Assembly and Executive Review Committee

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Review of d'Hondt, Community Designation and Provision for Opposition: Briefing from Professor Yvonne Galligan

23 April 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr Gregory Campbell
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Paul Givan
Mr Simon Hamilton
Mr Sean Rogers
Ms Caitríona Ruane

Witnesses:
Professor Yvonne Galligan   Queen's University Belfast

The Deputy Chairperson: I welcome Professor Yvonne Galligan to the meeting. Thank you for coming and for sending us your written presentation. If you are ready to go ahead with your presentation, feel free to do so.

Professor Yvonne Galligan (Queen's University Belfast): Thank you very much, Chairperson. I will make a short presentation that broadly summarises and pulls together some of the ideas that I presented in my submission. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to discuss aspects of the operation of Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I would like to suggest that, on the matters in question, it is timely to consider their operation as part of a regular cycle of reflection and assessment of the workings of the institutions. I imagine that finding agreement and building consensus might take a little bit longer.

The issues are treated separately, but they have reciprocal impacts. I would like to broadly suggest that the principles of inclusivity and power-sharing that underpin the Northern Ireland Act 1998 should be kept in mind as discussions on reform are undertaken, and interpreted to include gender diversity, as well as other forms of diversity. My presentation will address those matters, as did my submission.

I turn first to d'Hondt. As I stated at greater length in my written submission, d'Hondt has served Northern Ireland's politics well. It has been accepted as a fair and transparent means of distributing Executive and Assembly Committee leadership positions. In my view, there are three conditions that make d'Hondt work well in the Northern Ireland setting: transparency, inclusiveness and proportionality. This enables the politics of negotiation on substantive post distribution to take place in a context of certainty regarding the numerical distribution of positions among the parties. However, given the need to accommodate five parties in the power-sharing Executive, d'Hondt works best with a

minimum threshold of 10 positions, which is sufficient for all significant parties to be represented while conforming to the principles of inclusivity and power-sharing.

The consequences of a reduction in the number of Executive posts or Committee Chair and Deputy Chair positions would need to be carefully considered, not only in light of the politics of inclusion, but in respect of the operation of d'Hondt and its role in preserving the consociational arrangements. If a formal opposition were to emerge, d'Hondt could still act as a mechanism for the allocation of Executive positions as it does at present, leaving the Executive-forming parties to negotiate on the substantive policy areas and a Programme for Government. It could also be retained for the allocation of Committee Chair and Deputy Chair positions, again in the interests of inclusive politics. Often, a Government will seek to control the majority of Committee leadership positions. That happens elsewhere, but, in a Northern Ireland context, conserving a meaningful voice and presence for non-Executive party representatives would be an important part of continued confidence building in the political arrangements.

A related aspect of inclusion and power-sharing is that of gender, facilitated by d'Hondt. As my submission indicates, women have less of a share of power in the institutions than men. Over half of the number of men who were elected in 2011 hold leadership positions in the Executive or Assembly, compared with 40% of the number of women who were elected.

In the context of a reduced-in-size Assembly and Executive, women are likely to lose out on power-sharing. That could potentially be exacerbated further if the plans to reduce each constituency representation by one are carried out. If one examines the last seat filled in each constituency in the 2011 election, one will see that women are in a more marginal position than men. On the last count, 13 men and five women were returned, which is 15% of men and 25% of women who were elected in 2011. DUP and SDLP women would be particularly vulnerable to seat loss if the pattern of 2011 were repeated. Three of the five DUP Members and two of the three SDLP Members who were elected on the last count were women. Therefore, the point that I am making is that d'Hondt interacts with other dimensions in addition to party representation. In the interests of inclusivity, representative democracy and power-sharing, gender balance in the political institutions matters.

I turn now to community designation. The mechanism for supporting consociational decision-making is coming under the spotlight once more. Views are divided on whether it accommodates competing identities or perpetuates ethnic divisions. It has certainly irked those representatives who do not wish to indicate a community designation and those who argue that they represent both major communities and others. At the same time, community designation has provided an element of certainty in the political process that, with other measures, has allowed politics to establish legislative routines and practices. Changing community designation in respect of the 12 voting areas that are listed in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 is a sensitive matter. It is about trust in the institutions and politics to deliver a fair outcome that commands broad cross-community consensus. The effects of any change to those principles of inclusivity on power-sharing need to be considered in that regard.

