Network.

Approach to ICT

- Standard commercial packages are used where they provide the most economical solution for the Department - mainly administrative systems (accounting & office systems). Applications that support its systems that are Department-specific have largely been developed in-house usually with some assistance from ICT contractors.

- The Department's main business system is the Business Object Model Implementation (BOMi). It hosts business services around customers and payments for schemes such as Pensions, Child Support Payments, Invalidity, & Illness Benefit.

- Currently some 90% of schemes and 100% of payments are managed on BOMi.

- Short-term schemes such as Jobseekers, Supplementary Welfare Allowance etc. are hosted on an aged but reliable legacy system - the Integrated Short Term Schemes (ISTS) system.

COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)

Due to priority of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and other Covid-19 related work, the normal development and project work has been temporarily impacted. To date over €2 billion in payments have issued to over 600,000 Covid PUP customers.

- To facilitate the processing and payment of these claims the Department built a new IT application called the Emergency Online Application (EOA). The PUP was increased from €203 to €350 per week on March 24th and a further strand of the project has been delivered which migrated the scheme from the EOA system to the Department's strategic BOMi platform. Further scheme amendments are underway to implement a two level payment structure to the PUP based on prior earnings. The ISD response included:
  - new online Illness Benefit and Supplementary Welfare Allowance facilities
  - enhancements to the existing online Jobseekers service
  - new dashboard services to make it easier for customers to manage their claims.

- The MyGovID online authentication service was enhanced to allow people to use a mobile phone (previously provided to the Road Safety Authority for a driving licence) as extra security for their MyGovID account. This, along with a new service to provide access to a phone helpdesk, meant people could verify their MyGovID account without the need to visit an Intreo Centre.

- Building on established data sharing arrangements with Revenue, new interfaces were quickly developed to support the correct processing of PUP, and Revenue's implementation of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme. A facility to access Revenue payroll data in real time was enhanced to support control initiatives on PUP.

- A new dedicated COVID-19 information site with a staff operations hub was developed on the Departments intranet portal Stór. This acted as a key information and communication space for all staff and was used as a single source of reliable information for staff, many of whom are now working from home.

- With the urgent requirement to have a significant number of staff working from home there was a need to stand-up a service that supported home working. This service includes the provision of corporate laptops and mobile devices and an enabling technology that allows staff remote access to their PCs in the Department.

- A new customer telephone helpline was established to deal with customer queries. Additional staff were assigned to support the helpline. The telephony system was urgently reconfigured to allow engagement of multiple simultaneous call centres in a variety of locations to deal with the huge upsurge in the volume of calls to be managed.

Future COVID-19 related ISD work

- PUP is currently time-limited. It is anticipated that a significant number of applicants may not have returned to employment /or full employment by the PUP end date. Therefore it is imperative to commence planning for the transition from PUP to mainstream Social Welfare benefits or alternative income support measures.

- Delivering automated solutions for Jobseeker claim processing and officer claim management, including:
  - Registrations for verified Jobseeker applications
  - Automatic updates of Jobseeker claim load activity between applications
  - Auto award technology solutions for certain cohorts of Jobseekers and
  - Other claim management opportunities.

Other Major Projects underway or recently completed

- A major multi-year programme to modernise and migrate schemes from legacy platforms such as ISTS to the modern BOMi platform is ongoing. It will optimise opportunities for digital service provision and achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness. However, since March significant ISD resources have been deployed to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that supports payments have issued to those affected. Major Projects currently underway include:

Parents Benefit (PB)

- Parents Benefit, which provides for a two-week payment to both parents within one year of a child's birth, was developed and introduced on BOMi in November 2019. The previous Government has indicated that PB will increase incrementally in the future to nine weeks. The introduction of this scheme means that it is necessary to extend BOMi functionality and to extend and enhance existing online services to process applications for PB. Work to introduce additional process improvements for Parents Benefit, Maternity Benefit and Paternity Benefit was completed in June 2020.

Total Contributions Approach Homemakers Credits- State Pension Contributory (SPC)

- The Government announced improvements to pension calculations for post-September 2012 contributory (SPC) pensioners with insurance contribution gaps as a result of time spent providing caring duties.

- New software was built to allow for the capture of home-making periods and credits allowed for such periods and new payment processing was also introduced to pay an entitlement as a percentage of the maximum rate Pension. Applications can be made on www.mywelfare.ie and additional improvements are being introduced in 2020.

Working Family Payment (WFP) Modernisation

- Working Family Payment - (previously FIS) is a social welfare payment which provides an income support for employees on low earnings with families.

- The WFP modernisation project is ongoing with the objective to process, pay and maintain the WFP scheme on our BOMi strategic platform and on our online citizen platform www.mywelfare.ie.

Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) and Employment Support Schemes (ESS)

- WSS and ESS are employment supports designed to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities. A project to build capability on BOMi is underway for the WSS/ESS schemes, which incorporates business and process improvements. When finalised it will reduce the reliance on paper, streamline processes, and deliver payments and reporting capability. Phase 2 of the project, delivered March 2020, focused primarily on delivering digital services to enable employers to access the schemes via our online platform www.welfarepartners.ie.

Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI)

- The overall objective of this project is to enable Ireland to exchange social security information electronically with other EU member states.

- This facilitates speedy completion of information onto electronic documents with immediate transmission to other Member States, thus allowing for quicker decision making on welfare claims.

- The project also allows BOMi to be automatically updated upon receipt of EU contribution information from other Member States. A final software release was implemented at end of May 2020, bringing added business benefit to the Department and its customers. The Department will have fully implemented electronic exchange in all sectors by the end of 2020.

Public Services Card (PSC) - Production, personalisation and distribution of the PSC and the provision of associated services

- As part of the Standard Authentication Framework (SAFE) programme, the Department must provision its computer systems to support the registration of customers to agreed identity standards, including the capture of facial and signature images.
- The Department is also required to provide Public Services Cards (PSCs) to those customers who have been registered to an appropriate SAFE level, and to manage the lifecycle of these PSCs thereafter.
- A project to upgrade the PSC and card production software went live September 2019 and further work is underway and expected to complete during Q2 2020.

Upgrade of Facial Image Matching System (CFIMS)

- Facial Matching was deployed in DEASP in March 2013 to further strengthen the SAFE registration process by helping detect and deter duplicate SAFE registrations. The current CFIMS system is over five years old and an upgrade project is underway to upgrade the underlying software and to facilitate renewal of PSCs. This upgrade project is due to be completed in Q2 2020.

Department's Integrated Services Connector (DISC) upgrade project

- This technology relays General Register Office (GRO) life events (i.e. Births, Marriages and death information) into DEASP's systems and feeds information back to GRO. The technology is outdated and the purpose of the DISC upgrade project is to replace the existing software. It is due to go live in Q3 2020.

Illness Benefit (IB)

- Phase one and two of the IB project have been completed. The scheme is live on the BOMi since August 2018. IB Phase 2 project introduced new enhancements and facilities such as electronic illness certification in conjunction with the HSE and with General Practitioners software systems and new business process improvements. Over 1,500 General Practitioners have signed up to use electronic certification to date and over 138,000 electronic medical certificates have been received.

PAYE Modernisation/ Central Records (CRS) Redesign

- The purpose of the CRS Redesign Project is to migrate employment, PRSI processing and PPSN allocation functionality from the Department's legacy technological platform to BOMi and to take advantage of changes introduced as part of the Revenue Commissioners PAYE Modernisation Programme.
- To date, the project has successfully delivered a new Taxable Payments data exchange to Revenue, provided a new real-time look-up of PRSI on Revenue systems for staff managing claims and moved all processing of PRSI and employments to BOMi.

- It is expected that processing of PPSN and client matching will move to BOMi by the end of 2020.

Online Digital Services

- The Web Self Services (WSS) project covers both the MyWelfare and WelfarePartners digital platforms. The project includes the maintenance of existing services as well as the development of new services. The MyWelfare online service utilises the MyGovID identity service and provides a secure platform for customers applying for supports and services and for managing their claims.

- The WelfarePartners online portal utilises the ROS digital certificate to provide secure services for employers/businesses including community employment sponsors, opticians and dentists.

- MyGovID is an online identity service that enables clients to access Government provided online services in a safe and secure manner. This includes online services on MyWelfare, JobsIreland, Revenue MyAccount, SUSI, National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) Online, National Childcare Scheme and Voter.ie.

Data Sharing Services

- In line with Government legislation and policy around 'data as an enabler' the Department has a statutory basis on which it shares data with other Government Departments/Agencies.
- Projects delivered to date include:

    - SUSI for student grant processing
    - The HSE's Primary Care Reimbursement Service medical card processing
    - Local Authority Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)
    - Dept. of Children Affordable Childcare & Community Childcare Schemes
    - Road Safety Authority (RSA) Driving License Renewal
    - Workplace Relations Commission
    - Companies Registration Office

ICT Infrastructure Modernisation

- A robust ICT infrastructure is essential to the Department delivering its services to customers. Ongoing investment is required in order to maintain a modern technical infrastructure. Investments include:
    - the main data centre, server and storage infrastructure, telephony systems and desktop and mobile infrastructure;
    - Investment in the network & security infrastructure; and
    - a recently completed upgrade of the national network to utilise a resilient Government network.

- The main data centre investment has significantly improved resilience to interruptions to its electricity supply and air conditioning services and optimised the use of space.

ISD Information Security

- Following the investment in the Department's data centre, a project was begun to align the Department's IT processes and standards with ISO 27001. ISO 27001 is the international standard that describes best practice for an information security management system (ISMS). Achieving accredited certification to ISO 27001 would demonstrate that the Department is following information security best practice.

Service Delivery Group (SDG)

- The SDG Team are at the nerve centre of business continuity and are comprised of specialised roles in relation to software development, system operations, quality assurance, systems analysis, design, information security, organisational process and management.

Department's Corporate Portal (Stór)

- Stór is a single point of access to information, systems & functions used by staff. It provides a knowledge repository; collaboration facilities such as team sites; content and records management functionality and business applications include:

  - the Ministerial Representations (REPS) application
  - Business Planning & Risk Management System (BPRM)
  - Customer Comments & Complaints system
  - Contracts Management system
  - Freedom of Information (FOI) system
  - Fraud Reports system.
  - The ePQ system has been successfully rolled out and the eSubmission system is currently being rolled out.

