

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
SINGAPORE
OFFICIAL REPORT
CONTENTS

Written Answers to Questions

	Page
1. Statistics on Licensed Insurance Companies/Agencies from 2007 to 2016 (Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan)	1
2. Full-time Securities Dealer's Representatives and Remisiers from 2007 to 2016 (Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan)	1
3. Attendance at Meetings of Presidential Council for Minority Rights from 2012 to 2016 (Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap)	2
4. Accessibility of Public Transport for Persons with Disabilities (Ms Sylvia Lim)	3
5. Hybrid Concession and Off-Peak Passes Issued to Public Transport Commuters (Mr Png Eng Huat)	3
6. Criteria for Application of Vocational Driving Licence (Mr Zaqy Mohamad)	4
7. Retrenchment Benefits for Workers (Ms K Thanalechimi)	4
8. Insurance Coverage and Compensation for Workplace Injuries (Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang)	5
9. Breakdown of CPF Life Payments from 2011 to 2015 (Mr Leon Perera)	6
10,11. Breakdown of Singapore Companies with More than 100 and 1,000 Employees in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2015 (Ms Sun Xueling)	7
12. Minimum Compassionate Leave for Children and Grandchildren (Ms Joan Pereira)	8
13. Processes Involved in Producing Weekly MUIS Friday Prayer Sermon Text (Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap)	9
14. Appointment Considerations for Heads of Overseas Missions (Ms Sylvia Lim)	9
15. Usage of Family Visiting Privileges by Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) Inmates (Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang)	10
16. Update on Case of Eight Deported Indonesian ISIS Suspects (Mr Ang Wei Neng)	11
17. Prison Inmates with Identified Intellectual Disabilities and Their Recidivism Rate (Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap)	11
18. Application Fee for Enforcement of Money Order Issued by Small Claims Tribunal (Ms Tin Pei Ling)	12
19. Total Subsidised and Private Nursing Home Capacity (Ms Tin Pei Ling)	13

20. Additional Nursing Home Beds from 2021 to 2030 (Ms Tin Pei Ling)	13
21. Extent of Codeine Substance Abuse in Singapore (Mr Desmond Choo)	14
22. Impact of Changes to Smoking and Cigarette Sales Laws on Smoking and Smokers (Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef)	15
23. Benefits of Integrated Healthcare Clustering (Er Dr Lee Bee Wah)	16
24. Criteria for Auto-renewal of Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) Card (Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong)	16
25. Blue and Orange CHAS Cards Issued in 2015 and 2016 (Mr Pritam Singh)	17
26. Update on SME Working Capital Loan Scheme (Mr Liang Eng Hwa)	18
27. Tax-free Withdrawals from Supplementary Retirement Scheme (SRS) Accounts (Mr Yee Chia Hsing)	18
28. Allocation and Utilisation of ActiveSG Funds (Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap)	19
29. Breakdown of Expenditure Incurred by Grassroots Organisation Committees for FY2015/16 (Mr Png Eng Huat)	20
30. Specialist Team for Attempted Suicide Cases (Mr Kok Heng Leun)	20
31. Nationwide Study on Employment for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs (Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong)	21
32. Data on Persons with Disabilities and/or Special Needs in Singapore (Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong)	22
33. Property/Estate Agencies and Agents Registered in Singapore from 2007 to 2016 (Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan)	23
34. Fake Food Imports Detected (Er Dr Lee Bee Wah)	24
35. Complaints Received by BCA against Managing Agents of Management Corporations of Strata Titles (MCSTs) (Mr Zainal Sapari)	25
36. Applicants above Income Cap for Rental Flats (Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang)	25
37. Considerations for Replacement of Bathroom Doors in New HDB Residential Developments (Ms Sun Xueling)	26
38. Impact of Selective En Bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS) on Community Social Capital (Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap)	26
39. Management of Food Wastage through Schools and Neighbourhood Communities (Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye)	27
40. Measures Taken to Manage E-waste (Mr Chen Show Mao)	28
41. Guidelines for Schools on Retention of Prizes Won during Competitions (Mr Zainal Sapari)	30
42. Statistics on Time Taken by Institutes of Higher Learning Graduates to Secure Full-time Employment (Mr Desmond Choo)	30

STATISTICS ON LICENSED INSURANCE COMPANIES/AGENCIES FROM 2007 TO 2016

1 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked the Prime Minister for each of the years from 2007 to 2016, what is (i) the number of insurance companies/agencies with a valid licence operating in Singapore (ii) the number of staff on full-time employment by all these insurance companies/agencies and (iii) the number of insurance agents engaged by all these insurance companies/agencies.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister): The statistics are set out in the Table below¹:

Year	Number of Insurance Companies	Insurance Sector Headcount ²	Number of Insurance Agents ³
2007	59	23,827	13,645
2008	61	26,295	13,944
2009	63	27,120	14,137
2010	62	28,133	13,315
2011	65	28,637	13,304
2012	69	29,689	16,527
2013	75	30,396	17,328
2014	78	33,558	17,931
2015	79	34,157	19,040
2016	79	-	19,022

National Archives of Singapore
[Back to Contents](#)

FULL-TIME SECURITIES DEALER'S REPRESENTATIVES AND REMISIERS FROM 2007 TO 2016

2 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked ask the Prime Minister for each of the years from

¹Figures are as at 31 December.

²These are based on Ministry of Manpower figures on the headcount of the insurance sector, which comprises insurance agents and staff.

³The figures comprise insurance agents who represent life and/or general insurance companies, except for years 2007-2011 where the figures exclude insurance agents who represent only general insurance companies. The General Insurance Association of Singapore did not have figures for these agents during that period.

2007 to 2016, what is the number of (i) full-time employed dealer's representatives dealing with securities in Singapore and (ii) remisiers in Singapore.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister): The statistics are set out in the table below. MAS does not collect information on whether a representative (rep) is working on a part-time or full-time basis.

Year (as at 31 December)	SGX Member Firms Dealing in Securities ⁴		Non-SGX Member Firms Dealing in Securities		Total
	Number of Employed Reps	Number of Self- Employed Remisiers	Number of Employed Reps	Number of Self- Employed Remisiers	
2007	989	2,661	N.A. ⁵		
2008	1,067	2,754			
2009	1,165	2,848			
2010	1,256	2,985	7,696	12	11,949
2011	1,333	3,032	9,270	12	13,647
2012	1,313	2,918	9,355	7	13,593
2013	1,238	2,841	9,647	8	13,734
2014	1,217	2,709	10,362	7	14,295
2015	1,159	2,537	10,562	6	14,264
2016	1,097	2,355	10,646	4	14,102

[Back to Contents](#)

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS OF PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL FOR MINORITY RIGHTS FROM 2012 TO 2016

³ Mr Muhammad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap asked the Prime Minister what is the average number of absences for each member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights over the 31 meetings held from 2012 to 2016.