Community designation interacts with cross-community voting. That is evident in the operation of petitions of concern. The intent of petitions of concern was to alert the Assembly to upcoming decisions that could have a bearing on significant community-specific interests. However, the use of petitions of concern seems to have extended beyond the key community-specific interest that it was intended to address. Therefore, there is scope for a number of initiatives on that, some of which could be undertaken independently of other reforms. One could be to clarify the circumstances in which a petition of concern could be invoked, possibly confining it to legislation only. Another would be to introduce a qualified majority for non-legislative matters on which a petition of concern is lodged. A third, more radical departure would be to require a qualified majority for all issues that are related to community designation and cross-community voting. That would remove the parallel-consent requirement for key decisions. That point has been raised in the briefing paper that accompanies this evidence hearing. I lay those points before you without necessarily coming to a view on one side or the other. I offer them as issues for discussion and exploration. Obviously, a political decision is required on which of them, if any, would be considered possible to pursue.

Finally, I turn to the matter of opposition. I present a case in my submission for enhancing current opposition opportunities because I believe that there is scope to extend the role of Committees as they stand at present. I believe that there is benefit to be gained from relaxing the discipline of the Whips in order to facilitate wider discussion in Committees and wider purview of Committees. There is also something to be said for not having every MLA on a Committee as of right. Again, those issues are open to discussion.

There are consequences to the introduction of a more "conventional" form of opposition. One of those is that the Executive may need to begin to consider operating under the rubric of collective Cabinet responsibility, at least in some areas. Indeed, in that regard, the discussion on opposition allows space for a discussion on how the Executive Government are functioning. What about policy-sharing, policy continuity, joined-up government, and thematic policy initiatives? These are areas that would enable an opposition to function more effectively if some semblance of collective government were in place and if there was a longer-term plan to which the Executive could be held accountable.

If an opposition were instituted, there would need to be rules for what exactly constituted an opposition. How much speaking time would the opposition or opposition parties be allowed? Who would represent the opposition group or groups? Would there be a leader of an opposition or would all leaders of opposition groups have rights of their own? Would that person or persons have additional speaking rights and the right to question the First Minister and deputy First Minister? That is all part of the nitty-gritty of developing the framework for oppositional politics to take place. If that is the decision, it may not be easy to move to that model immediately, but, in the absence of that happening, there is merit in Committees flexing their muscles more and taking on inquiries of a more cross-cutting or far-reaching nature than they currently do. That would require additional research assistance. Indeed, enhancing the research capacity allocated to individual MLAs would contribute to MLA scrutiny and development.

One aspect in considering the emergence of an opposition is the leadership of Assembly Committees. Customarily, in Westminster-type systems, those positions are in the gift of the Government. I suggest, as I did earlier, that the d'Hondt system could continue to be used for allocation of Committee roles of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, with all recognised opposition groups having an opportunity to be involved in leading scrutiny of the Executive. With that, I conclude my formal presentation to you. I am very happy to discuss any matters arising.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks very much for that, Professor Galligan. I will start off by asking a general question. I noticed that when you referred to conventional opposition in your submission, you had the word conventional in inverted commas. I mention that because the argument has been advanced that, to have a normal democracy, to go through the normal processes of holding government to account, scrutinising legislation, and so forth, there is a need for a formal opposition. Others will argue that, given the institutions that we have here, there is no need for that because there is a high level of scrutiny and holding the Executive to account. The difficulty is that many people use Westminster and the system there as their reference point. Would you like to comment on that general issue of the formal opposition and whether that is a prerequisite for normal democracy, whatever "normal" means?

Professor Galligan: That is a very interesting question, Chairperson. It goes to the heart of the matter, which is how we construct our democracy here, and to what extent is it normal or not. I think that looking at the Westminster Government/Opposition relationship to some extent constrains our opportunities for thinking about what opposition means and what holding the Government to account means. Clearly, a normal arrangement — in the sense of a Westminster-style system — is largely based on a two-party system; certainly a system of two dominant parties. Obviously, there are other parties in the mix, but two parties are dominant in that system. It is very easy to accept that as the model. As the briefing paper points out, there are many forms of opposition and every one of them is appropriate for that particular circumstance. In my view, our facility for holding the Government to account already has much potential. We should be looking at how that power is utilised, developed, and exploited, if we feel that there are some constraints on our holding the Government to account. That is my view. There is a lot of scope for developing the existing institutions with democratic procedures and practices that are also "normal".