Project Governance

- The Department has a Project Governance Committee (PGC), a committee of the Management Board chaired by the Secretary General, which monitors the project portfolio and procurement process. Through the Department's governance process, project proposals and initiatives are approved and prioritised; budgets and resources assigned and implementation monitored. The process ensures that resources are focused on delivering the Department's objectives as set out in the Statement of Strategy and that best practice is followed in the procurement and management of major programmes.

Procurement Policy

- The Department actively participates in the initiatives of the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) who have established a range of central framework agreements to

cover common goods and services. The Department is committed to facilitating SME access to procurement opportunities and publishes its procurement policy on Procurement Policy

Expenditure on Consultancy, IT External Service Provision and eGovernment)

Year	A2(v)2 IT External Service Provision	A2(vii) Consultancy	A2(ix) eGovernment	Total
2014 (outturn)	€13,653,771	€1,327,123	€6,471,991	€21,452,885
2015 (outturn)	€13,736,231	€493,282	€8,533,338	€22,762,851
2016 (outturn)	€17,910,686	€199,823	€9,442,018	€27,552,527
2017 (outturn)	€21,554,631	€743,740	€12,277,390	€34,575,761
2018 (outturn)	€23,708,756	€709,711	€13,210,079	€37,628,546
2019 (Provisional Outturn)	€31,208,821	€427,899	€12,911,192	€44,547,912
2020 (Estimates Allocation)	€39,125,000	€2,100,000	€12,100,000	€53,325,000

Increases in recent years are due to:-

- the ongoing demand from Government /citizens for schemes and services such as the urgent Covid19 emergency ICT developments
- an ongoing programme of work to improve processes and migrate existing complex DEASP schemes from legacy technology/systems to BOMi
- the development of digital self-service platforms for citizens and employers.

Poverty & Social Inclusion Policy

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon *Principal Officer: Dermot Coates*

- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has overall responsibility for the development, monitoring and evaluation of the whole-of-government policy focusing on reducing poverty and improving social inclusion.

Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Policy

- Since 1997, Ireland has put in place successive national strategies focusing on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion in Irish society. These plans have been cross-Departmental. In the case of each successive plan, the focus has been on the reduction of the number of people in consistent poverty – that is with an income below 60% of the national median income *and* experiencing material deprivation, according to the national poverty measures.

- The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 was developed following consultation with people experiencing poverty and the groups that represent them and with relevant government departments.

Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025: Ambition, Goals, Commitments

- The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 was published on 14th January 2020. The Roadmap builds on the work of its predecessors with the aim to *reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU*".

- The Roadmap translates this ambition into seven Goals underpinned. There will be a mid-term review at the mid-point, in Q4 2022 to facilitate an evaluation of the impact of the Roadmap commitments.

- While previous plans have defined social exclusion, the Roadmap includes a definition of social inclusion for the first time. This moves the focus towards what we are trying to achieve, rather than what we are trying to avoid and highlights the positive difference that policy can, and should make in people's lives and in society.

- The Roadmap recognises that existing national sectoral strategies have social inclusion as a core objective and so does not seek to duplicate these strategies. Instead, it has three main purposes:

    - Set out a level of ambition for what the Government wishes to achieve, which can then inform and be reflected in sectoral and service strategies across Government as they are renewed and updated over the coming years

    - Identify specific commitments, particularly with regard to income supports and employment services, to complement sectoral approaches and ensure that the risk of poverty and deprivation is minimised, with priority given to those experiencing or at risk of experiencing the poorest outcomes.

    - Set a framework for monitoring and reporting progress that will hold Government to account and also inform the renewal of existing, and the development of future, sectoral strategies

- The Roadmap commits to establishing a Social Inclusion Roadmap Steering Group to be chaired by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to manage and oversee the successful implementation of the Roadmap commitments. This group will comprise senior representatives of responsible Departments, who will be designated as Social Inclusion Responsibility Officers (SIRO), along with two external members, Tricia Keilthy, Society of St Vincent de Paul and Sr. Bernadette McMahon from the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. It is intended that the Steering Group will meet twice per year with the first meeting to take place when the Minister's diary permits. The Social Inclusion Division of DEASP will act as secretariat to the Group.

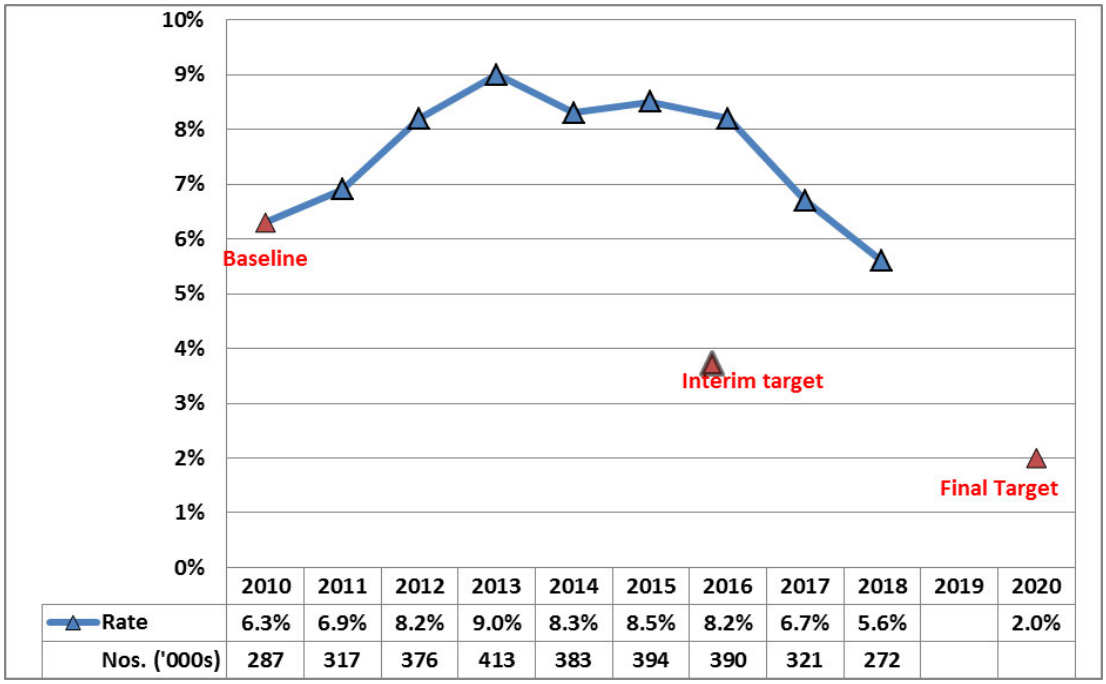
Trends in Poverty and Social Inclusion

- The Roadmap for Social Inclusion contains a range of national and EU measures with specific targets proposed over the period to 2025. The Roadmap retains the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction which is to reduce the percentage of the population in consistent poverty to 2% by 2025. It also sets targets against a number of specific metrics to capture progress against a number of key aspects of social inclusion (housing, healthcare, early learning & care and social integration) as well as some additional income-related measures. The measures are reasonable and meaningful with an aim of improving Ireland's relative position within the EU. The two headline Roadmap targets at national and EU level are set out below.

National Social Target for Poverty Reduction

- In 2012, the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction was agreed with a headline target to reduce the percentage of the population in consistent poverty to 2% or less by 2020 from the baseline of 6.3%. Progress against this target can be seen in the figure below.

- The consistent poverty rate in fact increased during the period of recession to 2013, reaching a high of 9%. It reduced slowly in the early post-recession years with more significant reductions since 2016. This improved rate of decrease is likely due to a combination of increased employment, increased wage growth, the overall improvement in the economy and the introduction of increases to welfare payments in recent Budgets. As it can take some time for the full impact of budgetary measures to be reflected in data from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), it is expected that the poverty data figures for 2019, when they become available, will show further improvement. However the CSO has noted that their production of statistics for 2020 will be affected in terms of timeliness and data quality due to changes in the method of data collection as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is likely to impact on comparability with previous periods, data quality, and the timeliness of results for the 2020 SILC data.



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Rate	6.3%	6.9%	8.2%	9.0%	8.3%	8.5%	8.2%	6.7%	5.6%		2.0%
Nos. ('000s)	287	317	376	413	383	394	390	321	272		

Figure: Trend in national consistent poverty rate for period 2010-2018
Source: SILC Data 2018, www.cso.ie

- The new Roadmap for Social Inclusion retains the national consistent poverty target of 2% or less but extends the timeframe to 2025. Retention of this target was a strong recommendation made by many groups in the community and voluntary sector during the public consultation process and it reflects the Government's ongoing commitment to poverty reduction in Ireland.

At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion (AROPE)

- The headline EU target is based on the At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE) measure. The AROPE measure is the basis for the Europe 2020 poverty target: to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020. The measure is based on a combination of the following metrics[16]:

  i. The number of people who are at risk of poverty (AROP), or
  ii. Those experiencing severe material deprivation, or
  iii. Those experiencing very low work intensity (VLWI).

- The next figure shows Ireland's performance on this measure, along with the EU-28 average for the period 2010-2018. As can be seen, during the year of the recession, the Irish AROPE rate rose but recent years have seen a considerable reduction with the Irish rate (21.1%) dropping just below the EU average (21.9%) in 2018.