Mr Lee Hsien Loong: The composition of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights is not fixed and varies according to the terms of the Members. The number of Council meetings also varies from year to year depending on the number of legislation which it scrutinises.

⁴SGX member firms can trade directly on the SGX while non-SGX member firms, which currently include banks and merchant banks, can only trade on the SGX through an SGX member firm.

⁵Statistics are not available. Prior to 2010, individuals working for banks and merchant banks conducting dealing in securities were not required to be notified to MAS. The data from 2010 onwards includes such individuals.

As Council proceedings are conducted in private, it is not appropriate to disclose details of its meetings. All meetings of the Council have been conducted with sufficient quorum and decisions are made by the collective judgement of the Council as a whole. The work of the Council is also reported to the President and its report presented to Parliament annually.

The value and effectiveness of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights is not measured by the duration of its meetings or by the number of Members attending. The Council continues to exercise the duties entrusted to it by the Constitution responsibly and conscientiously.

[Back to Contents](#)

ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

4 **Ms Sylvia Lim** asked the Minister for Transport what is the Government's assessment of the current physical accessibility of public transport to persons with disabilities.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: Our public transport system is now largely accessible to persons with disabilities. First, all our MRT stations and bus interchanges have at least one barrier-free access route from the entrance to the concourse. Second, all MRT trains and 92% of public buses are wheelchair-accessible. By 2020, all public buses will be so.

[Back to Contents](#)

HYBRID CONCESSION AND OFF-PEAK PASSES ISSUED TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT COMMUTERS

5 **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked the Minister for Transport as of 31 December 2016 what is (i) the number of Hybrid Concession Pass and Off-Peak Pass issued to public transport commuters (ii) the number of concession cards issued to persons with disabilities (iii) the average number of trips per day per concession cardholder and (iv) the average distance travelled per trip.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: About 67,000 Hybrid Concession Passes and 13,000 Off-Peak Passes were issued monthly in 2016. About 12,000 'Persons with Disabilities' concession cards have been issued so far.

A typical concession cardholder makes about one to two journeys per day. The average

distance of each journey is about nine kilometres.

[Back to Contents](#)

CRITERIA FOR APPLICATION OF VOCATIONAL DRIVING LICENCE

6 **Mr Zaqy Mohamad** asked the Minister for Transport whether there are plans to exclude PRs and foreign private car drivers from taking up vocational licences to ensure that such vocation remains only for Singaporeans, just like that for taxi driving.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan: From July this year, all private hire car drivers will be required to obtain a Private Hire Car Driver's Vocational Licence (PDVL). Non-Singapore citizens will be granted PDVLs only if they are employees of chauffeured services companies, which are also constrained by foreign worker quotas. Singaporeans, on the other hand, are eligible for the PDVL even if they are self-employed. This is similar to the policy for taxi drivers.

[Back to Contents](#)

RETRENCHMENT BENEFITS FOR WORKERS

7 **Ms K Thanaletchimi** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) how many companies have included retrenchment benefit clauses in their employment contracts; (b) which are the industries that do so and how prevalent is the practice; (c) what kind of assistance does the Ministry render to those retrenched without retrenchment benefits; and (d) whether the Ministry will consider imposing some baseline retrenchment benefits to help workers tide over the period before they get into another employment.

Mr Lim Swee Say: For workers who have served more than two years, payment of retrenchment benefits is mandatory if it is specified in their individual employment contracts or the collective agreements negotiated by their unions. According to our survey on retrenchment benefits in 2015, it was not a widespread practice for employers to specify the quantum of retrenchment benefits in their employment contracts, except for the unionised sector where a majority of the collective agreements specify the quantum of retrenchment benefits. These establishments were mainly from manufacturing, construction and wholesale and retail trade. The same survey also found that around 90% of establishments which retrenched workers in 2015 paid retrenchment benefits to eligible workers.

The tripartite partners have deliberated extensively on whether to make retrenchment benefits mandatory, and to specify the minimum quantum in the Employment Act. We have concluded that it may not necessarily be beneficial for both workers and businesses. A mandated level of minimum retrenchment benefit will likely become the norm, and would not benefit the workers in cases where the employers are able to pay higher amounts. If we set the quantum too high, companies may not be able to afford it, especially when they are downsizing under difficult conditions. Further, overburdening companies will also have a negative impact on the remaining workers in the company as they strive to restructure and turn around the business. Instead, the tripartite partners issue guidelines which stipulate the prevailing norms for retrenchment benefits quantum. These norms can be updated from time to time.

The tripartite partners have also stepped up our support for all retrenched workers through the Adapt and Grow initiative, providing job matching and career services for them. In addition, since 1 January 2017, it has become mandatory for employers to notify MOM of retrenchments so that we can reach more retrenched workers and offer them timely assistance.

[Back to Contents](#)

INSURANCE COVERAGE AND COMPENSATION FOR WORKPLACE INJURIES

8 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Manpower for each year of the past three years (a) how many cases of workplace injuries had occurred where the employer had no valid work injury insurance cover on the date of the accident; (b) how many of these cases concluded with a finalised Notice of Assessment awarding compensation for permanent disability; (c) of these, how many employers paid the full amount to the injured employee by the 21st day after the Notice of Assessment was finalised; and (d) how many employers were prosecuted for not having valid work injury insurance in place.

Mr Lim Swee Say: The following table provides the requested data:

	2014	2015	2016
Number of Work Injury Compensation (WIC) Claims awarded	14,733	14,221	15,679
Number of uninsured claims involving employers covered under mandatory WIC insurance	86	83	59
Cases where compensation paid within 21 days from finalised Notice of Assessment	82	75	49
Cases where compensation paid after 21 days from finalised Notice of Assessment	3	6	5
Cases where compensation remain unpaid	1	2	5

The number of employers prosecuted for failing to provide work injury insurance are as follows:

	2014	2015	2016
Number of employers prosecuted	4	1	1

[Back to Contents](#)

BREAKDOWN OF CPF LIFE PAYMENTS FROM 2011 TO 2015

9 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Manpower (a) from 2011 to 2015, in what proportion of cases were CPF Life payments not made by the 4th working day of each month; (b) in such cases, on what day of the month was the payment subsequently made, with the breakdown of percentage by days; and (c) whether the Ministry will consider requiring that earlier payments be made in the event that the 4th working day of the month falls on the 6th or subsequent calendar day of the month so as to alleviate cash flow difficulties that seniors may face in such cases.

Mr Lim Swee Say: Monthly CPF LIFE payouts are paid directly into members' bank accounts by Inter-Bank GIRO on the 4th working day of each month, or to the CPF Ordinary Account if they do not have a bank account.