Mr Beggs: You seem to be arguing for continuing with big government and that, should there be a reduction in the number of Departments and Ministers, you would want to see additional junior Ministers appointed for the purposes of inclusivity. However, as junior Ministers are appointed by a principal Minister, that practice would not necessarily widen inclusivity. Why do you argue that it would? I do not understand that.

Professor Galligan: If there is to be a change in the number of Departments, it would involve more than just changing that number and keeping everything else as it is. There has to be a lot of consideration. If we are going to change the size and number of our Executive Departments, we must think very carefully about how we make government work. There is no point in, let us say, cutting out two or three Departments and merging them with others without a rationale as to how those

rearrangements will deliver better government. It may be that more than one Minister will be needed to deliver that better government in those particular spheres. I do not necessarily say that the current method of appointing junior Ministers should be continued. Junior ministries should perhaps be distributed in a similar way to the senior ministries.

Mr Beggs: I will move on. Petitions of concern have been abused; most people recognise that. However, the abusers have been the DUP and Sinn Féin, which also have the power to stop any change to the mechanism of petitions of concern. What would encourage those parties to relinquish some of that power, which they seem to relish?

Mr Hamilton: It is hard to abuse the system when you cannot get enough signatures.

Mr Givan: You established it in the agreement.

Professor Galligan: I think that petitions of concern are meant to be warning bells and signals.

Mr Beggs: They are just blockages. They block legislation and motions.

Professor Galligan: Yes; that is exactly what has happened. That is why I suggest that, instead of a petition of concern being triggered by 30 signatures, the test or the threshold should be much higher than that. A petition of concern should require, for example, a qualified majority of the Members of the Assembly. That would mean that it would require more than any individual party alone — either the DUP or Sinn Féin — to lodge a petition of concern. That is what I am getting at, moving forward.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Tá fáilte romhaibh. You are very welcome. I want to make two points. I will start with the petition of concern. Lest you leave with something that is not factual, I think there was a bit of misrepresentation by previous contributors. First of all, Sinn Féin cannot complete a petition of concern on its own; we have 29 MLAs. Secondly, as part of the negotiations, we negotiated petitions of concern in relation to an equality mechanism. A petition of concern is a warning bell in relation to equality.

If you look at where Sinn Féin has used them, you will see that it was to protect equality; for example, the Ad Hoc Committee on welfare reform. If you look at where other parties used them — indeed, Roy's party has used them along with the DUP — it was to block areas of equality. In fact, I think that the DUP used a petition of concern to stop Jim Wells from having to apologise when he should have had to apologise.

Mr Givan: The National Crime Agency —

Ms Ruane: Sorry, I did not interrupt you, Paul.

Mr Givan: I did not speak.

Ms Ruane: He uses a good example with the National Crime Agency. That was in relation to the protection of rights in respect of fingerprints and retention of data, which goes against international courts and legislation.

You spoke about a qualified majority. In relation to petitions of concern, what is your view on maybe two parties having to initiate a petition of concern instead of requiring 30 signatures, so that it is not just one party? I think that the DUP has used a petition of concern seven or eight times on its own. Do you think that is a good mechanism for democracy and equality?

Professor Galligan: My point, without getting into any of the party politics of this, is that irrespective of what party is able to initiate a petition of concern under the current rules on its own, and one never knows what the electoral arithmetic will throw up at any point in time, I suggest that 30 signatures is too low a threshold, irrespective of whether three parties could each achieve 30 signatures.

There has to be an agreement that an issue, whatever it may be, is a genuine issue of concern that reflects a general concern within the Assembly. That requires more than just 30 Members to indicate a concern. Maybe it could be through two parties. However, maybe instead of it being party related, it could be Member related: the threshold could be moved up to whatever 55% or 60% of the

membership of the Assembly is, so that there is some way of moving a petition of concern and not using it as a blocking mechanism, as has been said.

Ms Ruane: I will move to my second area. I wanted to compliment you on your focus on gender diversity. That is particularly interesting, given that we have 21 women Members. When we look across the Benches, there are very few women. Although I welcome the percentage of 40% of women in the Executive, that figure is so high only because Sinn Féin picked three women out of its five Ministers. There is only one other woman in the Executive. We need to improve on that 40%.

In relation to MLAs, I note — I have not seen this before — how women would lose out if we cut the number of constituencies and the number of Members who represent constituencies. Like Pat — I think it was Pat who said it — I am not a great fan of the first-past-the-post system. It is fundamentally anti-democratic, and we should not be blindly following England or anywhere else. The Scottish system is interesting. We were over there recently. They have regional representation, looking at policy, and also individual MSPs representing constituencies, so they are focusing on constituencies and another layer is focusing on policy. I think that there is something interesting there.

