



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
(Hansard)

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**Pobal / Ultach Trust / Forbairt Feirste**

22 September 2011

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)  
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Dominic Bradley  
Mrs Brenda Hale  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mrs Karen McKeivitt  
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín  
Mr Pat Sheehan  
Mr Robin Swann

**Witnesses:**

Ms Janet Muller	)	Pobal
Mr Aodán Mac Póilin	)	Ultach Trust
Mr Gearóid Mac Siacais	)	Forbairt Feirste

**The Chairperson:**

We are being briefed by Aodán Mac Póilin, the director of Ultach Trust; Janet Muller, chief executive of Pobal; and Gearóid Mac Siacais. Good morning. You are very welcome. Janet, are you leading on the group? Perhaps you could introduce everyone.

**Ms Janet Muller (Pobal):**

Cuirim i láthair Aodán MacPóilin ó Iontaobhas Ultach, Gearóid Mac Siacais ó Fhorbairt Feirste,

agus is mise Janet Muller ó Phobal. I introduce Aodán Mac Póilin from Ultach Trust and Gearóid Mac Siacais from Forbairt Feirste, and I am Janet Muller from Pobal.

**Mr Aodán Mac Póilin (Ultach Trust):**

I will make some opening remarks. I realise that time is short, so I will leave out quite a lot.

In June, Mr Scott of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) gave evidence to this Committee in which he said that he would be disappointed if the sector was dissatisfied with the consultation process relating to the reorganisation of the Irish-language sector, led by Foras na Gaeilge. Giving further evidence last week, he said that there was to be another meeting of the advisory committee. That was to be the fourth meeting of that committee: one in January, one in February, one in September and then a final one before the decision by Foras na Gaeilge, which is to be made tomorrow.

Unfortunately, we did not have the minutes of that meeting, so I had not realised that there was to be a meeting. I am a member of that advisory committee. A meeting was organised for Dublin today at 2.00 pm. We did not hear about it until Monday afternoon. It came as an e-mail at about 4.30 pm, and I caught it by accident at 5.45 pm on Monday. I said that I would go, and we asked for documentation.

Mr Scott said that documentation was to be sent to the advisory committee so that it could make two responses: a written response in the very short timescale before the meeting and an oral response at the meeting. I e-mailed Foras na Gaeilge to ask for the documentation and got no reply. Then, on the Tuesday, I discovered the minutes of this committee from last Thursday. We did not get the documentation until 9.30 am on Wednesday, which, of course, meant that there was absolutely no chance of us getting together. Two of the other members are in Dublin, and I am in Belfast, so there was no chance of us getting together to make a considered response. If the meeting, which was to be a lobbying or response meeting, was to be meaningful, there had to be some chance that it could have an effect on the outcome. We decided that the meeting would have no effect on the outcome and was intended to have no effect on the outcome, and we, therefore, decided not to attend.

That is the latest example in a very long list of examples of a very poor consultative process. It is really bad. I will document all the rest of it and send it to you, because we do not have time to go through it today. I would love to talk to you about the equality impact assessment (EQIA), but it would take me about five minutes and we do not have very much time.

**Mr Gearóid Mac Siacais (Forbairt Feirste):**

I will add to what Aodán said. When we began this process, following the decision of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC), the Foras called a meeting of all the core-funded bodies. At that meeting, it asked us to appoint two representatives to attend its coiste feidhmiúcháin, as it called it then, which was a pre-advisory committee. We were invited to that meeting but given no documentation in advance, despite having requested it. We were left sitting in an anteroom while the meeting progressed and invited in at the end of the meeting and asked to listen to a presentation from the head of Foras na Gaeilge. We asked two questions. We asked what our status was — were we members of the committee or observers on the committee? — and what our terms of reference were, as we had not had any. They said that they were not making any decision about our status but that we were not entitled to attend all the meetings and would be briefed. So, it was highly unsatisfactory.