The earliest that CPF LIFE payments can be made is the 4th working day of the month because (a) CPF Board credits interest on the 1st working day and deducts the monthly payments on the 2nd working day to enable members to earn interest on the full CPF LIFE monies during the preceding month; and (b) the banks require two working days to clear and credit the payments into members' bank accounts.

From 2011 to 2015, 99.98% of CPF LIFE payouts were paid out by the 4th working day. Payouts which could not be disbursed within the four working days were exceptional cases which required further verification. For example, for members who are mentally incapacitated, CPF Board may need more time to check if there are new court orders issued to ensure that members' payouts are paid out to a third party who is legally authorised to manage the member's monies.

CPF LIFE payments are only made after the 6th calendar day in months where a public holiday and a weekend occur in the first week of the month. From 2012 to 2015, only 133 out of a total of 1.7 million payments were made after the 7th calendar day.

[Back to Contents](#)

BREAKDOWN OF SINGAPORE COMPANIES WITH MORE THAN 100 AND 1,000 EMPLOYEES IN 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005 AND 2015

10 Ms Sun Xueling asked the Minister for Manpower (a) what is the number of companies in Singapore who hire more than 100 employees in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2015 respectively; and (b) what is the total number of employees hired by these companies in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2015 respectively.

11 Ms Sun Xueling asked the Minister for Manpower (a) what is the number of companies in Singapore who hire more than 1,000 employees in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2015 respectively; and (b) what is the total number of employees hired by these companies in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2015 respectively.

Mr Lim Swee Say: The number of private sector establishments⁶ that hire more than 100 employees⁷ and more than 1,000 employees is provided in Table 1.

⁶Establishment refers to a unit within an enterprise (defined as an incorporated/registered entity such as company, business, association, society etc) engaged in one activity and operating in a single location.

⁷Refer to local and foreign employees.

Table 1: Number of Private Sector Establishments by Employee Count, 1995, 2005, 2015 (June)

	1995	2005	2015
Private sector establishments hiring more than 100 employees	1,610	2,100	3,590
Private sector establishments hiring more than 1,000 employees	90	110	200

Source: Labour Market Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

The corresponding number of employees hired by these private sector establishments is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Total Number of Employees in Private Sector Establishments by Employee Count, 1995, 2005, 2015 (June)

	1995	2005	2015
Total number of employees in private sector establishments hiring more than 100 employees	384,500	505,900	866,700
Total number of employees in private sector establishments hiring more than 1,000 employees	210,600	277,200	542,200

Source: Labour Market Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Data from 1965 to 1985 is not available.

[Back to Contents](#)

MINIMUM COMPASSIONATE LEAVE FOR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

12 Ms **Joan Pereira** asked the Minister for Manpower whether the Ministry will consider mandating a minimum number of days of compassionate leave for children and grandchildren in view of the limited number of days of annual leave, particularly for those working in junior positions or lower paying jobs, smaller families and our rapidly ageing population.

Mr Lim Swee Say: We recognise that employees need our support during the time of bereavement. Already more than nine in 10 companies (92%) provide compassionate leave based

on MOM's survey in 2016. We will continue to work with our tripartite partners to encourage employers to voluntarily adopt such progressive workplace practices.

The Government has introduced several family leave enhancements over the last few years. We should allow time for businesses to adjust and adapt. At this stage, we have no plans to make it mandatory for all firms to provide specifically for compassionate leave for their employees.

[Back to Contents](#)

PROCESSES INVOLVED IN PRODUCING WEEKLY MUIS FRIDAY PRAYER SERMON TEXT

13 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Communications and Information and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs (a) what are the processes involved in producing the weekly MUIS Friday prayer sermon text; (b) who determines or approves the final draft of the sermon text; and (c) whether the sermon text has to be vetted and approval obtained from the Ministry of Home Affairs as well as the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs prior to its delivery.

Assoc Prof Dr Yaacob Ibrahim: The weekly sermon text is written by the Office of the Mufti in MUIS under the guidance of the Mufti. The themes for the sermons are based on an annual framework developed by the Office of the Mufti.

The Office of the Mufti seeks public feedback, including through an annual survey, on the topics for the sermons. Such feedback helps ensure that MUIS continues to provide religious content that is relevant to issues faced by Muslims in Singapore.

The Office of the Mufti is entirely responsible for the sermon texts. They do not seek approval from other government agencies or ministries. Although MUIS is a statutory board, the Government does not dictate how MUIS should administer matters relating to religious doctrine.

[Back to Contents](#)

APPOINTMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR HEADS OF OVERSEAS MISSIONS

14 **Ms Sylvia Lim** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs (a) what proportion and number

of Singapore's current Heads of Overseas Missions are career diplomats and political appointees respectively; and (b) what are the specific considerations to determine which Missions will be headed by career diplomats as opposed to political appointees.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan: No resident Heads of Overseas Missions are political appointees. All our resident Ambassadors are Foreign Service Officers, recruited and appointed strictly based on merit, like the entire Foreign Service and indeed Civil Service.

Our diplomats operate in a challenging and uncertain global environment. They are expected to robustly defend and advance Singapore's interests in the international arena. To build the strongest possible team of diplomats for Singapore, the Foreign Service recruits both fresh graduates and mid-career professionals through rigorous recruitment processes. In particular, mid-career officers are considered based on their past experience, performance and relevant skillsets. Appointments of senior Foreign Service Officers are also subject to approval by the Special Personnel Board in the Civil Service or Public Service Commission. Currently, about 10% of Ambassador-level Heads of Missions joined MFA mid-career.

Our guiding principle is to appoint the best person for the job, whether he or she has joined the Foreign Service as a fresh graduate or mid-career recruit. We will not allow any compromise to the professionalism and excellence of our Foreign Service.

[Back to Contents](#)

USAGE OF FAMILY VISITING PRIVILEGES BY DRUG REHABILITATION CENTRE (DRC) INMATES

15 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Home Affairs for each year of the past three years (a) what percentage of inmates in the Drug Rehabilitation Centres (DRCs) use their entire quota of family visiting privileges each month; and (b) how many requests have the DRCs received for additional family visiting privileges by the inmates or by their family members respectively.

Mr K Shanmugam: The percentage of inmates in the Drug Rehabilitation Centres (DRCs) who received the maximum allowable two visits per month is as follows:

	2014	2015	2016
% of DRC inmates who received two visits per month	35.2%	34.2%	33.7%

Requests for additional family visits by DRC inmates or their family members are rare. When requests for additional visits are made, the Singapore Prison Service would assess each request and grant the visit based on the circumstances of the request.

[Back to Contents](#)

UPDATE ON CASE OF EIGHT DEPORTED INDONESIAN ISIS SUSPECTS

16 **Mr Ang Wei Neng** asked the Minister for Home Affairs if he can provide an update on the case of eight Indonesians deported to Malaysia due to their suspected link to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and why they were subsequently released by the Indonesian police.