There is also an opportunity to increase gender representation. I am regularly the only woman on a Committee. That is the case for women from other parties, and I know that that is a factor for them. I think that that then often leads to gender-biased representation on various Committees. So, I welcome that you are here and that you focused on gender. Could you give us some advice on how we not only maintain but increase the number of women in the Assembly?

Professor Galligan: Increasing the number of women in the Assembly is a challenging agenda. I think that, unlike many other countries in the world, there is a mechanism at your disposal that most parties have decided that they do not want to look at. That mechanism is the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, which enables parties to introduce their own supportive measures for gender-balanced representation. I think that political parties could use that tool much more to support women's representation.

It occurred to me only after I had presented my submission to you some weeks ago to do a piece of research on looking at who filled the last seat at the previous election That is because, obviously, the last seat is always the marginal seat, if there is one. From the figures, it was very clear that, in some instances, women who ran in 2011 were in a more vulnerable position and in a greater position of vulnerability than men. I think that that is quite disturbing. So, it is about bringing more women in as candidates and positioning them to run in winnable constituencies. That is the key. It is not enough to bring in more women to run as candidates; they need to run in winnable constituencies. Again, I think that there is a lot of room for further development there, so we will have to see how it goes.

Northern Ireland lags way behind the other devolved Parliaments and Assemblies. Over 40% of Members in the Welsh Assembly and over one third of Members in the Scottish Parliament are women. That happened because, when both Parliaments were established, they embedded the principle of equality of opportunity. In our circumstances, although we also embedded the principle of equality of opportunity, that relates to different fault lines and divisions in our society. I think that now is an appropriate time to extend that to gender and gender balance in Parliament.

Mr Rogers: You are very welcome. I have a little question to ask about petitions of concern, which seem to exercise a lot of people around the table. Do you not believe that a qualified majority would undermine the whole purpose of a petition of concern and, in particular, squeeze smaller parties? That is my first question.

Professor Galligan: Do you mean that it would undermine that it is meant to express a community's key interests?

Mr Rogers: Yes.

Professor Galligan: I do not think that we would be discussing this if petitions of concern had not been used differently from the way in which they were intended to be used. That is why I raised the issue of a qualified majority. The threshold of that qualified majority is open for question. I only suggested a figure, but it does not have to be that; it could be 55%. The point is that petitions of concern are a way of supporting the trust in and confidence that politics is representative, which is sort of what you are saying to me. I think that when that role leaks away, petitions of concern have to be brought back to their initial purpose and function. It seems to be that the point that can trigger a

petition of concern is causing the problem. It is on that moment that one must focus. What are the trigger mechanisms that alert that alarm bell? If 30 is too low, perhaps we should be raising it to prevent the alarm bell from being raised too often and unnecessarily. However, we also want to set it at a point that allows for a genuine expression of interest. So, I think that it is a matter of finding the formula that brings it back to what it was.

Mr Rogers: My second point is about opposition. You said that, in a Northern Ireland context, conserving a meaningful voice and presence for non-Executive parties is very important. What sort of a mechanism do you see for that? You mentioned additional time and so on for non-Executive parties. Can you elaborate on that?

Professor Galligan: If there is a scenario where there is a clear-cut opposition and parties choose not to take their seats in the Executive and go into opposition, I think that it would become quite important that those parties be recognised in their capacity to hold the Government to account and that they be recognised in their own voices in doing so. So, if one, two or three parties decide not to take up their seats, they would not be a collective one-voice opposition; there would be an opportunity for each of them to bring their perspective and diverse view to the table to hold the Executive to account. They would not be one block.

That leads me to say that there is also a role for people from very small parties. They could join together or align with other parties to have speaking rights as such, or they could form an independent block in their own right as an independent grouping of MLAs wishing to hold the Executive to account. So, I envisage a more inclusive and more diversified opposition than a one-voice opposition.

Mr Dickson: Thank you for your presentation. I want to follow through on two areas: community designation; and opposition. I appreciate that you indicated that community designation has served the process well to this point in time, but you use a word that irks me. That word is "irked". It is not due to being irked that I do not choose to designate myself as unionist or nationalist; it is a matter of political belief and philosophy that I do not wish to be defined by a sectarian title. Rather, I wish to represent everyone in the community. There needs to be recognition of that. I feel undervalued, and, indeed, my vote is undervalued, for as long as that remains. Is there an understanding of that? How will we work our way through that?