Since the outset of this process, all the core-funded bodies have prepared documentation, sent it to Foras na Gaeilge and asked questions. At every stage, that has failed to bring an adequate response, as Aodán's point illustrates. Despite having been in the process for a number of years, our only sight of the Foras proposal came in the form of two information sessions, the first of which outlined the range of the three schemes that it said would be brought in to replace the other schemes. It said that there would be a second session at which we would get other schemes. The number of schemes changed from 10 to 12 to nine, back to 10 and down to eight. It has now been resolved at eight in a document that was not sent to us but was posted on Foras na Gaeilge's website.

From our end of the table, this process has been flawed from the beginning, and we are now left with a situation — if we read the latest document that Foras has put up — where Foras will present the schemes as a definitive document at its meeting of 23 September. Those schemes will be cleared by Foras's board, and they will then go through a series of drafts before being put to

the North/South Ministerial Council on 12 October, at which stage we will basically be into a countdown to the ending of core funding. It is highly unsatisfactory.

One of the major flaws with the situation of the core-funded bodies in this jurisdiction is that no account has been taken of the fact that there is no strategy for the Irish language here. All the schemes that are now posited on Foras's website are linked to the 20-year strategy for the development of Irish in the southern jurisdiction. It is premature to push through a set of schemes that will fundamentally dismantle the infrastructure of the Irish-language voluntary sector in the North without having a strategy in place to carry forward the development of Irish.

**Ms Muller:**

I want to reiterate those points. Last week, we sent out a document that contained a number of questions. Those questions were agreed by five of the organisations, but only three of them were able to be here today. We are aware of the responsibilities of this scrutiny Committee, and we welcome the opportunity to come and talk to you about this issue.

According to the document that Foras na Gaeilge put on its website yesterday, the amount of money that is under discussion over the next three years is €16.4 million. That is a substantial amount. We believe that it probably represents employment for 60 to 70 full-time workers in the Irish-language sector. Our understanding is that all those people will be made unemployed when the new schemes come in: some may get jobs and some may not, but all will be made unemployed. There are issues in relation to those redundancies, which remain unresolved, even though most of the core-funded organisations have had to give redundancy notices to all their workers. My organisation has now done that four times.

The opposition of the Irish-language sector to the proposals and our major concerns about the consultation process have been on the record from the beginning. Those concerns are contained in the submissions made by the sector, and the findings of the research that was carried out by the Assembly's Research and Information Service earlier this year confirmed the predominant concerns and opposition of the sector.

We have raised major concerns about the legality and good practice elements of the process in

relation to risk impact assessments. We understand that a draft risk impact assessment was carried out, but we have no idea how it was done, when it was undertaken or what the details are. We also understand that an equality impact assessment screening exercise was carried out, but we are not aware of whether a full equality impact assessment will be carried out. We believe that not only must that be carried out but it must go to public consultation.

As Gearóid said, the Irish-language voluntary sector was given no notice that the document posted on Foras's website was to be made available. It was posted yesterday, and the meeting of the advisory group was to be held today. However, the sector's representatives felt that the situation was so impossible that they have decided not to attend that meeting. As far as we are aware, that document will go to the board of Foras na Gaeilge for agreement tomorrow. I think that this is an emergency situation because of the practice.

The document contains new information, there are a number of gaps and significant changes, and this is the first time that figures have been mentioned in relation to any of the draft schemes. The issue of research, which was mentioned previously, has now disappeared. Lifelong learning has been incorporated into advocacy. The description of all the schemes is extremely sketchy, with 200-word descriptions being given for schemes that are proposed to deal with €2 million or €3 million each. That is very disturbing. There is no discussion of the implications of the proposals, and it is clear that some organisations will be disqualified from application. I stress that, even among those organisations that will not be disqualified, there is extreme disquiet and dissatisfaction about the process.

The timescale is extraordinary and a great cause for concern: a document appears on 21 September, an advisory group meeting is to take place on 22 September, and the draft is to be agreed on 23 September. We are not sure whether any further documents are going to be discussed or put forward to the board. If they are, we have to ask why they are not available to the sector. I am not sure whether they are available to the scrutiny Committee, or when they were made available if they are. There is no information about umbrella organisations and the need for advocacy work to be carried out by a representative body, as opposed to a single organisation.