Mr K Shanmugam: On 9 January 2017, a group of eight Indonesians tried to enter Singapore through the Woodlands Checkpoint. The Indonesians were referred for secondary checks by ICA officers when they presented themselves for immigration clearance. One of them said that he was a religious teacher and that his travelling companions were his students. He was found to possess images of security concern, including that of a shoe-bomb and fighters from the terrorist group that calls itself the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The group was denied entry into Singapore and turned back to Malaysia from where they last departed.

The Malaysian authorities repatriated the Indonesians back to their country of origin after they had completed their investigations. It is the prerogative of the Indonesian authorities to decide on the course of action to take with regards to their citizens.

On our part, we have shared our investigation findings on the case with our Malaysian and Indonesian counterparts. We will continue to watch our borders closely and work with our partners to counter the terrorism threat in the region.

[Back to Contents](#)

PRISON INMATES WITH IDENTIFIED INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND THEIR RECIDIVISM RATE

17 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) how many prison inmates are there currently with identified intellectual disabilities, with a breakdown

by type and severity of intellectual disability; (b) what is the overall recidivism rate of this group of offenders; and (c) how does this compare with the recidivism rate of able-bodied, neuro-typical offenders with similar offences.

Mr K Shanmugam: The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) will assess every inmate upon admission to understand whether they have any condition, for example, medical, physical or intellectual disability, which may require special attention. Depending on the individual's profile and needs, SPS would tailor the management approach and rehabilitation programmes for the inmate such as housing arrangements, where this is practicable.

SPS does not currently collate detailed data on the overall number, profile and recidivism rate of inmates with intellectual disabilities. It plans to do so going forward.

[Back to Contents](#)

APPLICATION FEE FOR ENFORCEMENT OF MONEY ORDER ISSUED BY SMALL CLAIMS TRIBUNAL

18 Ms **Tin Pei Ling** asked the Minister for Law (a) whether a claimant has to pay a fee to apply for the enforcement of a money order issued by the Small Claims Tribunal and, if so, how much; and (b) whether there are measures in place to help a low-income claimant defray this cost.

Mr K Shanmugam: Legal costs for proceedings at the Small Claims Tribunals are kept low as the process is straightforward and parties appear in person. A Money Order issued by the Tribunals is deemed to be a Magistrates' Court Order, and can be enforced through a Writ of Seizure and Sale.

The filing fee for a Writ of Seizure and Sale to enforce the Tribunals' order is to be paid by the claimant unless the Court orders otherwise. Currently, the filing fee is \$80, which is about half the fee for a case filed under the Magistrates' Court. In addition, there are other associated and ancillary fees, which may bring the total cost of enforcing the Tribunals' Money Order to about \$400 to \$600. The claimant can recover these enforcement costs from the judgment debtor if the judgment debtor's personal property is successfully seized and sold, and the proceeds of sale are sufficient to cover the costs incurred.

The claimant may also apply to the Registrar of the State Courts to waive or defer the

payment of such costs. The Registrar will consider all the relevant facts in the specific case, including the claimant's financial circumstances, in deciding whether to waive or defer such fees. The claimant will not be charged a fee for making a waiver or deferment application.

The Legal Aid Bureau may also provide legal aid for the execution of a Writ of Seizure and Sale, provided that the applicant satisfies the requisite means and merits tests.

[Back to Contents](#)

TOTAL SUBSIDISED AND PRIVATE NURSING HOME CAPACITY

19 **Ms Tin Pei Ling** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the current total subsidised and private nursing home capacity; (b) in the past five years, how many applications for these nursing homes have been received and what has been the queue time in each of those years; and (c) within the same period, how many of the patients in these nursing homes are ambulant and how many can be cared for at home or within the community.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: We have about 12,800 nursing home beds as at end-December 2016. Of these, about 11,000 beds are subsidised.

Between 2012 and 2016, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) received an average of 3,400 applications for subsidised nursing home beds per year. The waiting time depends on several factors such as care needs of patients, family preferences and available capacity. On average, successful applicants wait about four months for a subsidised nursing home bed.

Very few nursing home residents are ambulant. This is because in assessing the needs of applicants, AIC generally prioritises nursing home placements for patients who require help and supervision in three or more activities of daily living such as feeding and toileting, and have weak family support. For seniors who are ambulant and can be supported in the community, AIC refers them for home-based and community services instead. We are strengthening these services to enable more seniors to age in place, rather than be cared for in a nursing home. In 2016, more than 6,000 seniors were placed in home care and/or day care.

[Back to Contents](#)

ADDITIONAL NURSING HOME BEDS FROM 2021 TO 2030

20 **Ms Tin Pei Ling** asked the Minister for Health (a) how many nursing home beds will be added from January 2021 to December 2030; and (b) how much of the expected demand will

be fulfilled by 2020 and 2030 respectively given our ageing population.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: MOH plans for nursing home capacity to meet projected demand based on a combination of factors, such as demographics and incidence of disability. We have increased our capacity from 9,400 beds in 2011 to 12,800 beds today, and will develop more nursing homes to reach a total of 17,000 beds by 2020. This is expected to meet the demand for nursing homes in 2020.

Beyond 2020, we will continue to add more nursing home capacity. However, the number of beds added will have to be constantly reviewed and calibrated as demand patterns change. We are also meeting seniors' care needs holistically in different ways. Even as we continue to build more nursing homes, we are also focusing on upstream efforts to keep Singaporeans healthy, and growing our suite of home and community care services to help seniors age in place.

[Back to Contents](#)

EXTENT OF CODEINE SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN SINGAPORE

21 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Minister for Health (a) how widespread is the abuse of codeine in Singapore; (b) which are the most vulnerable groups; and (c) what are the measures taken to address such codeine abuse in Singapore.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: Codeine is used as a medicine for the relief of cough and pain. As codeine can be addictive, the supply of medicines containing codeine is monitored and controlled in a few ways.

First, the manufacture, import and supply of medicines, including codeine cough preparations, is regulated by the Health Sciences Authority (HSA). Under HSA's Health Products Act, doctors and pharmacists can only supply to an individual patient not more than 240 ml of codeine cough preparation on any one occasion. They cannot supply to the same patient within a period of four days.

Any person who violates the law can be fined up to \$50,000 and/or jailed for up to two years under the Health Products Act.

Second, as the professional body which regulates the conduct of doctors, the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) acts on complaints of errant prescribing or dispensation of codeine cough preparations. The SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines also provide guidance for

doctors to prescribe or dispense drugs with potential for dependence or addiction. Doctors who breach the MOH guidelines or the SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines may face disciplinary action and be liable for suspension of between three months and a year, fine and censure.

Third, HSA regulates the wholesale distribution of codeine cough preparations, and works closely with various enforcement agencies, such as the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) and the Singapore Police Force (SPF) to curb the illegal diversion of such preparations into the illegal market.