Professor Galligan: I appreciate your point. I was mindful that there are clearly tensions for people and representatives — individuals are representatives of different voices in the community — and it is clear that this space for diverse voices is restricted because of the community designation. It is a point at which, if there is ever going to be "normal" politics, the normality of the politics has to include all voices. Therefore, community designation needs careful thinking through. For example, people say that "other" is a community designation, but, in fact, it is not really a designation at all.

Mr Dickson: No, it is not, and it undervalues a group of people in the Assembly. If I wish to share my voice with unionists or nationalists on a particular subject, I am free to do that, and I can effectively add my voice to theirs. However, they are in a more difficult position if they wish to add their voice to mine. Their voice counts more than mine. It is an area on which we are clearly going to have to do a lot more work, and I would welcome more information on it as we progress through this.

Turn to opposition, there is a feeling or perception that there is no opposition in the Assembly, that opposition was poorly thought out in the Assembly or that it is ill catered for in this organisation. Having looked last week at, for example, the Scottish Parliament, I can see that it is quite clear that we actually have clear lines, roles and rules for people in the organisation and that we are not that different from the Scottish Parliament, which has opposition. There may be a few tweaks that we could do with matters such as speaking time, for example. However, I am interested to know how you see opposition being developed. Does opposition just simply mean those parties that are either too small to be in the Executive or that choose not to be in the Executive? That is also a free choice; a party may choose not to be in the Executive. It may be that, at some stage in the future, a significant number of people may choose not to be in the Executive. One party or another may decide to take that line. Your view is that d'Hondt serves everybody well, so how would it serve in those circumstances? Would it allow the largest non-Executive party more time than the next smallest party and so on, going right down to the single Member?

Professor Galligan: Opposition is an issue that needs careful attention. Having looked at the Assembly, I think that there is a lot of opposition in the Assembly as it is and that there is a lot of scope

for opposition in the Assembly. As I said, there is room to extend and to take the power that opposition allows for Committees to be more proactive —

Mr Dickson: Even in this model?

Professor Galligan: Even in this model. That is my view.

This relates to an earlier point that I made, but I think that, at the moment, we should welcome that we have got so far with our consensual politics, with the politics of the Assembly and with the consociation of power-sharing politics. Even though the agreement is 15 years old, the Assembly is in fact not much more than six years old — you could maybe push it to seven — in its regular and continued working. So, in a way, we have only one full parliamentary term, if you like, under our belt. This is our second parliamentary term, and it has its own uncertainties, such as length of time and all the rest.

I think that we can sometimes be a little too hard on ourselves. We can say, "Things are not working, so we have to fix them really quickly." In fact, maybe they are not working, but maybe we do not need to fix them really quickly; maybe we need to fix them slowly and carefully in an organic manner rather than in a knee-jerk manner. The Scottish Parliament has been going for 15 years, so it has double the amount of experience and is bedding in. As we all know from our own experience of politics and other areas, it just takes a little bit of time for dust to settle and for processes to bed in. However, that does not mean that we should not be reflecting on how those processes are working. We should absolutely be doing that. That is where we should be with the opposition issue.

Mr Campbell: My apologies for being late. The issue that you raised about gender and the last seat had not occurred to me. Surely you do not think that the greater preponderance of females that is likely to win final seats is down to their gender. Is it not the case that the lesser number of female candidates that stood previously is only now being reflected in voters becoming more used to giving higher preferences to more women rather than women being regarded as the final candidate or the second, third or fourth choice?

Professor Galligan: I think that that is an important point about how the electoral system interacts with candidate gender, who the voters choose and how that works through the system. Interestingly, at the previous election, we found that voters were more inclined to give women than men their first vote across all parties except the DUP.

So, even though there are fewer women than men running as candidates, when you average it all out, you will see that voters were as likely to give their first vote to a woman as to a man but, in fact, went further and were more likely to give their first vote to a woman. That is the first point.

Mr Campbell: I presume that that is the case where, across the board, voters can select a male or a female. If they do not have a female candidate, obviously they cannot vote for a woman. I take it that that analysis took account of that and that you had to discount areas where there were all-male candidates.

Professor Galligan: Yes. That tells us that the Northern Ireland electorate is not necessarily going to discriminate against women candidates. That is an important point.