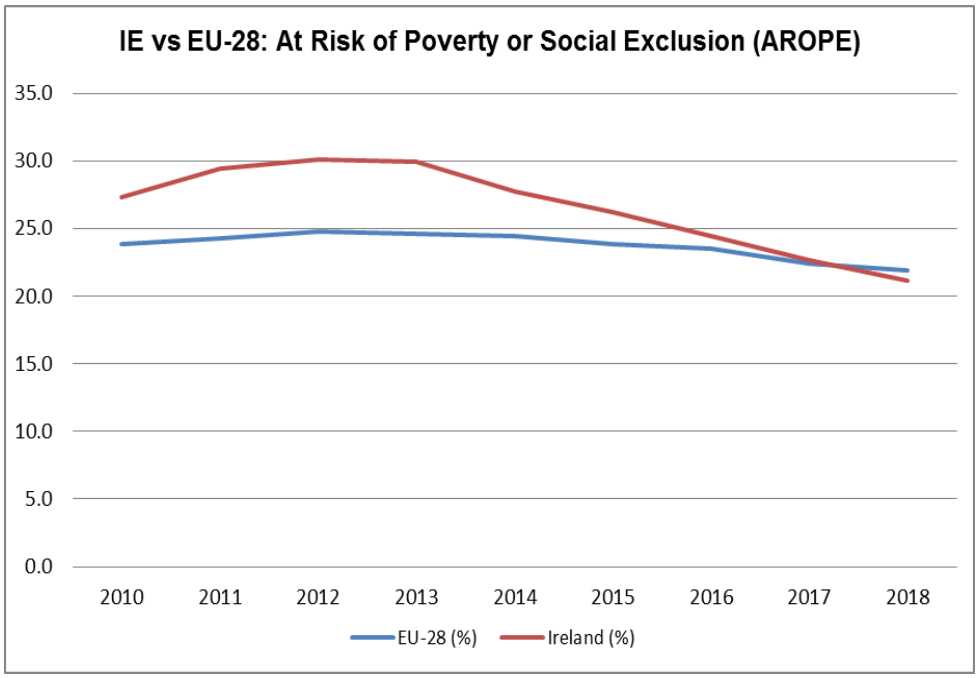


Figure Trend in AROPE rate for period 2010-2018 Source: SILC Data 2018, Eurostat

Annual Outputs

Social Inclusion Division is responsible for the delivery of a range of annual outputs:

- **Social Inclusion Monitor (SIM):** The Social Inclusion Monitor is the official report on progress towards the national social target for poverty reduction, including the sub-target on child poverty and Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target. It also presents information on supporting indicators relating to poverty and social exclusion. The current version of the Monitor is being drafted and will be available in early Q3 2020. This will be based on the results from the 2018 SILC data, released by the CSO in late November 2019.

[16] Persons are only counted once even if they are present in several sub-indicators.

- **Social Inclusion Initiatives:** Each year, the Department, through the Social Inclusion Division, provides financial support for two social inclusion initiatives: Young Social Innovators and the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The amount provided for this purpose in 2020 is €80,000.

- **Social Impact Assessment**: This is an evidence-based methodology to estimate the likely distributive effects of policy proposals on income and social inequality. It uses a tax-welfare simulation model known as SWITCH, which was developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), to measure the distributive and poverty impacts of policies on family types, lifecycle groups and gender. Since Budget 2013, the Department has published an integrated SIA which includes the main welfare and direct tax measures in annual budgets. The SIA for Budget 2020 is being finalised and will be published, on foot of the new Minister's approval.

Consultation & Engagement

- Engagement with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the community & voluntary groups that represent them is an important facet of the ongoing monitoring and development of government policy on poverty and social exclusion. This engagement takes place on an ongoing basis throughout the year and in a variety of fora organised by the Department. This includes:

- **Social Inclusion Forum**: The annual Social Inclusion Forum is a key mechanism for engagement with community and voluntary groups, government officials and people experiencing poverty. The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection normally attends and addresses the gathering. Due to social distancing requirements, arrangements for the 2020 Social Inclusion Forum are under review with a virtual option being considered.

- **Community & Voluntary Pillar:** The Department convenes regular meetings with voluntary and community groups.

Research on Poverty and Social Exclusion

- The Social Inclusion Division manages a commissioned research programme with the ESRI on the Measurement and Analysis of Household Income and Living Conditions (MAHILC), at approximately €80,000 per annum. The research analyses the latest national data on income, deprivation and services from the annual *Survey in Income and Living Conditions (SILC),* to identify trends, conduct comparative EU analysis and to indicate the implications for policy.

- The 2019 DEASP/ESRI research programme considered the comparative effect of certain housing supports, childcare supports and health benefits on deprivation rates. The Department expects the research to be published in early Q3 2020. The contract with the

ESRI concluded at the end of 2019 and a request for tender for a new three year research contract issued in Q2 2020.

Statistical and Business Intelligence Unit

Assistant Secretary: John Conlon *Principal Officer: Dermot Corcoran*

- The Statistics and Business Intelligence Unit provides timely, high-quality data and analytical support to the Minister, the operational and policy areas of the Department, the Irish Statistical System, and the wider public, across six mutually supporting initiatives:

I –Administration and infrastructure

- This includes providing metrics to reports concerning the administrative activity of the Department;
- Liaison with the CSO, DPER, C&AG, and other stakeholders
- Building of statistical capability and capacity within the Statistics and Business Intelligence Unit and across other areas of the Department.

II – Data provisioning, strategy and standards

- Oversight over the calculation and utilisation of Key Performance Indicators in the Department including inflows to the Live Register and Operational Performance Metrics

III – Surveys and sampling

- The unit is responsible for deciding the sampling method to be used for in-house research or for externally run surveys on customer satisfaction
- The unit has authority over the methodology used in statistical outputs (for example, Control Surveys, Monthly Recipient and Claim Processing Reports)

IV – Business Intelligence, statistical reporting and open data

- Responsible for publication of appropriate aggregate-level data in Open-Data format

V – Technical input and advice for Research, Analytics, Evaluation and Modelling

- Providing technical observations or comments on European, national, or international indicators
- Interaction with business areas to design, develop, or interrogate outcome metrics
- Cooperation with external research organisations, such as the OECD, the ESRI, the EU Commission, and others

VI – Supporting the Irish Statistical System (ISS)

- Ensuring our statistical outputs meet the principles of the ISS Code of practice with regards to professional independence, timeliness, accessibility, quality and confidentiality
- Working with other Government Departments in developing the National Data Infrastructure
- The Department publishes an Annual Statistical Report which provides comprehensive information on all social welfare programmes administered by the Department.

Human Resources

Staffing

Assistant Secretary: Paula Lyons *Principal Officer: Dermot Sheridan*

- Since 2015, the Department has been operating its pay budget in accordance with delegated sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This sanction permits the Department to fill vacancies through recruitment and/or promotion in specified designated grades up to and including Principal Officer or equivalent, subject to the overall pay budget of €300.464 million.

- Over the period January 2014 to December 2019 the Department's approved headcount was reduced from 6,526 to 5,900, a decrease of over 600 posts. The Department's staffing allocation for 2020 has remained the same as for 2019 i.e. 5900 full-time equivalents. The Department is the second largest employer in the civil service (Revenue is the largest) with 6,142 staff filling some 5,817 full-time equivalent posts. The Department also has 21 Gardaí working with the Special Investigations Unit on control work and 390 temporary clerical staff on fixed term/specified purpose contracts (figures at end of May 2020).

- The demographics of the Department indicate that there is a high risk of losing significant numbers of experienced staff with critical skills over the next decade. Approximately 1,500 staff have retired since the beginning of 2012. To this end, a programme of Strategic Workforce Planning is used to proactively manage the current and future workforce composition.

- Significant pressure has been placed on the staffing resources of the Department since the start of the Covid 19 pandemic. Extra temporary resources including the assignment of Temporary Clerical Officers and temporary reassignment of Civil and Public Servants from other Departments and Agencies have been utilised to assist the Department with answering phones or assisting in processing the Covid-PUP. In

addition, over 600 staff were redeployed from other business areas within the Department to support the processing of the payment.

- From mid-August there will be a requirement on the Department to transition an anticipated 300,000 PUP applicants to the relevant Jobseeker claim type, benefit or allowance or disallow those who have no entitlement to a jobseeker payment. This will require substantial additional temporary resources and suitable accommodation. The Department is currently in discussion with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform regarding the additional resources that will be required.

- The further possible impact of Covid-19 on the Live Register figures and increase in resources for claim processing, control work and employment services will be kept under review.

Recruitment/Assignments

- In 2019, 560 staff left the Department through retirements, promotions and mobility and there were 421 new entrants to the Department.
- At Clerical Officer grade, we recruit 50% through open competitions via the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and 50% through the Civil Service Mobility Scheme.
- For Executive Officer, we recruit 40% through open competition organised by PAS, 30% through Interdepartmental competition organised by PAS (of these every second post is filled through the Civil Service Mobility Scheme), and 30% through internal competition.
- For Higher Executive Officer we recruit 50% through Interdepartmental competition organised by PAS (of these every fifth post is filled through the Civil Service Mobility Scheme) and 50% through internal competition.
- For Assistant Principal Officer we recruit 33% through Interdepartmental competition organised by PAS, 33% through Open competition organised by PAS and 34% through internal competition.
- For Principal Officer we recruit 66% through open competition organised by PAS and 34% through internal competition. Some PO posts are filled through Senior Public Service Mobility.
- For Assistant Secretary, posts are filled either through Senior Public Service Mobility or Top-Level Appointments Commission through open competition.
- For some specialist posts, we recruit directly using our own recruitment license granted by the Commission for Public Service Appointments.
- In 2019 we filled 337 posts through the PAS and to date in 2020 we have filled 137 posts.

Use of virtual competitions

- Traditionally all internal competitions were organised using manual application forms (paper based) and a traditional face to face interview with the candidates. Due to Covid related Health and Safety advice, face to face interviews are not possible in the

short-tem. It is proposed to hold all interviews remotely. This is in line with the approaches being adopted by the PAS and by other Government departments. Moving to remote interviewing will result in significant savings for the Department in terms of travelling expenses for board members and candidates and also in terms of travel time.

Staff Learning and Development

Assistant Secretary: Paula Lyons *Principal Officer: Mary McSharry*

- The Department's training unit – Staff Development Unit (SDU) is co-located in Dublin and Sligo. It has a total staff of 46 with a budget of €2.2m providing a range of learning and development support and staff engagement initiatives.

QQI Accredited Learning and Development

- Since 2014, the Department has invested significantly in learning and development in respect of core business training.

- Following a public procurement process, the National College of Ireland (NCI) was selected in 2016 as the Department's educational partner, to introduce QQI-accredited educational programmes for staff:

    - *Level 6 Cert in Social Protection Studies**
    - *Level 7 Cert in Social Protection Investigative Work (SWI)*
    - *Level 7 Cert in Public Employment Services Provision (Case Officer)*
    - *Level 7 Cert in Social Welfare Decision Making (Deciding Officer)*
    - *Level 7 Cert in Managing Social Protection Services (Intreo Centre Manager)*
    - *Level 7 Cert in Community Welfare Service Provision (Designated Person)*
    - *Level 8 Cert in Social Welfare Appeals (Appeals Officer)*

- The Department commenced rollout of the programmes in 2019. To date (June 2020), approximately 250 staff have commenced on five programmes (Public Employment Services Provision, Managing Social Protection Services, Community Welfare Service Provision, Social Protection Investigative Work and Social Protection Studies), with the first graduates conferred in November 2019. Curriculum development is ongoing for the final two programmes (Deciding Officer and Appeals Officer).