Finally, to help reduce the demand for such preparations by codeine abusers and addicts, HSA has stepped up public education on the harm caused by codeine abuse through public advisories and press releases.

From 2012 to 2016, HSA convicted 37 offenders and SMC disciplined 5 doctors for inappropriate prescribing of codeine cough preparations.

[Back to Contents](#)

IMPACT OF CHANGES TO SMOKING AND CIGARETTE SALES LAWS ON SMOKING AND SMOKERS

22 Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef asked the Minister for Health with recent changes to the smoking and cigarette sales laws, whether there have been changes to the statistics on smoking and smokers, especially amongst women and teenagers.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: Based on the Student Health Surveys which are conducted every three years, the prevalence of smoking among Secondary 1-4 students decreased from 8.6% in 2006 to 6.2% in 2009 but has remained at the same level in 2012. Although the rate fell to 2% based on the 2015 survey, there was a change in survey methodology and we are studying the data to better understand if this had an impact.

Based on national health surveys which are also conducted once every three years, smoking amongst women increased from 3.7% in 2007 to 4.2% in 2010 and decreased slightly to 3.8% in 2013.

Smoking prevalence is determined by complex socio-demographic factors as well as the various tobacco control measures introduced in recent years. My Ministry will continue to monitor smoking prevalence in Singapore, and further strengthen our tobacco control programme

as part of a multi-pronged approach.

[Back to Contents](#)

BENEFITS OF INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE CLUSTERING

23 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for Health (a) what is the average size that each integrated healthcare cluster will serve; (b) how does it compare to Hong Kong; (c) how will this new clustering benefit the public in expediting the waiting time at A&E departments; and (d) how will this improve the average waiting period for a patient who needs to be scanned for suspected serious illnesses like cancer.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: Each cluster will serve a population of 1-1.5 million Singapore residents. This is comparable to Hong Kong, which also has healthcare clusters serving populations of 0.5-1.8 million each.

Healthcare 2020 outlined our plan to expand capacity, improve quality and enhance the affordability of healthcare services. Even as we implement Healthcare 2020, we need to plan ahead further into the future. Last year, three key shifts to prepare for our healthcare needs beyond 2020 were announced: beyond hospital to community, beyond quality to value and beyond healthcare to health. This transformation is necessary as our healthcare needs will grow in volume and complexity due to our ageing population and increased chronic disease burden. For this reason, we need to organise ourselves better so that we can implement the transformation more swiftly and decisively.

The reorganisation will enable the integrated clusters to deliver more comprehensive and person-centered healthcare services that are appropriate and closer to the patients. This will help to reduce the need to access specialist care and the A&E at the hospitals.

The reorganisation will also facilitate scaling up of programmes and services to benefit more Singaporeans. In addition, the integrated clusters will be able to offer their employees a wider and deeper range of professional development opportunities, and a broader platform for cross-learning that will benefit staff and ultimately our patients.

[Back to Contents](#)

CRITERIA FOR AUTO-RENEWAL OF COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSIST SCHEME (CHAS) CARD

24 **Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong** asked the Minister for Health (a) whether the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) cards have been automatically renewed for households that do not respond to the invitation letter for renewal; (b) whether these households receive the same subsidy tier upon automatic renewal; and (c) whether the Ministry allows for auto-renewal to the same subsidy tier for retired senior citizens with no change in their household situation.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: A household's eligibility for and level of subsidy under the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) depends on their latest household income or property Annual Value, as well as household composition. To ensure that households receive the correct level of subsidies, households are requested to submit a renewal application form every two years so that we can verify and update their latest household information.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) seeks to make the renewal process convenient for CHAS cardholders. Households would receive a reminder letter about three months before their CHAS cards are due to expire. For those who do not respond, another renewal reminder letter is sent about one month before their CHAS cards expire. The renewal application form is included with the reminder letters. The application form is pre-filled based on our existing records, to make it simpler for households to update their household information.

MOH also works with partners such as the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) to publicise information about the renewal process, as well as to reach out and provide any necessary assistance to individuals and households who may not be familiar with the renewal process. The CHAS application form is also available online, and at various locations such as polyclinics, public hospitals and Community Centres.

We will continue to review the CHAS renewal process from time to time to ensure that it is convenient to the public and enables them to receive appropriate levels of subsidy based on their latest circumstances.

[Back to Contents](#)

BLUE AND ORANGE CHAS CARDS ISSUED IN 2015 AND 2016

25 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Minister for Health how many blue CHAS cards and orange CHAS cards were issued by the Government in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

Mr Gan Kim Yong: 290,000 Blue and 170,000 Orange CHAS cards were issued in 2015, while 400,000 Blue and 240,000 Orange cards were issued in 2016.

[Back to Contents](#)

UPDATE ON SME WORKING CAPITAL LOAN SCHEME

26 **Mr Liang Eng Hwa** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) (a) what is the number of applications and utilisation rate of the SME Working Capital Loan Scheme since its introduction in 2016; (b) whether SMEs face cash flow concerns or inability to obtain funding for their business growth; and (c) whether there are plans to enhance the attractiveness and availability of the scheme.

Mr S Iswaran: The SME Working Capital Loan was announced at Budget 2016 to help viable SMEs access working capital and continue growing their businesses. The scheme complements existing Government loan schemes and commercial loans offered by financial institutions. Since its launch in June 2016 to December 2016, the SME Working Capital Loan has catalysed more than S\$700 million in loans, benefiting approximately 4,300 SMEs.

Based on the 2016 DP Information Group SME Development Survey, 96% of SMEs which applied for Government and commercial working capital term loans of five years and below were successful in their applications. This comprised 79% who received the full amount requested, and 17% who received partial approved amounts⁸.

82% of the approved loans under the SME Working Capital Loan are less than the maximum quantum of S\$300,000. The current scheme is therefore sufficient to meet the needs of most applicants. The Government has regular meetings with the financial institutions and chambers and associations to understand and monitor the financing needs of SMEs, and is prepared to provide greater assistance if necessary.

[Back to Contents](#)

TAX-FREE WITHDRAWALS FROM SUPPLEMENTARY RETIREMENT SCHEME (SRS) ACCOUNTS

⁸DP Information Group surveyed SMEs on the outcome of their financing applications, which included applications for both Government and commercial working capital loans. The high percentage of approvals for full and partial amounts implies that SMEs were able to access financing to address cash flow concerns or for business growth.

27 **Mr Yee Chia Hsing** asked the Minister for Finance whether the Ministry can allow tax-free withdrawals from the Supplementary Retirement Scheme (SRS) accounts to the extent where the SRS contributions do not benefit from any tax deduction due to the personal income tax relief cap of \$80,000 that will be effective from the Year of Assessment 2018.