As Gearóid said, links are made specifically between certain schemes and the 20-year strategy

in the South. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, except that there is a policy vacuum in the North at present. Since the Minister has said that her Department is preparing the strategy — we welcome that fact — it would appear to us only logical to wait until that strategy is available, has been agreed and has gone to consultation before any changes are proposed that will affect the core-funded organisations in the North.

We ask for two things of the scrutiny Committee: that it asks for a meeting with the Minister specifically to discuss the consultation process and the proposals in the light of progress made in the Department on strategic development; and that the questions that we have put to it be sent to Foras na Gaeilge and the Department for written responses. We are aware that Foras na Gaeilge and DCAL have made a number of submissions, which have been very informative and useful, but, at this stage, responses in writing are needed for the scrutiny Committee to be sure.

Go raibh míle maith agat.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much. You will be aware that this Committee has raised the issue of the EQIA and the regulatory impact assessment (RIA) in the last number of months. Will you outline why you believe that there is a need for an EQIA?

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

Under the legislation, a screening exercise is supposed to take place at an early stage of policy development. That is a standard procedure, but it was not done at all. This process has been in train since December 2009. There was no consultation about the proposed structures before that date. You have been given evidence that there have been consultations; but there have been no consultations at all about the reorganisation that was proposed then. We were told to co-operate better, and we did so. My organisation — a small organisation of four people — produced a document to show that, in the previous five years, we had done 24 partnership projects. There was a high level of co-operation. There was nothing about ending the core-funded sector and that was never discussed. That is my first point.

The EQIA, or a screening exercise, should have been carried out before proposals took place,

but it was not. DCAL was essentially a sleeping partner. Arthur Scott said to me at a meeting that the Department of the Gaeltacht was doing the heavy lifting. In other words, DCAL was a nodding dog in this process.

On 22 September last year, we wrote to DCAL to raise the issue of an EQIA. That was the first time that the Department had even thought about it, which is completely in negation of good practice. In November 2010, Mr Scott made the following statement to this Committee, with different members on it. He said:

“A screening exercise will be carried out on the methods of funding to identify whether an equality impact assessment is required, and I can give the Committee that commitment.”

In March 2011, Foras na Gaeilge sent out a consultation document. It was written in Irish, which is a problem because some of Foras na Gaeilge’s target audience are English-speakers. If you send out a consultation document, you are supposed to leave the consultation open to its target audience. It is mentioned several times in the schemes that English-speakers are part of the target audience. The document stated — I will translate:

“DCAL has concluded that the proposals put forward in this paper do not require a full equality impact assessment. The equality impact screening exercise is available on the Department’s website.”

I went to the Department’s website, and there is no equality impact screening exercise there. I sought direction from officers in DCAL, one of whom phoned me to say that he had never heard of a screening exercise. That was an officer who worked in *[Inaudible.]* I then put in a freedom of information request to DCAL, because there is no point in putting in a freedom of information request to Foras na Gaeilge, and I received a screening exercise on a DCAL screening form. That screening exercise claimed that a full EQIA was not needed — a conclusion that I would strongly dispute if there was any forum where I could dispute it. It was neither dated nor signed, but the person who completed the form was identified as the CEO of Foras na Gaeilge. The form also asks who owns and implements the policy, and the answer given was the board of Foras na Gaeilge. The screening exercise is in English.

At an advisory committee meeting recently, I asked when the decision to ratify the screening exercise had been made, because I could not find any reference to its having been ratified by the board of Foras na Gaeilge, which is supposed to have ownership of it. The CEO said that it had



not been ratified by the board of Foras na Gaeilge, which had never seen nor heard of it.

There is something badly wrong with that sequence of statements and assertions. An interdepartmental cross-border steering group is not entitled to ratify a screening exercise because it is an ad hoc group that includes people from another jurisdiction — from a Government Department in the South. The statement in the Foras consultation document that DCAL had undertaken a screening exercise was not true. DCAL had not undertaken a screening exercise. The statement in the screening exercise itself, that the board of Foras na Gaeilge had ownership of the screening exercise, was not true. Furthermore, it is not on the Foras website, even though that is a legal requirement.