- **COVID-19 Impacts on accredited programmes**:
    - NCI campus closure
    - Semester 1 2020 (2 programme intakes) ceased mid-delivery

- March graduation ceremony postponed
- Semester 2 2020 intake (4 programme intakes) postponed
- DEASP Management Board directed the cessation of all direct learning and development activity on 12th March to take account of public health risks. All staff in SDU nationally were redeployed to processing Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) claims and staffing the phonebank.
- Since resumption of SDU work, tutor teams are reviewing and developing staff training and development materials and methodologies to enable future delivery to take account of ongoing travel restrictions and public health considerations (e.g. remote learning, virtual live presentations, recorded material, eLearning modules)
- NCI have moved to virtual delivery, prioritising completion of ceased programmes and planning for later intakes.
- Virtual graduation scheduled for June 2020.
- NCI senior academics and DEASP senior management in discussions for Semester 3 intakes.

Other Learning and Development Supports

- In addition to the accredited learning programmes, DEASP provides additional learning and development supports to staff through OneLearning - the shared learning and development service for the Civil Service who provide in excess of 60 different training courses that support staff development.

- In 2019, almost 1700 staff attended OneLearning training courses in over 40 different subject areas.

- SDU, in conjunction with One Learning has developed a multi-disciplinary Management Development Programme for new POs, APs and EOs. These programmes were suspended due to Covid19 but will recommence via virtual delivery. A Management Development Programme for new HEOs as well as a developmental programme for COs are under development. External specialist training is also procured to meet specialist needs that cannot be fulfilled internally.

- In 2019, 2,449 staff completed various instructor-led OneDEASP courses provided by SDU and Divisional Training staff. Courses delivered included induction, customer service, and scheme specific training.

- Almost 8,912 e-learning sessions were completed across a range of areas. Some 5,800 staff completed the data protection module in this period.

- By the end of 2019, 3,858 staff had attended various externally delivered training, supporting various business needs such as health and safety training, retirement planning and specialist IT.

- A further 6,292 attended various internal learning and development events including on the job training and various staff fora across DEASP.

- Continuous professional development is also facilitated through the Refund of Fees Scheme which supports staff undertaking courses primarily in their own time that support the business needs of the Department. In the academic year 2018/2019, 103 staff were supported in undertaking courses from Foundation level to Level 10.

- A Scholarship Scheme, to undertake a Master's Degree, is also operated as a development opportunity to staff grades below that of Administrative Officer. This is aimed at staff interested in developing their academic knowledge and deepening their professional competence in certain core areas prioritised by the Department.

- In addition to the accredited learning programmes, SDU also develops and delivers training for new entrants with induction and orientation training and programmes to support changes in work processes and procedures. As part of staff well-being, training is also provided on resilience and supporting good mental health.

Employee Engagement

Staff Fora

- Staff fora provide staff with the opportunity to be appraised of current and future developments in the Department as well as in their own areas. Since the beginning of 2019, Clerical Officer Fora have been held with an overall attendance of over 2,600. Fora for EOs and HEOs commenced at end February but were suspended mid-March due to the outbreak of Covid-19. The Staff Engagement Unit is in discussion with Divisional management to see how these can be reconvened using video/virtual technology.

Engagement & Innovation Initiative

- The Engagement and Innovation (E&I) programme was initiated in 2013. Through project teams, this programme provides an opportunity for staff to utilise their expertise in the application of an alternative and innovative approach to problem-solving and service improvement. Projects undertaken within the E&I framework are time-bound, results-focused and driven by teams with representation of staff across the grade structures. A feature of the initiative is its collaborative approach which encourages further engagement through open and inclusive discussion by all team members.

- To date, 1,129 projects have been completed with findings and recommendations informing further policy development within the Department. The E&I Programme won a Civil Service Excellence & Innovation Award in 2016.

Values Recognition Awards

- The Department's annual One DEASP Values Recognitions Awards event was held on 28th November 2019 and was attended by nominees from all over the country. There was a wide variety of teams and individuals from an extensive geographical spread all of whom were nominated for making exceptional contributions in line with the Department's five core values. Over 50 nominations were received and there were 12 category winners as well as one overall winner. A new format for the awards to maximise engagement and participation is in development. Subject to social distancing requirements, it is hoped to hold the 2020 awards ceremony later in the year.

Social Welfare Summer School

- The annual Summer School is run each year by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), and the Department for Communities, Northern Ireland.
- It provides a unique learning and significant development opportunity for staff from CO, EO, HEO and AO grades, particularly those who would not normally have an involvement in policy development in the course of their day-to-day work.
- It provides an opportunity for staff to analyse and debate topical social policy issues facing both jurisdictions within a university environment and to gain valuable knowledge and understanding of the policy development process.
- It also facilitates an exchange of views and insights between staff of DEASP and their Northern Ireland counterparts. There is no requirement to have attended university previously.
- Unfortunately, the 2020 Summer School scheduled for August has been cancelled due to Coronavirus. In its place, DEASP along with DfC Northern Ireland are exploring utilising the long-established connection with our Northern colleagues by jointly convening a series of webinars to explore and share the learning and experience of both Departments in their response to the Pandemic in several suggested areas.

Industrial Relations

- The Department has a small unit to manage industrial relations with the civil service unions/associations – Fórsa and AHCPS. While IR matters arise and are dealt with on an ongoing basis, the Department is currently engaged with Fórsa in a conciliation process at the Workplace Relations Commission arising from an instruction issued by the union to its members not to cooperate with the further implementation of a change project at Intreo Offices (Front Office/Back Office Project). As part of continuous ongoing engagement during the Covid19 pandemic, the Department has worked closely with both unions relating to introduction of rostering/shift hours, remote working, essential workers in the workplace, appointment of worker representatives as part of the Return

to Work Safely Protocol, and individual issues relating to staff who have been impacted by the pandemic. Departmental Council was held with both unions on 10th June 2020.

HR Strategy and Performance

Assistant Secretary: Paula Lyons *Principal Officer: Pat Delaney*

HR Strategic Development

- The Department's HR People Strategy (Our People 2020-22) sets out the priorities, goals and actions for the HR Division over the next three years. The Department's strategy is in line with the overall Civil Service People Strategy which focuses on three cross-cutting priorities; being an employer of choice, building the workforce of the future and building, supporting and valuing managers as people developers.

- This Department is one of three departments participating in a pilot project funded by the EU and sponsored by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to develop and implement a new Human Resources Operating Model (HROM) with a view to extending this model across the wider Civil Service. This modernisation initiative, which is currently paused due to the Covid-19 crisis, aims to restructure HR to better support business areas through a partnership approach; strengthen the level of specialist expertise; optimise and enhance shared services and develop and support managers as people developers.

- The Organisation Transition Board (OTB) was established in May 2020 to look at how we work as an organisation and what changes are required to organise our work and our physical offices to cope with the new reality of Covid-19 restrictions. The OTB's guiding principle is that it addresses business continuity in the context of compliance with Public Health direction and harness efficiencies achieved. The OTB has taken a programme management approach, administered a Survey to senior managers to get a broad understanding on the main issues and challenges experienced for business areas in light of business continuity. The OTB has developed a Framework which sets out the DEASP Health and Safety Covid-19 Response and provides Standard Operating Principles on HR and Employee Rights, Attendance Patterns (e.g. office / remote working / rosters), ISD, L&D, HR, and Business Planning and Continuity.

- The Department moved to a shared services model in 2014 which manages its HR and payroll transactions as part of a Government decision to implement a shared services model across the civil and public service.

- The Department's HR Unit meets with the National Shared Services Office on a regular basis to review service levels and to agree actions where improvements to key performance indicators are required.

Absenteeism

- The number of working days lost to sick leave in 2019 was 78,817 which represented - a lost time rate[17] of approximately 5.40% for 2019. This compares to the 2018 figure of 80,355 which represented a lost time rate of 5.55% and 82,610 in 2017 - a lost time rate of 5.66%. On average, Certified Sick Leave accounts for 94% of overall sick leave and Self-certified Sick Leave accounts for 6%. The total cost of absenteeism to the Department in 2019 was estimated at €8.9m. Absenteeism is actively monitored.

Performance Management

- The strategic aim in the area of performance management is to build and develop high performance across the Department and to address underperformance where it occurs. The Department has achieved high levels of compliance with the Performance Management Development Process, achieving a 96% compliance rate with completion of performance appraisal in 2018 and in comparison with a Civil Service-wide average of 89% in that year. Although, 2019 figures were not finalised due to Covid -19, the strong indication is of similar high rates for 2019. The Department is currently drawing up guidelines for managing PMDS remotely which will be issued to all managers.

- In cases where underperformance has been identified, staff will be required to engage with a Performance Improvement Plan to address underperformance over a specified timeline in line with the Civil Service policy on underperformance. The management of underperformance has continued largely uninterrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic, with managers utilising technology solutions to continue to monitor work performance and output and to hold performance meetings virtually / remotely where necessary. HR Division has developed an e-training module on Performance Management for both staff and managers.

[17] *The Lost time rate shows the percentage of working time lost due to sick leave. The calculation is the number. of sick days divided by the (Standard Working year x he number of Full Time Equivalents) as a percentage.

- HR adopts a case management approach to advise and support managers in the implementation of HR Policies such as underperformance, managing probation, absence management, time and attendance and conduct and behaviour.

Disciplinary Code

- Staff are required to comply with the Terms & Conditions of Employment in the Irish Civil Service and to adhere to the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour. 19 staff disciplinary cases were concluded with sanctions (written warnings and/or financial penalty) applied in 2019. 13 disciplinary cases are being managed within HR Division.

    - Four in relation to poor attendance and performance
    - Three in relation to possible data breaches and compliance with correct data protection procedures; and
    - Six in relation to possible inappropriate behavior in the workplace or breaches of compliance with guidelines and procedures.

- Three staff members have been dismissed from the Department in the last 12 month period on completion of the disciplinary code process. One staff member is currently suspended from work on full pay pending the completion of a disciplinary investigation.