Mr Heng Swee Keat: All personal income tax reliefs, including SRS contributions made on or after 1 January 2017, are subject to an annual cap on personal income tax relief of \$80,000 from Year of Assessment 2018. This cap on personal income tax relief preserves the progressivity and fairness of our tax structure.

SRS members are advised to evaluate whether they would benefit from tax relief on their SRS contributions, and make an informed decision on whether to make the contribution in the first place. Generally, those who have reached their personal income tax relief cap can place their monies in the same investments outside of the SRS, and can enjoy the same tax treatment on the gains from these investments. This achieves the same outcome as the Member's suggestion to allow tax-free withdrawals from the SRS when the contributions do not benefit from tax relief.

[Back to Contents](#)

ALLOCATION AND UTILISATION OF ACTIVE SG FUNDS

28 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth as at 31 December 2016 (a) what has been the total amount of funds allocated for ActiveSG; (b) what is the size of the ActiveSG membership; (c) what is the total amount of ActiveSG dollars that have been (i) utilised (ii) extended (iii) forfeited; and (d) what happens to the forfeited and unconsumed portion of the allocated funds respectively.

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien: As at 31 December 2016, there were almost 1.2 million ActiveSG members. The budget for ActiveSG, including the operating budget for facilities such as sports stadia and swimming pools, was about \$60 million.

The complimentary \$100 ActiveSG credits given to new members are intended to encourage members to kick-start an active lifestyle and for them to experience the various sports facilities and programmes. Thus far, almost three quarters of members have utilised their credits. The ActiveSG credits amounted to about \$10 million in revenue forgone per year.

Sport Singapore (SportSG) announced in November 2015 that the validity of the credits

will be extended for another year, so long as the member uses them at least once in the last 12 months. More than 630,000 members benefited from the extension. About 150,000 members had their credits lapsed on 31 December 2016 despite email reminders.

[Back to Contents](#)

BREAKDOWN OF EXPENDITURE INCURRED BY GRASSROOTS ORGANISATION COMMITTEES FOR FY2015/16

29 **Mr Png Eng Huat** asked the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth for FY2015/16 what is (i) the amount of expenditure incurred by grassroots organisations and (ii) the percentage share of this expense incurred by Citizens' Consultative Committees, Community Club Management Committees, Residents' Committees, Neighbourhood Committees, and others respectively.

Mr Chan Chun Sing (for the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth): For FY2015/2016, the total expenditure for Grassroots Organisations (GROs) was \$206 million.

The percentage breakdown of this expenditure is:

Grassroots Organisation	Percentage Share
Citizens' Consultative Committees	37%
Community Club Management Committees	27%
Residents' Committees	22%
Neighbourhood Committees	2%
Others (e.g. CSC, C2E, MAEC, IAEC, SCEC, WEC, YEC, etc.)	12%

[Back to Contents](#)

SPECIALIST TEAM FOR ATTEMPTED SUICIDE CASES

30 **Mr Kok Heng Leun** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development whether

the Ministry will consider having a specialist team who provides psychological support and mental health expertise to go with the police when the police responds to cases of attempted suicide.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: Singapore adopts an inter-agency, multi-pronged approach to address suicides through promoting upstream prevention, encouraging help seeking behaviour, providing support to at-risk groups, and offering crisis intervention and support.

For cases of attempted suicide, the priority is to ensure the immediate safety of the person attempting suicide. The Police are thus activated as the first responder to attend to the crisis situation immediately.

Police officers will, when they notice signs of suicidal tendencies, recommend the appropriate follow-up including engaging the next-of-kin to assist in caring for the person, or referring the case to the Samaritans of Singapore for counselling. If there are signs indicating possible mental instability, the Police may refer the person to the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) for an assessment of the person's mental state, and treatment if necessary.

The current staged approach works well and it rightfully prioritises the immediate safety of the person attempting suicide. Time taken to mobilise a larger team, including psychological and mental health experts, may delay our response.

[Back to Contents](#)

NATIONWIDE STUDY ON EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

31 Assoc Prof Daniel Goh Pei Siong asked the Minister for Social and Family

Development whether the Ministry will conduct a comprehensive nationwide study on the employment rate and employment conditions of persons with disabilities and special needs, with a focus on finding out the employment difficulties they face and how their salaries compare to other workers with similar qualifications.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: Employment is integral to enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and integrate with society. In 2013, SG Enable (SGE) was set up to enhance employability and employment options for persons with disability. SGE works with voluntary welfare organisations to seek out employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and to

place and support them in these jobs.

Over the past two years, SGE and its partners have collectively placed more than 1,000 persons with disabilities into employment. SGE has also supported internships for about 75 tertiary students with disabilities in our Institutes of Higher Learning. Employment support for persons with disabilities range from training for employability, to job placement and support, to working with employers to put in place arrangements for better integration.

Through these employment support efforts, SGE has gained a better understanding of the needs and challenges of persons with disabilities seeking employment. With this knowledge, SGE will continue to render timely and customised support to persons with disabilities in seeking and sustaining employment.

Persons with disabilities comprise about 0.55% of the resident labour force. 60% of them tap on the various employment support schemes ranging from transportation subsidy, income supplement and training support. These persons with disabilities are mainly employed in the hospitality, food and beverage, wholesale and retail and administrative support sectors. Their median monthly gross wage ranged from \$1,000 to \$2,800.

MSF will continue to explore means of capturing information on the employment status and conditions of persons with disabilities, so that we have a more complete picture of the situation, and can better support them as part of our diverse workforce.

[Back to Contents](#)

DATA ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND/OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN SINGAPORE

32 **Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) how many persons with disabilities and/or special needs are there in Singapore; (b) what is the breakdown of this number based on the type of disability and/or special needs; (c) within these categories, what is the further breakdown based on functioning levels; and (d) if any of such data is not available, whether the Ministry will carry out a study for the purposes of more targeted policymaking.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin: The prevalence rate of Persons with Disabilities in Singapore is as follows:

POPULATION GROUP	APPROXIMATE PREVALENCE RATE
Student population	2.1% of student population ⁹
18–49 years	3.4% of resident population ¹⁰
50 years and above	13.3% of resident population ¹¹

Persons with sensory (blind and deaf) and physical disabilities would constitute half of the disability group. The remainder comprises those with Intellectual Disabilities and Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

An enhanced standardised in-take assessment was introduced in 2016 to enable professional staff to assess the level of functioning of Persons with Disability in our funded services. This enables staff to provide appropriate levels of intervention and support as required.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development refines its system of data collection regularly. The Ministry has started on a project to leverage on the Social Service Net (a national IT system for the social service sector) to collect more comprehensive data across our disability services. We will also work with partner government agencies to put together a more complete disability dataset to better guide disability policy and programme development.