This is just one example of the way in which Foras na Gaeilge has dealt with the core-funded sector. It is characteristic of all our experience with them since December 2009. Every principle of good practice in policy development has been thrown to one side. DCAL is not free of responsibility here either, by the way. Statutory requirements and due process have been ignored; critical information has been withheld; and the process has been characterised by dissembling and evasion. Major decisions are made without prior consultation, which again contradicts everything. There has been no meaningful, open discussion with any chance of influencing outcomes, which is another key principle of a consultation process. This has been an absolute disaster and a travesty.

**The Chairperson:**

That said, we have heard a lot of the objections around the proposals. DCAL officials and Foras na Gaeilge representatives in this room would contend that the status quo is unsustainable and that no viable alternative has been put forward during the consultation.

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

They have never asked us for a viable alternative. Every time we have a meeting, they tell us what is on the table, that it is an NSMC decision, that there is nothing we can do about it, and that we have to implement it. They have not allowed discussion. We are allowed to go to meetings only to make positive comments on the schemes. That is the way it is. It is appalling.

**The Chairperson:**

Have you put forward any written submissions with alternatives to them?

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

We have not tried to reinvent the wheel; no. But what we have said —

**The Chairperson:**

Do you accept that the current situation is unsustainable?

**Ms Muller:**

One document — I think that representatives of Foras na Gaeilge referred to it at a previous meeting with the Committee and that it was made available to the Committee — was entitled ‘I dTreo na Físe’ or ‘Towards the Vision’. That was one of the first documents that was agreed by all 19 core-funded organisations, and it very clearly proposed a different model for action. It outlined the need for core funding, as opposed to something else — there are two different words for it in Irish, croí-mhaoiniú and bun-mhaoiniú. The document gave a clear model for continued funding that would ensure longer-term planning and the core activities of organisations. In all sectors, it is recognised that, if you are basing your activity on project funding, you cannot secure the core activities of an organisation, because you are going from project to project to project. The core-funding model was put forward very early in the process. We never had any reaction from Foras na Gaeilge as to its response to either that document or its proposals.

The second document went two months later, and, again, it outlined different proposals. All the 19 core-funded organisations have also made a number of submissions. I think that my organisation has made six or seven submissions proposing different models of action. So, it is not true to say that no alternative has been offered; many alternatives have been offered. We are the people who rely on this funding, so what we are proposing is realistic and workable, because it is not to our advantage to propose something that is not.

One final point that I feel I have to make is that it has been said that the current model of core funding is not sustainable. The document that was published on the Foras na Gaeilge website yesterday gives breakdowns for budgets for the schemes that are proposed. Over three years, the

breakdown is €16.4 million. That is not a saving in money at all, so we have to ask what it is that is unsustainable about the model that is in place already.

One of the key factors with core funding is that organisations can attract funding from other sources, which my organisation and all the organisations have done extensively. Over the past seven years, our organisation has brought in more than 50% of its funding each year, and an increasing amount of our funding every year comes from other sources. If there is no secure funding for an organisation, other funders will not step in and make that money available to the Irish language, so that money will be lost. So, I think that the statement that says that the current model is unsustainable needs to be questioned. We have never been given an evidence base for that.

Last week, when representatives from Foras na Gaeilge were here, they were asked specifically whether the proposals were based on sociolinguistic research, and they said no. They said that the proposals were based on the work that is being carried out by the sector. I think that many organisations will say that a great deal of their work has been mistakenly left aside, and the danger is that the sustainability and continued existence of many of those organisations will throw the basis of the draft proposals completely into disarray. There are many questions to ask.