- Agreement was reached between DPER and Civil Service Unions in June 2020 to commence the holding of disciplinary meetings and Disciplinary Appeals Board hearings online through e-conferencing platforms (e.g. skype/WebEx). Any cases that had been placed on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions will now be progressed.

Dignity at Work

- All staff are obliged to comply with the Dignity At Work policy (DAW) which is the Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment policy for the Civil Service. This policy aims to promote respect, dignity, safety and equality in the workplace and provides advice for staff who believe they have been bullied or harassed. The policy sets out the procedures which must be followed by all parties to complaints of bullying and harassment.

- The policy promotes the use of informal resolution methods and mediation to resolve workplace conflict.

- Complaints proceed to formal investigation once all efforts to utilise local resolution methods or mediation have been exhausted or are considered unsuitable due to the nature of the complaint. Formal investigations are carried out, on behalf of the Department, by external workplace investigators. These investigators are selected via a

multi-supplier framework agreement managed by the Office for Government Procurement.

- A total of 15 complaints were dealt with and concluded by the DAW team during 2019. The team also provided assistance and advice to managers and staff in a further 148 cases during 2019. These cases covered a wide range of issues - for example, absences attributed to work stress or disagreements between staff. The DAW team is currently managing 11 cases through the DAW or Grievance Procedures and a further 12 cases involving legal proceedings which arose from previous DAW issues.

- Expenditure on DAW cases in 2020 to date is €14,540. This compares to €8,175 in 2019 and €3,030 in 2018. The cost of formal investigations account for most of this expenditure.

Diversity and Inclusion

- The Department's People Strategy 2020-2022 includes a commitment to support and develop diversity and inclusion for all staff.

- The Department employs a designated Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) with a specific brief to provide support and guidance to managers and staff with disabilities for the provision of reasonable accommodations.

- As part of its obligations under the Disability Act, 2005, the Department reported that 462 people employed by the Department have declared a disability which results in an employment rate of 6.96% of staff, which is in excess of the public service aim of 3%.

- In addition, as part of the Department's Engagement and Innovation (E&I) structures, a project team dedicated to exploring how DEASP can further support staff with disabilities was set up in 2019 and is due to report on its recommendations shortly.

- As part of our development of diversity and inclusion within DEASP, an E&I group was established in 2019 focussed on LBGT+ awareness and promotion of inclusivity in the workplace. Pride 2020 was celebrated by events throughout the week.

Accommodation and Facilities Management

Assistant Secretary: Paula Lyons *Principal Officer: Christopher McCamley*

- The Facilities Management Unit (FMU) oversees property management, maintenance and building services for some 275 DEASP offices across the country.

- DEASP has been through a process of consolidating its locations since the Community Welfare Service transferred to the Department in 2012. In 2012, the Community Welfare Service operated out of 748 shared HSE locations (clinic locations). This number has now reduced to about 100.

- The Department's property portfolio continues to reduce.

- In conjunction with OPW we are developing a plan for the future of the Department's Headquarters, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada (AMD). This building is held by the Minister on behalf of the (Social Insurance) Fund. It was completed in 1952 and is of architectural significance. It is in need of significant refurbishment. This will involve partial closure of AMD while work is carried out. While preparatory and investigative work will be undertaken during 2020, it is not envisaged that significant work would commence earlier than 2021.

- Works are being carried out this year on Con Colbert House, Kilmainham, which is the Department's principal Information Services Centre. This will involve upgrading existing ground floor and first floor bathroom facilities.

- Headquarter Moves - The Department's Staff Development Unit is currently housed in a number of buildings. Alternative accommodation in Smithfield (the Infinity Building) has been leased and work is ongoing with OPW architects with a view to getting the building fitted out as a matter of priority. This will include accessible training rooms on the ground floor. The OPW expect that the building should be ready for occupation in early 2021. This timescale includes design work, planning application, tender process and works on site.

- FMU manages the Department's spending on postage, energy, building capital projects, security and cleaning services in line with government procurement rules and procedures. FMU Budget allocation for 2020 is €32 million. We also work closely with the Office of Government Procurement and use their framework agreements where appropriate.

COVID-19 Crisis

- As the Department continued to operate throughout the pandemic, FMU has had a key role in providing health and safety advice, managing protocols for staff with or being tested for Covid-19 and providing additional resources to allow the Department to continue in operation. To maintain our operations the Department has spent an additional €900,000 to date on:

    - Additional and emergency cleaning
    - PPE including masks and gloves
    - Sanitiser gel, pumps and dispensers
    - Wipes and cleaning materials for staff use
    - Floor markings and posters.

    Work is underway to install Perspex screening in interview rooms and reception areas at an estimated cost of €450,000.

- FMU is the lead section in implementing the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol, including the appointment and management of Worker Representatives across the Department.

Climate Action/Conservation

- The Department is committed to delivering on the Government's Climate Action Plan published in June 2019. In 2009, the Government set a national target to improve energy efficiency by 33% with the Public Sector in an exemplar role. As of 2018, the Department has improved its energy efficiency by 32.1% from the 2009 Baseline figure and is on target to achieve the 2020 33% target.

- The Department is currently working with the SEAI towards accreditation under ISO 50001 to support its energy management strategy. We use this standard as a platform to continually improve our energy performance, energy efficiency, usage and consumption and associated CO2 emissions. It is our intention to achieve accreditation in 2020.

- The Department is currently installing charging points for electric vehicles in our larger carparks (initially Longford, Waterford and Sligo) and our intention is to provide chargers in all our carparks.

- FMU also has responsibility for coordinating and managing the statutory requirements on health and safety in the Department and provides advice, guidance and support on these matters. It collates Accident and Incident Reports from around the country and liaises with the State Claims Agency in relation to claims arising from accidents and incidents to staff and customers on our properties. In 2019, 718 incidents were reported to FMU; 500 of these were directed at staff, mostly verbal abuse or threats. The State Claims Agency finalised 19 claims at a cost of €130,000 in compensation in 2019 (some claims go back several years). There are 44 further claims under investigation, in settlement discussions or gone to trial.

- FMU is responsible for ensuring that the Department's printing and stationery requirements (including managing the facilities and staff at the Department's Printing Facility in Santry) are met in a cost-effective manner. It is also responsible for ensuring compliance with the requirements of the National Archives Act.

Data Protection in DEASP

- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into operation in 2018. It imposes new accountability and enhanced transparency rules on data controllers. It reinforces existing data protection principles and introduces new rights for data subjects.

- The Department has a Data Protection Officer (DPO) who is supported by a fully resourced Data Protection Unit. In accordance with the requirements of the GDPR, the role of the DPO is independent. The unit provides advice to business units on data protection matters, monitors compliance, increases awareness and maintains records of processing activities. It has also developed and communicated policies and procedures on data protection taking account of GDPR requirements.

- The Department's Data Management Programme Board (DMPB) comprises relevant senior managers at Assistant Secretary and PO level. It oversees data protection and GDPR activities and assesses and suggests appropriate solutions to data issues. Key priorities for the DMPB are ensuring the Department is compliant with the GDPR, overseeing data sharing arrangements with other State bodies and evaluating Data Protection Impact Assessments from business areas.

- Data protection is taken very seriously in DEASP. Staff members are regularly reminded of their obligations in relation to protection of personal data and of the penalties that are applicable in respect of any breach of them, up to and including, dismissal. All members of staff must, on an annual basis, sign undertakings that they have read, and will act in accordance with, data protection policies and guidelines.

- There is an ongoing programme of data protection information sessions for staff members around the country.

- A Data Protection Awareness Week is run annually. Activities have included a poster campaign; PC log-on messages; the dissemination to all staff members of a data protection newsletter; an e-learning module; in-house produced data protection videos; personal messages from the Secretary General to all staff members; and training time set aside for data protection.

- As part of a general HR update to staff, HR report on the number of cases where disciplinary sanctions have been applied to staff for Data Protection breaches.

Potential data breaches in 2019

- During 2019, 530 new cases of alleged breaches of the Data Protection Acts were examined in the Department. In addition, 26 cases were brought forward from the previous year. Following investigation, 547 cases were closed during 2019 with 172 being identified as non-breaches and 375 as actual breaches. Nine cases have been carried forward to 2020.

- Most data breaches are due to human error, such as including documents intended for a data subject in the post/email to a third party, handing a data subject's documents to a third party in a public office.

- In addition to DPC investigation outlined under Public Services Identity chapter, the DPC is also conducting an own volition inquiry into the independence of the DPO in connection with changes to the privacy statement in July 2018.

- The DPC has recently initiated another own volition inquiry into the issue of whether certain processing and/or proposed processing of personal data by the Department in the context of ongoing eligibility assessments/checks for child benefit is compliant with the GDPR and with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Decisions Advisory Office/FOI Unit

Assistant Secretary: Kathleen Stack *Principal Officer: Dave Keogh*

- The Decisions Advisory Office (DAO) supports line sections in seeking to ensure that decisions made on social welfare claims are consistent and of good quality. The DAO provides advice in complex cases and detailed guidelines on decision-making across the organisation.

- In addition, the DAO acts as the liaison with the Social Welfare Appeals Office and with the Ombudsman's Office. The DAO has dealt directly with the Ombudsman's Office during the public health crisis regarding any issues relating to Covid-PUP and Covid-IB.

- DAO also chairs the Migrant Consultative Forum (MCF), where representatives of NGOs with a specialist interest in issues concerning migrants, meet with DEASP representatives to discuss problems/issues facing migrants in their dealings with the Department. The last meeting of the MCF was held on the 3rd of June during which the representatives of the NGOs raised issues related to the COVID-19 crisis such as the allocation of PPSNs for the undocumented, access to Urgent Needs Payments and the application of the Habitual Residence Condition for applicants of social assistance payments.

- The Freedom of Information Unit (FOI) is part of DAO. Its role is to provide guidance on FOI requests and co-ordinate action on the implementation of the FOI Act. Data Subject Access Requests under GDPR and the Data Protection Acts are also handled by the unit.

- In 2019, DEASP received over 2,700 FOI requests annually of which 2,400 (more than 90%) were personal requests. The Department also received 560 Subject Access Requests in 2019 and this number is increasing steadily year on year.

- The Department notified customers and the Office of the Information Commissioner to flag potential difficulties in dealing with FOI requests within normal deadlines in the face of the public health emergency arising from COVID-19. The Department did not suspend the FOI process and continues to register, acknowledge and finalise the majority of FOI requests.