Coming to your second point, when one looks at the counts and at who was in the race for the final seat, one sees that, across all 18 constituencies, it is obvious that more men than women were in the race for the last seat. However, when you take that as a proportion of the number of men and women who were elected, it looks as though women are in the more vulnerable position. My point is that if you take the last seat away, you will consequently have proportionately fewer women than proportionately fewer men returned.

Mr Campbell: I understand that. Can we ascertain why that should be the case? Why should female candidates be at proportionately greater risk? I accept that they are, because you looked at the figures and found that to be the case. However, why is that? Why is it that, on the fifth seat, a female is more likely than a male to be at risk?

Mr Hamilton: May I butt in? I will propose a theory for why that is the case. You noted that, for the DUP, three of our five female Members were vulnerable at the last seat. Each of those three was a first-time candidate.

Mr Campbell: That is my point.

Mr Hamilton: Yes, and the other two topped the poll in their constituencies. I know that very well, because I trailed in miserably behind one of them. So, I am living proof that our voters far prefer women candidates. Three of them were first-time candidates, and one was brand new in politics and had never run for anything in her life. So, they did not have the benefit of incumbency, which is widely acknowledged everywhere in political science as being of some benefit to those who are running. There is other evidence to back that up. Those three people were all brand new candidates running for Assembly constituencies. In two cases, they were councillors, but that is only a tiny area of their entire constituency.

Mr Campbell: That is what I was alluding to.

Mr Hamilton: Sorry, I jumped in ahead of you.

Mr Campbell: Is it not the case that, slow and evolutionary as it might be, the issue that you correctly raise is more likely to be resolved when we see more female candidates on the ballot paper over two or three electoral cycles? As more women become more predominant in more places in the electoral world, more voters will place them higher on the ballot paper and they will be less likely to be the last candidate. Is that not likely to be the case?

Professor Galligan: I definitely agree with your point that, the more women who run, the more likely it is that women will be elected. That is very true, and I support that argument for a long term.

I have also observed that incumbency clearly matters, as you said. Whether somebody is a first-time candidate or not in the new political experience also very much matters, as does the level of support that a party attracts. Not all the women that I was looking at were first-time candidates. One of the vulnerable women was a long-time candidate for another party. Therefore, incumbency does not always protect or help women, nor does the fact that they were first-time candidates. So, party support also fits into this equation, and we need to consider that.

Ms Ruane: I have two brief supplementary questions to ask. It is very interesting to see how everyone gets so exercised when we talk about proactive measures for women. It is great that we are having this debate; I think that it is really important. Anyone who is involved in politics knows that it is about party support and how you divvy up party votes in a constituency. So, if a party wants to get women elected, it can, and if it does not take measures to do that, there will be very few women elected. It is as simple as that. You can add incumbency, etc, but there will be loads of men who are not incumbents and are still well up there. So, rather than starting to pick holes, I think that we would be better accepting that we have a problem, that we have a lack of women and that we need more.

I would be the first to say that Sinn Féin needs more women, yet we have the highest number of women in the Assembly. However, that is not good enough for me or, indeed, for the men in our party. That is because it should not just be women fighting for gender equality; men should do that as well. Thankfully, the men in our party are doing that.

I forgot to ask about this previously, but latitude is the other point that I wanted to raise. I think that others in the room might be interested in that. I speak as the only female Whip, which is also interesting, but I know that Stewart is a Whip for his party. You mentioned more latitude in Committees. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

Professor Galligan: I was thinking that a Committee — the Health Committee, for example — might feel that an issue that it wished to tackle fell within its broad remit or policy area. That issue need not necessarily always shadow an Executive matter, but it is obviously a societal problem of some kind or another. That Committee would investigate it as a Statutory Committee in its own right. It would explore and develop it and come up with a view or recommendations and a position on that policy issue.

That might also mean that that Committee would have to work with another Committee, because many of our societal problems are multidimensional. For example, somebody who is in poverty is not just poor financially; they are poor in many other ways and need support in many other ways. So, Committees could instigate tackling those kinds of cross-cutting issues off their own bat — and why not?

Ms Ruane: Thank you. I am sorry that it was so hard to hear because of the two gentlemen talking. I think that we need to be respectful to our guests.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks very much for coming along, Professor Galligan. Thanks for your written submission and for your patience in answering all the questions.

Professor Galligan: You are very welcome. Thank you very much for the discussion. I very much enjoyed it. I wish you well in your work.