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

I will respond to your question in a slightly different way. It is true that there is less funding. Everybody accepts that. Like most of the organisations, my organisation's funding for next year will be down by 25% from its baseline in 2008. We are absorbing that, working with it and working through it. Yes, there is less funding, but it is also possible that some of the organisations are inefficient. That has never been demonstrated. If you have an inefficient organisation, get rid of it. We proposed ways of pooling secretarial costs, overheads and, possibly, offices. When we were working on co-operation, there were all sorts of discussions on that, because we knew that the funding issue was coming. However, they came up with this extraordinarily incoherent notion of doing away with the entire sector and starting again, and the loss will be extraordinarily significant. The thing does not make sense organisationally or economically.

**Mr D Bradley:**

Go raibh míle maith agaibh as an chur i láthair a rinne sibh. Chuir mise cúpla ceist an tseachtain seo caite faoin bhun-taighde atá faoi na moltaí seo, agus, mar a dúirt Janet ansin, ní raibh freagraí inghlactha ar bith ag príomh-fheidhmeannach Foras na Gaeilge.

Last week, I asked the chief executive of Foras na Gaeilge what research its proposals were based on, and the answer to that question was not very satisfactory. In this day and age, I would expect that a government body or arm's-length body making those sorts of proposals would base them on objective scientific, sociolinguistic research, rather than on what appeared to be a back-of-the-envelope calculation. I think that that is disappointing. It is disturbing to hear you talk about the flawed process that has been engaged in here. There seems to be an attempt to railroad the proposals through, regardless of the reaction of the key partners in the sector. I think that that is wrong.

If there is a need for rationalisation, reorganisation or realignment, I think that it should be done in collaboration with the partners and on the basis of some form of scientific, sociolinguistic research. Unfortunately, that has not happened here. Nineteen organisations seems to be a lot, and better forms of co-operation between them could probably be achieved. I am not convinced that the proposals that Foras na Gaeilge has come up with and its planned way of implementing them are the best way forward.

I do not know what your views are of the fact that we seem to have almost a proliferation of Irish-language organisations. Sometimes, you get the impression that if someone thinks that he or she has a new idea that would benefit the Irish language, they can then set up yet another organisation. Do you believe that there is a need to streamline the approach across the 19 organisations?

**Mr Mac Siacais:**

We talk about the 19 organisations, and we raised this issue repeatedly with Foras na Gaeilge. In the middle of this process, which was kick-started by a decision of the North/South Ministerial Council, the former Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Rural Affairs was doing all the heavy lifting. The process was being driven by the desire of a former Minister of the

Gaeltacht to bring in a 20-year plan and to streamline Irish-language organisations into the delivery of that plan. We said that that was a flawed approach, because it did not take cognisance of the differing bases from which the Irish-language community was developing in the two jurisdictions. Also, the process, which was kick-started by that ministerial decision, proceeded while Foras na Gaeilge rolled out new schemes and created new organisations.

We raised the point that, if a rigorous assessment were done of the effectiveness and value for money being achieved by Foras na Gaeilge in its full range of funding, it should all be assessed in the round and we should not have had the roll-out of a new Gaeilge sa Phobal scheme midway through the process, which, I think, has created another 12 or 14 organisations.

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

Language revitalisation is a complex and multifaceted process. I could not tell you what an ideal number of organisations is, but I know that an arts organisation and an organisation lobbying for education should not be under the same committee. That is because you need to have specialisation.

You have to look at the areas of expertise and drive that are needed, and you will then have an appropriate number of organisations that are based around that. You do not start by saying that 19 is too many. You could count the number of core-funded organisations in Catalonia and Wales, and, taking Scotland as another example, there are seven core-funded organisations there for a language community of 61,000 people. There are 1.5 million-odd Irish speakers in Ireland, and there are 19 organisations. What comparison do you use?

There is surprisingly little overlap among the organisations. My organisation is mainly a lobbying one; we have lobbied for television, as a result of which the Northern Ireland economy receives £3 million a year on top of the block grant that comes directly from Westminster. We have added to the Northern Ireland economy by accident because we are pushing something to promote the Irish language. It has also brought in another £100,000 a year indirectly to Ulster Scots for the same reason, given that there was an element of catch-up there. All that has come in on top of the block grant, but was it taken into account when they calculated the value of my organisation? No, it was not.