OFFICES OF THE DEPARTMENT

Social Welfare Appeals Office

Chief Appeals Officer: Joan Gordon *Principal Officer: Brian Duff*

- The Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) was established in 1991 and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements and insurability of employment. The appeals system is underpinned by primary legislation. It is independent in its functions.

- The Office is headed by a Chief Appeals Officer, who is supported by a Deputy Chief Appeals Officer, an Office Manager, 40.75 Appeals Officers, three Higher Executive Officers and 35.7 other administrative staff.

- The independence of the SWAO is of paramount importance. Appeals Officers are quasi-judicial officers appointed by the Minister. The Supreme Court has held that Appeals Officers are required to be free and unrestricted in discharging their functions. The Chief Appeals Officer is statutorily required to submit an annual report each year to the Minister on the activities of her office.

- The quasi-judicial nature of the appeals system means that there are inevitable time lags involved but every effort is made to keep these to a minimum. Appeal processing times are kept under constant review.

- Many of the procedures which impact on appeal processing times are in place in order to ensure that due process, fair procedures and natural justice are adhered to and that every appellant is given the opportunity to make their case and have all of their evidence fully considered by an Appeals Officer. As a first step in the process, the appeal papers are forwarded by the SWAO to the Department for review and for preparation of a submission on the appeal contentions.

- The system allows for review and appeal and for further information to be submitted at any stage up to and including an oral hearing, (where an oral hearing is deemed necessary), in order to be as fair as possible to an appellant.

Workload of the Appeals Office

- All claim decisions taken by the Department's Deciding Officers and Designated Persons are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded by the Department and approximately 2% are appealed.

The following table shows the appeals received and workload since 2015.

Year	On hands at start of year	Received	Finalised	On hands end of year	Oral hearing processing time	Summary decision processing time
2015	9,628	24,475	25,406	8,697	25.5	18.1
2016	8,697	22,461	23,220	7,938	24.1	17.6
2017	7,938	19,658	18,980	8,616	26.4	19.8
2018	8,616	18,854	18,507	8,963	30	24.8
2019	8,963	22,397	22,572	8,788	26.9	22.1

Outcomes of appeals in 2019

The outcomes of the 22,572 appeals finalised in 2019 can be broken down as follows:

- 4,669 (20.7%) were revised by the Deciding Officer/Designated Person in favour of the appellant.
- 8,138 (36%) were either allowed in full or in part by an Appeals Officer.
- 8,456 (37.5%) were disallowed by an Appeals Officer.
- 1,309 (5.8%) were withdrawn or otherwise not pursued by the appellant.

Initiatives to manage the intake of appeals and improve processing times

- Significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. In 2011, appeal processing times were 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing and 25.1 weeks for a summary decision. In 2019 it had reduced to 26.9 weeks for an oral hearing and 22.1 weeks for a summary decision. The period January-May 2020 has shown a further improvement to 18.4 weeks for a summary decision. However, waiting times for decisions are still too long.

- The time taken to process an appeal reflects a number of factors including that the appeals process is a quasi-judicial process with Appeals Officers being required to decide all appeals on a 'de-novo' basis. In addition, appeals decisions are themselves subject to judicial review by the High Court and decisions have to be well reasoned.

- In 2018, a project was established to develop and implement a new Social Welfare Appeals Business Process to provide a more efficient service. Significant progress has been made It is anticipated that the project will be in a position to move towards the tendering phase during the course of 2020.

Effects of COVID-19 on the work of the Office

- Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions, in-person oral appeal hearings have been suspended since 13th March 2020. The resumption of oral hearings is being kept under review in light of government advice on easing restrictions. However, appeals work continues and appeals are currently being determined on the basis of written submissions.

The table below sets out appeals processing times in 2019:

Appeals processing times by scheme 01/01/2019 – 31/12/2019

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	-	33.7
Back To Work Family Dividend	28.5	55.6
Bereavement Grant	39.7	-
Blind Person's Pension	26.9	21.0
Carer's Allowance	23.2	27.3
Carer's Benefit	21.3	20.5
Carer's Support Grant	25.9	28.6
Child Benefit	33.6	36.6
Deserted Wife's Allowance	20.4	-
Deserted Wife's Benefit	76.0	30.0
Disability Allowance	14.9	19.1
Disablement Pension	28.6	33.6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	27.3	30.3
Farm Assist	33.7	41.9
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	20.5	27.6
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	20.2	34.3
Illness Benefit	30.1	29.9
Incapacity Supplement	31.6	29.8
Insurability of Employment	45.4	67.4
Invalidity Pension	25.6	29.5
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	26.3	34.0
Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments)	24.4	31.1
Jobseeker's Benefit	24.0	29.1
Jobseeker's Transitional	24.4	34.1
Liable Relatives	69.7	14.2
Maternity Benefit	31.7	29.1
Occupational Injury Benefit	40.4	58.2
One Parent Family Payment	29.4	38.9
Partial Capacity Benefit	41.3	47.8
Paternity Benefit	31.3	17.7
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	37.3	-
State Pension (Contributory)	30.9	51.3
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	30.9	35.9
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	17.6	27.8
Widow/Widower's Pension (Contributory)	33.4	31.0
Widow/Widower's Pension (Non-Contributory)	28.5	63.1

Widowed Parent Grant	35.7	-
Working Family Payment	20.2	28.1
All Appeals	**22.1**	**26.9**

General Register Office

An tArd Chlaraitheoir (Registrar General): T.J Fleming

- Civil registration is the system by which the State records the vital life events (including births, marriages, adoptions, and deaths) of its citizens and residents. The repositories or databases are called the civil registers. The Civil Registration Service is responsible for the registration process and for maintaining the registers.

- The civil registers create a legal document that can be used to establish and protect the identity and rights of the person. Birth registrations automatically result in the allocation of a personal public service number (PPSN) unique to each person which becomes the basis for identity and all other services delivered by the Department.

- Registration data collected and recorded by the Civil Registration Service allows for the compilation of vital statistics and population projections by the Central Statistics Office and fulfil Ireland's obligations in such matters to the UN, OECD and EU institutions. This data is the basis for economic, social and infrastructural planning, as well as providing an authoritative data source for a number of Government Departments and agencies. This data is also used within the Department for identity and control purposes.

- There is a legal requirement on every person to notify the Civil Registration Service of certain life events, such as births, marriages and death.

Structure of the Civil Registration Service

- The Civil Registration Service operates under the provisions of the *Civil Registration Act 2004* (as amended). This legislation is regularly amended to reflect changes in social and public policy that require life event data to be updated and revised.

- The obligation to maintain, manage and control the system of civil registration in the State and to maintain the registers, indexes and other records required to ensure an effective and efficient system rests with an office holder referred to as an tÁrd Chláraitheoir (Registrar General) under the 2004 Act.

- The HQ of the Civil Registration Service, the General Register Office (GRO), is based in Roscommon town with a staffing level of 37 staff with a Genealogical Research Unit located in Dublin with seven staff. A local registration service is provided by the HSE at 61 locations nationally with 170 staff providing services directly to the public. Local

registration staff report indirectly to the GRO, via eight regionally located superintendent registers employed by the HSE.

Activity

- The number of life events registered by the Civil Registration Service annually has averaged around 125,000 with decreased numbers of births, marriages and deaths noticeable since 2016.

Number of Registrations Recorded 2016-2019

Type of event registered	2016	2017	2018	2019
Births	64,760	62,919	61,903	60,174
Stillbirth	213	208	223	197
Deaths	31,232	31,385	32,039	32,084
Marriages	22,621	22,018	21,052	20,335
Total	129,414	126,982	115,217	112,790

Temporary COVID-19 measures

- To facilitate registration of births and deaths during the Covid-19 Pandemic, measures were included in the *Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020* to alleviate the requirement for a person to attend in person before a registrar to register a birth or death. The arrangements in place (extended to end August 2020) allow for the necessary registration documentation to be delivered electronically and by post.

- The emergency legislation also provides that the GRO, at the request of a Superintendent Registrar, can provide registration services in the event that local services were compromised.

- Between 23rd March and the end of May, the GRO has facilitated the registration of over 8,000 births.

Digitisation of Historic registers

- Registration of marriages commenced in 1845 and of births and deaths in 1864. The system remained paper-based until 1996. All registration processes are now digital.

- Some 15.9 million digital images of older births, marriages and deaths records can be accessed free online on the irishgenealogy.ie website which is operated in partnership with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

- Tranches of register entries are released annually - for births, only those registered more than 100 years earlier are released; marriages that occurred more than 75 years earlier and deaths registered more than 50 years earlier.

- A project to digitise a number of smaller registers maintained by the Civil Registration Service is currently being rolled out and these records will become available for public access later in 2020.

Marriages

- Marriage registrars (staff of the HSE) conducted 6,410 marriages during 2019. The number of same-sex marriages conducted was 641 last year (down slightly from the 664 registered in 2018). The proportion of religious marriages continues to decline (now 58%).

Marriages Registered 2016-2019

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Religious	14,513	13,738	12,760	11,906
Civil	6,438	6,417	6,279	6,410
Secular	1,669	1,863	2,013	2,019
Total	**22,620**	**22,018**	**21,052**	**20,335**

Marriages of convenience (marriage only for the purposes of gaining an immigration advantage)

- The *Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014* created a new impediment to a marriage in that a marriage that would constitute a marriage of convenience is invalid.

- The Act provides that where a registrar forms an opinion that an intended marriage would constitute a marriage of convenience, an investigation of the facts must be undertaken by a Superintendent Registrar and the matter reported to the Minister for Justice and Equality.

- A party or parties dissatisfied with a decision of a Superintendent Registrar that the marriage is a marriage of convenience may appeal that decision to the Circuit Court. Since implementation, the number of marriages involving a non-Irish EU national and a foreign national has gone from a peak of 1,163 in 2014 to around 200 in 2019.

Recognition of foreign divorces

- The Service examines foreign divorces of persons seeking to remarry in the State to determine whether the divorce is recognisable under Irish law. Over 1,000 cases are examined annually – of which only 2% fail to meet the legal requirements. Where an application fails, the persons concerned will need to seek a declaration from the Courts to either recognise the foreign divorce or be granted an Irish divorce.

Gender Recognition

The Gender Recognition Act 2015 provides that a person can obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate from the Department. A person whose birth has been registered and/or whose adoption is registered in Ireland and has been issued with a Gender Recognition Certificate may apply to the GRO for the fact to be entered in the Register of Gender Recognition.