[Back to Contents](#)

PROPERTY/ESTATE AGENCIES AND AGENTS REGISTERED IN

SINGAPORE FROM 2007 TO 2016

National Archives of Singapore

33 **Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan** asked the Minister for National Development for each of

⁹Source: Ministry of Education. This is based on the number of reported cases of students with sensory impairment, physical impairment, autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability. The total student population is put at approximately 460,000.

¹⁰Source: National Council of Social Service. Based on a random sampling of 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 18 and above done by NCSS in 2015, the self-reported disability prevalence rate was 3.4% for those aged 18–49 years old. This includes those who acquired disabilities due to accidents and illness. The resident population is put at approximately 3.9 million.

¹¹Source: National Council of Social Service. Based on a random sampling of 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 18 and above done by NCSS in 2015, the self-reported disability prevalence rate was 13.3% for those aged 50 years and above. This includes those who acquired disabilities due to accidents, illness and old age. The resident population is put at approximately 3.9 million.

the years from 2007 to 2016, what is the number of (i) property/estate agencies in Singapore and (ii) housing/estate agents registered in Singapore.

Mr Lawrence Wong: CEA was set up in October 2010 to administer the new regulatory framework for the real estate agency industry. The annual number of Estate Agents (EAs) and real estate salespersons (RES) since CEA's formation is as follows:

Year#	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of EAs	1,288	1,487	1,492	1,425	1,369	1,369	1,286
Number of RES	28,766	30,577	31,040	31,783	30,830	29,262	28,397

All figures were accurate as of 1 Jan of their respective years. The figures for 2011 are the exception; they were published on 9 Jan 2011, in the middle of CEA's first licensing and registration exercise.

[Back to Contents](#)

FAKE FOOD IMPORTS DETECTED

34 **Er Dr Lee Bee Wah** asked the Minister for National Development (a) how many cases of fake food imported from overseas have been detected by AVA over the past three years; (b) what is the breakdown of the country of origin in these cases; and (c) what action has been taken against the suppliers.

Mr Lawrence Wong: The Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) has not detected any cases of fake food products in Singapore to date. Fake food is defined as food that is made from ingredients that are not edible and can be hazardous when consumed.

The Government places great importance in ensuring that our food is safe. In addition to sampling food imports for safety tests, AVA also conducts checks to ensure that food is accurately labelled. From 2014 to 2016, AVA took enforcement action against 26 cases of mislabelling of food products, including honey, black moss and chai seeds. The traders involved were warned or fined, and required to correct the labels.

The maximum penalty for importing fake food or mislabelling food products is a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or both.

[Back to Contents](#)

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY BCA AGAINST MANAGING AGENTS OF MANAGEMENT CORPORATIONS OF STRATA TITLES (MCSTS)

35 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for National Development (a) whether there is an increasing trend over the last five years on the number of complaints received by BCA on managing agents of Management Corporations of Strata Title (MCSTs) over their non-delivery of service or compliance; and (b) whether there are processes in place to ensure only managing agents of MCSTs with the necessary credentials are allowed to operate their business.

Mr Lawrence Wong: We have not seen an increase in the number of complaints received about service standards of managing agents (MAs). BCA receives about 30 cases of such feedback annually. This number has been consistent over the last five years.

MCSTs have the flexibility to appoint MA firms that best serve their needs. To aid them in their choice, MCSTs can select from a list of MA firms accredited under the voluntary Accredited Managing Agent (AMA) scheme. This scheme is jointly administered by two industry associations - the Singapore Institute of Surveyors and Valuers, and the Association of Property and Facility Managers. Accredited firms are required to have staff who are trained in recognised estate or building management courses, and who also possess sufficient experience and knowledge in property and strata management.

To help raise the overall competency of MAs, the BCA Academy also offers courses covering the strata management framework and relevant rules and regulations. We encourage MAs to make use of these training opportunities.

[Back to Contents](#)

APPLICANTS ABOVE INCOME CAP FOR RENTAL FLATS

36 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development for each year of the past three years (a) how many applicants above the income cap for rental flats have applied for rental flats; and (b) how many of such applications have been approved.

Mr Lawrence Wong: HDB exercises flexibility for deserving households who do not meet the eligibility criteria, such as the income ceiling, to rent a flat from HDB on a case-by-case

basis.

Between 2014 and 2016, about 1,900 households requested for a waiver of the income ceiling criterion, of which 273 applications were approved. The other applicants were assessed to be able to afford other housing options, or had family support.

[Back to Contents](#)

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REPLACEMENT OF BATHROOM DOORS IN NEW HDB RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

37 **Ms Sun Xueling** asked the Minister for National Development (a) whether there has been an assessment on the practicality of providing wooden laminated doors for HDB bathrooms given usage patterns; and (b) whether HDB will consider replacing the wooden laminated doors with aluminium bi-fold doors for the bathrooms of new HDB residential developments.

Mr Lawrence Wong: HDB has provided laminated timber bathroom doors for standard BTO flats since 2001. These doors have undergone performance tests, including repeated wetting and drying cycle tests, and meet the requisite industry standards for use.

However, depending on their usage habits, some residents could find such timber doors unsuitable; for example, in bathrooms where the door could be frequently splashed with water due to floor washing, bathing patterns or lack of shower screen. In such cases, deterioration would appear over time.

It is thus the flat owners' responsibility to use and maintain the doors properly.

Nonetheless, if issues with the laminated timber doors occur within the one-year Defects Liability Period (DLP), HDB will perform rectification, which may include one-for-one replacement.

Separately, HDB has been carrying out studies on new bathroom door options as part of its regular effort to keep flat fitting designs up to date. One new option is laminated UPVC folding doors. These doors are durable, easy to maintain, and offer a modern timber look and feel that complements the bedroom doors. They are also more resistant to fungus growth. Since November 2015, HDB has introduced laminated UPVC folding doors for bathrooms in new public housing development launches.

[Back to Contents](#)

IMPACT OF SELECTIVE EN BLOC REDEVELOPMENT SCHEME (SERS) ON

COMMUNITY SOCIAL CAPITAL

38 **Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap** asked the Minister for National Development whether there has been a study done or planned on (i) the degree of preference of Singaporeans to sink deep roots in a local community as opposed to having to move out under the Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS) with no guarantee of relocation in the vicinity and (ii) the erosion of social capital when people who have lived in the area for a long time and contributed to the community move out under SERS.

Mr Lawrence Wong: Under the Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS), residents move en bloc to a new precinct nearby, preserving the existing community ties built over the years. HDB has also put in place the Joint Selection Scheme, where up to six households affected by SERS can book their new replacement flats together, to continue living near their old neighbours.

HDB conducts a biennial survey to gauge residents' level of support and satisfaction for SERS, including the extent to which SERS has impacted their family and community ties. Over the years, our surveys have consistently shown a strong support level for SERS, at 85% or more, with residents affirming benefits such as having a brand new living environment, being able to move nearby and with their old neighbours.