As an advocacy body, the job of my organisation is to promote the Irish language on a cross-community basis. It is the only dedicated organisation in Ireland to do that. I have not only Protestants in my board and in the staff but unionists. They are people who are passionate about the Irish language and who are passionate about maintaining the Union with Great Britain and staying in the UK. That is not replicated anywhere. I am stuck into advocacy, and Janet, who has a totally different approach, is stuck into advocacy. They say that we should have one advocacy organisation for all Ireland. There are no unionists in the South. If there are, I have not heard about them. My job is specific to Northern Ireland, and I am disqualified from applying for that funding. I am not allowed to apply for it. Ferdie Mac an Fhailigh talked last week about a closed shop being replaced by open competition. It is not open competition; I am not allowed to compete because of the way that it is structured, and the other two organisations represented here are not allowed to compete.

**Mr D Bradley:**

I am recalling the history of the whole process. I get the impression that the Department here has not really engaged with it and that DCAL has allowed the Department in the South to dictate the terms without standing up for the Northern organisations and speaking up on their behalf. It seems to have accepted everything that is done without any question whatsoever. Is that your impression?

**Mr Mac Siacais:**

I will make a direct response to that and harden it. At the most recent meeting, which was the second information session that Foras na Gaeilge held, we discussed the schemes in some detail. Besides the clear indications that the back-of-the-envelope approach would be preferred to anything more rigorous or scientific, I asked Donal Moran, who was at the meeting with another official from DCAL, whether they had followed the proceedings and whether they had sufficient Irish to follow them. He said, "I think we might have got the main gist of it, but Ferdie will give us a recap". I find it astonishing that officials from DCAL attended what was a key consultative meeting on proposed schemes and provision was not made for simultaneous translation that would mean that they did not miss any of the points that were made. In addition, Foras did not take effective notes to ensure that they were briefed adequately after the meeting. Neither of

those things happened, which raises a serious question about the level of engagement that DCAL has had in ensuring that the basis of the core-funded organisations and the interests of the Irish-language community in this jurisdiction were being protected.

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

It needs to be said that DCAL is more active now than it was. However, most of its activity seems to be to provide a rubber stamp.

**The Chairperson:**

OK. Are you content with that?

**Mr D Bradley:**

For the moment, yes.

**Mr Irwin:**

Given that only 26% of the organisations, which is five out of 19, responded to the consultation, can we take it that the other 74% are either not concerned about the issue or accept that there has to be change?

**Ms Muller:**

No, but that is a very important point. I was very surprised when I saw those figures, but I think that there was selective reporting of what happened during the consultation process. The figures, which are from last week's meeting, refer to what Foras na Gaeilge called an open, public consultation. It actually had to organise two public consultations, because the first one lasted for only three weeks and nobody knew about it, so it had to organise another one. Running concurrent with that was an invitation to the core-funded organisations to make submissions at different points during the consultation. As I said, I do not even know how many written submissions my organisation has put in. We must have put in seven, eight or nine written submissions to Foras na Gaeilge, but we have had acknowledgement of only one of them. I had to ask for that, because I was concerned that it had not been received. We have had no feedback whatsoever on what examination was made of the points that we made or of anything else. In addition, we have had no acknowledgement of how the two documents agreed by all 19

organisations on an all-Ireland basis, which I mentioned earlier and which were submitted fairly early on in the process, were processed. So, the figures that are given relate only to the public consultation that was going on at the same time as the consultation with the organisations. I understand why this sounds confusing; it is confusing to us, too.

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

I can simplify things a bit. Most of the organisations responded to the first consultation the previous autumn. The second consultation was forced on them, because, this day last year, we wrote to DCAL to say that the first consultation was illegal and had not followed procedure according to Northern Ireland legislation. Everybody knew that the second consultation exercise was designed for Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland people responded to it. The other people had already responded to a different consultation process.