Subsequently, a person can be issued with a copy of their birth or adoption certificate reflecting the entry in the Register. The register was established in September, 2015. The number of new entries in the register showed a big increase in 2019.

New entries in the Register of Gender Recognition 2016-2019

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Entries in register	77	60	75	102

Current and Future Developments

- The service is planning to improve online access to register data and to provide for online registration and notification of key life events over the coming year.
- Projects to be delivered in 2020 will provide other public bodies with access to registration data that will reduce the requirement on members of the public to produce birth, marriage and death certificates.
- The requirement for more timely registration of deaths has been highlighted during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Currently, the obligation to register deaths rests with relatives. The *Civil Registration Act* requires that deaths should be registered within three months of a person's death. The GRO is preparing proposals to reduce the timeframe for death registration and a new measure to impose a duty on medical practitioners certifying a death to report a death to the GRO within 48 hours of the death occurring.

Civil Registration Policy

Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: Dave Dillon*

This is a separate unit within the Department focused on civil registration policy development and the preparation of legislation. A number of significant pieces of civil registration legislation, which amend the CRA, have been enacted in recent years:

Gender Recognition Act 2015

- This Act provides that transgender people may obtain formal legal recognition of their preferred gender and allows them acquire a birth certificate showing their preferred gender.
- Persons aged over 18 years of age can obtain a certificate via a self-declaration model which is revocable.
- Persons aged 16 and 17 years of age may obtain a certificate subject to parental consent, approval from specified clinicians and the Courts.
- The number of gender recognition certificates secured by self-declaration annually since enactment are shown in the table below. There were 13 certificates issued to people aged 16 and 17 years. There has been one application refused under the self-declaration process; this was an application for a non-binary gender certificate which is not permissible under the *Gender Recognition Act 2015*.

Gender recognition certificates secured by self-declaration annually 2015 -2019

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
89	109	97	124	160	579

- The *Gender Recognition Act 2015* provides for a statutory review of the operation of the Act to be commenced within two years of the Act coming into operation.

- In November 2017, a group was established to undertake the review. The group was chaired by Moninne Griffith (Executive Director, BeLonG To) and included representation from the Transgender Equality Network of Ireland (TENI), other independent experts in the field and Government bodies with an interest in this area.

- The report of the Review Group was published on 18th July 2018. The Minister's responding report was published on 29th November 2019.

- The Minister's, own statutory report to the Oireachtas, set out a response to all of the recommendations in the Review Group Report. This includes the following proposals for legislation that were approved by Government and forwarded to the Joint Oireachtas Committee in the 32nd Dáil to consider for pre-legislative scrutiny:

    - Simplifying the path to legal gender recognition for children aged 16/17 years by introducing an arrangement for self-declaration, with parental consent; a simple revocation process; and by making family mediation support available on a voluntary basis.
    - In order to bring greater clarity to the fact that legal gender recognition is separate and distinct from any question of medical intervention, it is proposed to identify clearly on a gender recognition certificate for 16 and 17 year olds that it is awarded on the basis of self-declaration only
    - To provide that a gender recognition certificate may be used to provide proof of change of name as well as proof of change of gender.

- To provide that Irish citizens born outside the State and living outside the State (including Northern Ireland) would be allowed to apply for a gender recognition certificate

- In addition, there is a recommendation by the review group that similar recognition be provided to those persons who are non-binary. Non-binary is an umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of male or female. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female, a combination of male and female or between or beyond genders. Therefore, non-binary is a term that relates to questions of gender identity. (Intersex, on the other hand, refers to individuals who are born with sex characteristics, such as chromosomes, genitals, and/or hormonal structure, that do not belong strictly to male or female categories, or that belong to both at the same time.) The issues regarding non-binary recognition will be considered by an interdepartmental group that will be established to engage in a deeper impact assessment. The group have been tasked to complete this work by the end of 2020.

- Other recommendations of the Review Group are of a more administrative nature and are being progressed at official level. Annual reports and a copy of the Minister's report under section 7 of the Act is available here:
  Annual Reports
  Minister's response

Underage Marriage Exemption

- The *Civil Registration Act 2004* and the *Family Law Act 1995* removed the exemption which enables persons under 18 to marry. This was brought into effect with commencement of the *Domestic Violence Act 2018* on 1st January 2019.

Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2019

- The most recent Act made provisions for the registration of birth particulars in respect of children born as a result of donor-assisted reproduction, and allowed for further changes to the rebuttal of paternity in line with changes to the *Status of Children Act 1987.*

- The provisions relating to donor-assisted births mainly affect same-sex female couples – they will allow the second partner in the relationship to be registered in the register of births using the gender-neutral term "Parent". This will assist them in affirming their parental rights in practical day-to-day matters such as passport applications, school enrolment, interaction with medical practitioners, and other situations where demonstration of parental relationship may be required. These provisions came into operation on 6th October 2019 in line with section 12 of the Act.

Proposals for Further Amendment

- Proposals have been received from Féileacáin[18] for the creation of a 'Certificate of Life' to allow for registration of loss in pregnancy that does not meet the criteria for registration of a birth or stillbirth. [redacted]

Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) Bill

- The general scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) Bill was published in October 2017 and the Oireachtas report on pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill was published in July 2019. The Department of Health is the sponsoring Department.

- One of the main elements of the Bill is regulation of surrogacy in the State. This Department is engaging with the Department of Health in developing the legislation, to provide for birth certificates for children born of surrogacy arrangements, which would be based on a similar model to that used for adoptions.

[18] Féileacáin is a not for profit organisation that aims to offer support to anyone affected by the death of a baby during pregnancy or neonatal deaths.

Other changes

- Consideration will also be given to continuing elements of the Covid-19 emergency measures to facilitate the electronic registration of certain life events and for the service of notice of intention to marry using online services.

BODIES UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Pensions Authority

- The role of the Pensions Authority is to monitor and supervise the operation of the Pensions Act and pension developments generally. The purpose of the Pensions Act is to regulate the operation of occupational pension schemes and Personal Retirement Savings accounts. In this context, the Pensions Act sets out the duties and responsibilities of trustees of a pension scheme. It also assigns a responsibility to the Pensions Authority to supervise the operation of the Act.

- The Pensions Authority is overseen by a three person body consisting of a Chairperson, David Begg, and two officials, Jacqui McCrum, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and Gary Tobin from the Department of Finance.

- The Statement of Strategy of the Pensions Authority is available here. The most recent Annual Report is available here.

The Pensions Council

- The function of the Pensions Council is to advise the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection on matters of relevance to pensions. It is currently focussing on automatic enrolment and gender issues.

- Membership of the Council has been constituted to ensure the relevant skills, specialist knowledge, and experience is in place to allow for the provision of collective advice, information and assistance in the development of pensions policy. The Department is awaiting Ministerial sign-off on the reappointment of the Chairperson, as well as the reappointment and appointment of several other members, the Council cannot function until the Minister signs the relevant documents. The Council has produced a number of reports on pension charges for the Minister, as well as sponsoring research about the pension income gender gap in Ireland.

The Low Pay Commission

Chairperson: Donal De Buitlear

Liaison Assistant Secretary: Rónán Hession *Principal Officer: John O'Toole*

- The primary purpose of the Low Pay Commission is to make recommendations to the Minister regarding the national minimum hourly rate of pay.

Commission Membership

- The Commission comprises eight members and an independent Chairperson.

  The full membership of the Low Pay Commission is:

  - Dr. Donal de Buitléir – Chairperson
  - Vincent Jennings – CEO Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association
  - Patricia King - General Secretary of ICTU
  - Gerry Light - Assistant General Secretary, Mandate Trade Union
  - Mary Mosse – Former lecturer in Economics, School of Business, Waterford Institute of Technology
  - Tom Noonan – former Chief Executive, The Maxol Group, former President of IBEC, 2008–2010.
  - Caroline Fahey – Former Head of Justice and Social Policy, Society of St. Vincent de Paul
  - Sinead Mullins – Senior Employee Relations Executive, IBEC
  - Frank Walsh – Associate Professor, University College Dublin

- The secretariat for the Commission is provided by this Department

Citizens Information Board (CIB)

- The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money advice and budgeting) and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services.

- Since 3rd March 2020, there are two vacancies on the Board. Current membership is as follows:

  - Ita Mangan (Chair) Term of Office expires in early December 2020
  - James Clarke
  - Mary Doyle
  - Tim Duggan (Minister's nominee)
  - Mary Higgins
  - Tina Leonard
  - Joanne McCarthy
  - Niall Mulligan
  - Cearbhall O Meadhra
  - Ian Power
  - John Saunders
  - Sean Sheridan

- Nicola Walshe

In accordance with the provisions of the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, engagement is underway between the Department and the Public Appointments Service for a campaign to seek expressions of interest in appointment to the Board of CIB.

- **Services:** CIB provides services directly to the public through a number of websites and publications and funds 21 delivery service companies across the country to provide services to the public. These services are:

  - 8 Citizens Information Services
  - National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS);
  - Sign Language and Interpreting Service (SLIS);
  - Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS);
  - 8 Money Advice and Budgeting Services;
  - National Traveller MABS (NTMABS); and a
  - MABS Support Company.

- **Strategic Plan 2019 - 2021:** The Citizens Information Board Strategic Plan *Delivering Information, Advice, Money Advice and Advocacy Services for our Communities* builds on the restructuring work undertaken in recent years which resulted in the revision of the structures of the 42 local Citizens Information Services (CIS) and the 52 local MABS companies into eight regional CIS and eight regional MABS companies.

- The objective of the restructure was to improve management systems and governance, maximise effective use of resources and ensure consistent quality of services.

  The following are significant Government initiatives in which CIB and its funded services are involved:

- **ABHAILE:** the State funded service for borrowers in home mortgage arrears, which is jointly co-ordinated and funded by the Department of Justice & Equality and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Its aim is to help borrowers who are insolvent and in home mortgage arrears to access independent expert financial and/or legal advice and assistance, free of charge and wherever possible to keep them in their own homes.
- Since its inception in mid-2016, over 17,000 borrowers in mortgage arrears have received independent expert financial advice and negotiation support.
- As of end December 2019, almost 35% of these either have a solution in place or on trial. A further 47% of borrowers who engaged with Abhaile financial advice (8,236 borrowers) are still in their homes and are receiving ongoing support from their Abhaile financial adviser, who is working with the borrower to get a solution into place.
- **Personal Micro Credit Initiative**: is aimed at moving people away from the use of high cost moneylenders.