[Back to Contents](#)

MANAGEMENT OF FOOD WASTAGE THROUGH SCHOOLS AND NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITIES

39 **Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) whether the Ministry will be working with schools to raise awareness about food wastage and ways to manage the issue; and (b) whether the Ministry will consider setting up a network of food banks within communities so that households with excess food items can donate them via these neighbourhood food banks.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M: My Ministry works closely with schools to raise awareness on the importance of reducing food wastage. The National Environment Agency (NEA) supports schools by providing educational resources such as posters, videos and presentation materials on

food waste reduction.

Later this year, the NEA will implement a two-year food waste reduction and recycling project for schools. Under this project which will involve 10 schools, emphasis will first be placed on reducing the amount of food waste produced and then on recycling the remaining food waste using on-site food waste recycling machines. There will be assembly talks on managing food waste in participating schools and training will also be provided on the proper segregation of food waste for recycling to the schools' staff, students and canteen stall-holders. In addition, they will host learning journeys for neighbouring schools and their community partners to share about their food waste reduction and recycling efforts. Apart from raising awareness about food wastage, the project will demonstrate the benefits of proper food waste management to other schools and encourage them to set up similar systems.

Currently, food redistribution organisations such as The Food Bank Singapore, Food from the Heart and Fei Yue Community Services accept donations of excess food items from households. For example, The Food Bank Singapore currently has 15 collection points for households to drop off their food items. As these organisations are located within the communities, they are able to channel food efficiently to those in need. My Ministry will continue to support these organisations' efforts on food redistribution and encourage companies and households to donate their excess food to them.

While food redistribution is one step towards reducing food waste, we should move upstream to avoid generating food waste in the first place. The NEA has developed a food wastage reduction guide for households with a wide range of useful tips on how to reduce food wastage, such as planning food purchases to avoid having to throw out expired food items that are not consumed.

To raise awareness and minimise food wastage in the community, my Ministry works with the Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). For example, the NEA has partnered the South East district on the 'Eco-Kepalas @ South East Organisations' programme and North East district on the 'I Love My Food' initiative to encourage households to reduce food wastage.

[Back to Contents](#)

MEASURES TAKEN TO MANAGE E-WASTE

40 **Mr Chen Show Mao** asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (a) what measures are being taken to encourage consumers and waste management companies to adhere to environmentally sound practices in managing e-waste; (b) how effective have these measures been; and (c) whether the Government will consider establishing strict guidelines on e-waste collection, disposal and recycling for consumers, businesses and waste management companies.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M: Electrical and electronic waste (e-waste) is a key waste stream in Singapore. Approximately 60,000 tonnes of e-waste is generated in Singapore each year. E-waste contains valuable and scarce materials, but also small amounts of hazardous substances such as mercury and cadmium. The release of such substances into the environment may pose pollution and health problems.

To encourage environmentally sound management of e-waste, my Ministry supports voluntary recycling programmes such as REcycling Nation's Electronic Waste (RENEW), which is led by Starhub, DHL and recycler TES-AMM. Under this programme, consumers can place their e-waste in bright green e-waste recycling bins which are conveniently located in shopping malls and commercial buildings. The e-waste will then be collected by DHL and delivered to TES-AMM. RENEW, which is an expansion and replacement of its predecessor StarHub E-waste Recycling Programme, now covers almost 280 locations around Singapore. Since 2012, these programmes have collected and recycled about 110 tonnes of e-waste. Businesses that want to recycle their e-waste, can participate in the HP Planet Partners Programme or Dell Recycling Programme. The e-waste collected is sent to e-waste recycling facilities, which are subjected to pollution control requirements.

As the amount of e-waste generated in Singapore is likely to increase as technological advancement leads to faster product replacement, my Ministry has been exploring options for a comprehensive nationwide system for the collection, disposal and recycling of e-waste.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) commissioned a study in March 2016 to develop possible options for an e-waste management system. The ongoing study includes a survey of the entire e-waste collection and recycling value chain, including treatment and disposal. In addition, consultations were conducted in October and November 2016 to seek industry's views on elements of an e-waste management framework. The results from the study

and industry consultations are expected to be released this year.

[Back to Contents](#)

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS ON RETENTION OF PRIZES WON DURING COMPETITIONS

41 **Mr Zainal Sapari** asked the Minister for Education (Schools) whether there is a policy to guide schools in deciding on the retention of prizes, especially cash prizes or those with cash value, won by students representing the schools during competitions.

Mr Ng Chee Meng: Schools set their own internal guidelines in managing prizes won by student representatives in competitions. This is done based on factors such as the school's education philosophy, type of prizes and competition rules.

Some schools have a practice that book vouchers are shared equally amongst team members. When cash prizes are given, winners may be encouraged to donate a portion of the cash to support needy students or for their own Co-curricular Activity (CCA). This inculcates in our students a sense of gratitude to the larger community supporting them in the competition, and to pay it forward to benefit fellow students through the school programmes.

The preparation for, and experience of the competition are the most valuable aspects. This is the educational value the students gain irrespective of prizes won. We will remind schools to explain the purpose of their management of cash prizes to students and parents clearly.

[Back to Contents](#)

STATISTICS ON TIME TAKEN BY INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING GRADUATES TO SECURE FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

42 **Mr Desmond Choo** asked the Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) (a) what is the average and median time taken for graduates of institutions of higher learning to secure full-time employment; (b) whether the time taken is lengthened with the economic slowdown; and (c) what are the steps taken to help these graduates find employment.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: The Ministry of Education does not measure the statistics as requested by the Member. Instead, the Graduate Employment Survey (GES), conducted by the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) annually, provides an indication of the employment outcomes of

graduates six months after the completion of their final examinations.

For 2016 fresh and post-National Service Polytechnic graduates, the overall employment rates were 90.6% and 95.4% respectively, slightly higher than 88.9% and 91.5% in 2015. Full-time permanent employment rates for the fresh and post-National Service Polytechnic graduates in 2016 were 55.8% and 70.1% respectively, also comparable to 2015 figures. Many Polytechnic graduates chose to work in part-time/temporary jobs as they prepared to commence further studies.

The results of the 2016 GES for Autonomous Universities (AUs) are being tabulated. Based on the 2015 GES results, the overall employment rate six months after graduation was 89.5%; full-time permanent employment rate was 83.1%.

The IHLs have in place various programmes and initiatives to help fresh graduates find employment after graduation. For example, education and career guidance are provided to students to broaden their awareness of the jobs and careers available. The IHLs also organise annual career fairs for graduating students, and provide resources to help graduating students as well as fresh graduates in their job search. Workforce Singapore (WSG) programmes and initiatives are also extended to fresh graduates to help those who require more support in their job search.

[Back to Contents](#)

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