**Ms Muller:**

My organisation made a submission to that public consultation. However, two days before, we made a similar submission to the consultation on the second information session, and, a matter of weeks before that, we made a submission on the first consultation meeting. It has been an ongoing process. Indeed, the research in the Assembly that was carried out earlier this year reflected the very deep concerns about the proposals across the Irish-language sector. All the written evidence is there. I can make any or all our submissions available, and I am sure that, if required, other organisations could do so too.

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

Eighty per cent of the organisations are strongly opposed to or have strong reservations about the process, including, as Janet said, those organisations whose future seems fairly safe and that are well positioned under the schemes. Those that are excluded and those that are still in the game are all worried.

**Mr Mac Siacais:**

In addition, there is a severe lack of faith and trust among the organisations that came together at the direction of Foras na Gaeilge and went through quite a lengthy process of preparing a document called ‘I dTreo na Físe’, which has been referred to and which was not even responded



to. So, a lot of organisations have no faith that the process is anything other than what Aodán referred to as a rubber-stamp exercise; the decision has been made and will be railroaded through. Under a Machiavellian reading, you could put the names of organisations against the proposed schemes and see who would feel relatively safe. The process has been flawed from start to finish.

**Ms Muller:**

It is important to say that some of the organisations that it is perceived will continue to have a role under these funding changes are also up front in their criticism and concern about the damage that will be done to the Irish language through these schemes.

**The Chairperson:**

I am conscious of the time.

**Mr Ó hOisín:**

Tá fáilte romhaibh chuig an Choiste seo.

**Ms Muller:**

Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Ó hOisín:**

I may have to declare an interest, because I am involved in some of the organisations that are being discussed. I have been told about the situation in the 1960s — obviously, I am too young to remember — when some 32 organisations across the island of Ireland were engaged in the preservation and promotion of the Irish language at a time when, historically, it was, perhaps, at its weakest.

I am aware of the work of quite a number of the 19 core-funded organisations, including Aodán's and Janet's, and I know the value of the work that they have done.

**Mr D Bradley:**

Nár chuala tú faoi Forbairt Feirste?

**Mr Ó hOisín:**

Chuala, cinnte.

Dominic referred to the €16.4 million or whatever. You made the point that, in the run-up to the drawing up of any strategy, it is critical to outline and make sure that a cost-benefit analysis of your own organisations is out there in the ether. Aodán and Janet talked specifically about the broadcasting fund, which I know about historically. I think that that is where the issue is here, and the historical issues go back some time as well. There is a major issue that needs to be addressed, and that must be done before any strategy comes in to place.

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

There is always a tension between a funder and a fundee. In my organisation, there were funders as well. Basically, everybody you give money to either hates you for not giving enough or despises you because they got away with it. That is the nature of funding, and you expect that. However, this is at a much worse level, and it is mainly to do with the massively unprofessional and cynical way that this process has been handled by Foras, with the collusion of both Departments.

**The Chairperson:**

OK. Thank you very much. No other members have indicated that they want to ask a question.

**Mr D Bradley:**

I will ask just one final question.

**The Chairperson:**

I am really not surprised. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr D Bradley:**

What indications have you had from Foras na Gaeilge board members of their attitude to these proposals?

**Mr Mac Póilin:**

There is a sort of omertà in the board. I am a former Foras na Gaeilge board member; I was on its board for eight years. You are not allowed to criticise the organisation when you are on the board. You are not allowed to discuss anything that has happened. I presume it is a bit like closed sessions here: you are not supposed to say anything. My wife, who is a board member, tells me nothing. For eight years, I told her nothing, and she now tells me nothing.

Although she tells me nothing, she happens to be involved in one of the organisations, so she has never been involved in any of the discussions about these schemes. If you read through the minutes of Foras na Gaeilge meetings, you will find that members are in and out like a fiddler's elbow on the bases of the perceived danger of a conflict of interest. So, every decision that has been made about the restructuring has been done with partial board involvement.

**The Chairperson:**

Was that final finally?

**Mr D Bradley:**

Yes.

**The Chairperson:**

OK. Thank you all once again.