- *It Makes Sense* loans, which range in value from €100 to a maximum of €2,000, and have a maximum interest rate of 12% per annum are currently offered in 108 credit unions nationwide. Repayments on almost 7,000 of these loans are being facilitated weekly via An Post's Household Budget facility.

Commitments in the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 and the National Disability Strategy (NDIS):

- CIB is working closely with the Sign Language Interpreting Service to extend services to the Deaf community as provided for in the NDIS.

- Section 9 of the *Irish Sign Language Act 2017* which is due to come into operation in 2020 provides for funding to be made available to facilitate users of Irish Sign Language (ISL) to access social , medical educational, and cultural events and services. CIB is working together with SLIS on the implementation of the provisions of Section 9, commonly known within the Deaf community as the "voucher scheme".

The Social Welfare Tribunal

- The Social Welfare Tribunal is a statutory body set up in 1982 to deal with cases where entitlement to Jobseekers Benefit or Jobseekers Assistance is refused due to an involvement in a trade dispute.

- The legislation governing the operation of the Social Welfare Tribunal is provided for in Sections 331 to 333 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005.

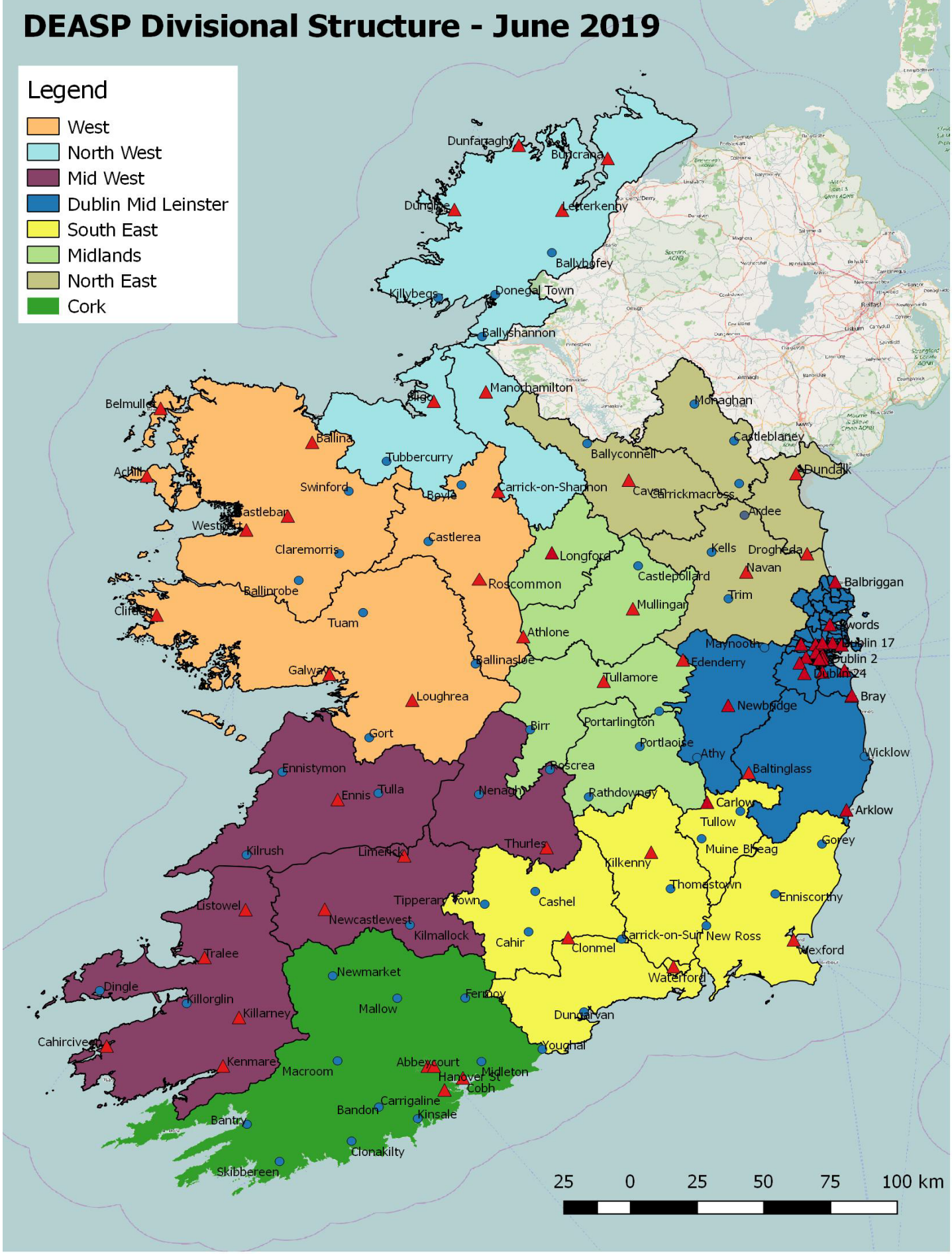
Labour Market Advisory Council

The role of the Labour Market Advisory Group is to provide advice to the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Government with regard to the efficient operation of the labour market with a particular view to increasing participation rates, minimising unemployment levels and reducing average unemployment durations.

The membership of the Council is made up as follows:

Labour Market Advisory Council: Membership
Mr. John Martin (Chair)*
Dr. Phillip O'Connell (Director of the Geary Institute, UCD)*
Mr. Frank Gleeson (Aramark)*
Ms. Ade Stack (Stacks Pharmacy)
Ms. Susan Hynes (Takeda Dunboyne Biologics)
Ms. Angela Smith (Dress for Success))

Ms. Brid O'Brien (INOU)*
Mr. Ger Gibbons (ICTU)
Dr. Kara McGann (IBEC)
Ms. Sinead McSweeney (Twitter)
Mr. Terry Corcoran (retired Chief Economist, D/EASP)*
******Former members of the Labour Market Council*
Ex-Officio Members of Labour Market Advisory Council
Jenny Connors – Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
John Shaw – Department of Taoiseach
William Beausang – Department of Education and Skills
David Hegarty – Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
John Conlon and Dermot Coates – Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Andrew Brownlee – CEO, Solas



Appendix - Regional Services

CORK	DIVISIONAL MANAGER: MARIE O'FLYNN
DUBLIN / MID LEINSTER	DIVISIONAL MANAGERS: LISA DOYLE AND NOEL HAND
MID-WEST	DIVISIONAL MANAGER: JIM LYNCH
MIDLANDS	DIVISIONAL MANAGER: VERONICA O'BRIEN
NORTH EAST	DIVISIONAL MANAGER: PAUL CARROLL
NORTH WEST	DIVISIONAL MANAGER: KAREN KEATING
SOUTH EAST	DIVISIONAL MANAGER: BRENDAN LAWTON (ACTING)
WEST	DIVISIONAL MANAGER: ANTOINETTE RYAN (ACTING)

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2014, the redacted material in the Ministerial Brief is shown in the following schedule:

Page No.	Partial Release/Not Released	Exemption
Part B – p. 80	Partial Release	**Section 29 (1) (a) (b) - Deliberations of FOI bodies** A head may refuse to grant an FOI request— (a) if the record concerned contains matter relating to the deliberative processes of an FOI body (including opinions, advice, recommendations, and the results of consultations, considered by the body, the head of the body, or a member of the body or of the staff of the body for the purpose of those processes), and (b) the granting of the request would, in the opinion of the head, be contrary to the public interest, and, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (b), the head shall, in determining whether to grant or refuse to grant the request, consider whether the grant thereof would be contrary to the public interest by reason of the fact that the requester concerned would thereby become aware of a significant decision that the body proposes to make. **Section 30. (1) (c) - Functions and negotiations of FOI bodies** A head may refuse to grant an FOI request if access to the record concerned could, in the opinion of the head, reasonably be expected to (c) disclose positions taken, or to be taken, or plans, procedures, criteria or instructions used or followed, or to be used or followed, for the

		purpose of any negotiations carried on or being, or to be, carried on by or on behalf of the Government or an FOI body.
Part B - p. 150	Partial Release	**Section 33. (1) (d) - Security, defence and international relations** A head may refuse to grant a FOI request in relation to a record (and in particular but without prejudice to the generality otherwise of this subsection, to a record to which subsection (2) applies if, in the opinion of the head, access to it could reasonably be expected to affect adversely- (d) the international relations of the State.
Part B – p. 154	Partial Release	**Section 33 (1) (d) - Security, defence and international relations** A head may refuse to grant a FOI request in relation to a record (and in particular but without prejudice to the generality otherwise of this subsection, to a record to which subsection (2) applies if, in the opinion of the head, access to it could reasonably be expected to affect adversely- (d) the international relations of the State.
Part B – p. 156	Partial Release	**Section 31. (1) (a) - Parliamentary, court and certain other matters** A head shall refuse to grant an FOI request if the record concerned— (a) would be exempt from production in proceedings in a court on the ground of legal professional privilege
Part B – p. 169	Partial Release	**Section 30. (1) (a) - Functions and negotiations of FOI bodies** A head may refuse to grant an FOI request if access to the record concerned could, in the opinion of the head, reasonably be expected to— (a) prejudice the effectiveness of tests,

		examinations, investigations, inquiries or audits conducted by or on behalf of an FOI body or the procedures or methods employed for the conduct thereof,
Part B - P.170	Partial Release	**Section 30. (1) (a) - Functions and negotiations of FOI bodies** A head may refuse to grant an FOI request if access to the record concerned could, in the opinion of the head, reasonably be expected to (a) prejudice the effectiveness of tests, examinations, investigations, inquiries or audits conducted by or on behalf of an FOI body or the procedures or methods employed for the conduct thereof, **Section 30. (1) (c) - Functions and negotiations of FOI bodies** (c) disclose positions taken, or to be taken, or plans, procedures, criteria or instructions used or followed, or to be used or followed, for the purpose of any negotiations carried on or being, or to be, carried on by or on behalf of the Government or an FOI body.
Part B – p. 211	Partial Release	**Section 31. (1) (a) - Parliamentary, court and certain other matters** A head shall refuse to grant an FOI request if the record concerned (a) would be exempt from production in proceedings in a court on the ground of legal professional privilege