



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Irish/Ulster-Scots Strategies: DCAL Briefing

20 September 2012

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

### Irish/Ulster-Scots Strategies: DCAL Briefing

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

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)  
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mrs Brenda Hale  
Mr David Hilditch  
Ms Rosaleen McCorley  
Mr Michael McGimpsey  
Mrs Karen McKeivitt  
Mr Oliver McMullan  
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín  
Mr Robin Swann

#### **Witnesses:**

Mr Aidan McCann	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Arthur Scott	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Dr Michael Willis	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

**The Chairperson:** Arthur, Michael and Aidan, you are very welcome. Would you like to make your opening statement, and then members will follow up with some questions?

**Mr Arthur Scott (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to update the Committee on the separate public consultations on the strategies for protecting and enhancing the development of the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture. The statutory context for the strategy is set out in section 28D of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It states:

*"(1) The Executive Committee shall adopt a strategy setting how it proposes to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.*

*(2) The Executive Committee shall adopt a strategy setting how it proposes to enhance and develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture.*

*(3) The Executive Committee—*

*(a) must keep under review each of the strategies; and*

*(b) may from time to time adopt a new strategy or revise a strategy."*

The Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15, which was published on 12 March 2012 following extensive public consultation, includes a strategy for the Irish language and a strategy for the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture as required building blocks necessary to deliver against priority 4, building a strong and shared community.

The Minister wrote to the Committee on 3 July stating that she intended to begin public consultation on 11 July in order to start work on delivering the Executive's Programme for Government obligations in relation to both strategies. The Minister also provided separate copies of the consultation documents for the Committee's information and comment. The Minister had previously stated her intention to launch the consultations before the Assembly summer recess. The objective of both consultations is to provide the opportunity for all stakeholders, particularly both sectors, to express their views on the aims, objectives and each area for action in the draft strategies and to put forward additional new ideas for consideration. The consultations do not seek public opinion on whether the strategy should be developed. That matter was dealt with in the Programme for Government consultation, and it was concluded, on Ministers' agreement, that the strategy should be included in the Programme for Government.

The key aims of the strategy for the Irish language are as follows: to create a framework where Irish can flourish and be shared by all who wish to use it; to protect and support the development and learning of Irish; and to promote wider understanding of the background to the Irish language. The specific objectives of the strategy are to increase the number who can access Irish-medium education, increase the number who use public services through the Irish language and increase access to Irish language media. Key areas for action included in the draft strategy, which consultees are asked to comment on, include education; family transmission of Irish; public services and community; media and technology; legislation and status of the language; and economic life.

The key aims of the strategy for the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture are to create a framework where the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture can flourish and be shared and enjoyed; to protect and support the development and learning of the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture; and to promote wider understanding and recognition of the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture. The draft strategy has the following objectives: to increase educational provision in all aspects of Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture; to increase access to Ulster-Scots language media, including online material; to promote the economic benefits of the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture; and to promote research on the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture. Key areas for action in the draft strategy, which consultees are asked to comment on, include education, media, use of the language, public services and culture.

As the consultation process started during the summer holiday period, the Minister decided that the consultations will last for 20 weeks. We are now about 10 weeks through that process. It is a significant increase on the recommended 12-week period and should afford all those who wish to respond the opportunity to do so. Following the consultations, there will be a period to analyse the responses and report the findings. At this point, it is difficult to be precise about the time required to analyse the responses received, as that will depend on the volume and detail. We estimate that somewhere in the region of eight to 12 weeks will probably be necessary, but that will be revised depending on the response. The findings from the consultation exercises will be shared with the Committee once the analysis has been completed.

The Minister stated her intention to conduct full, meaningful and inclusive consultations on both strategies. The consultations have been widely publicised and made accessible to everyone who wishes to respond. We specifically invited opinions and input from Irish language and Ulster-Scots stakeholder groups as well as those on the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) equality unit's list of consultees. Foras na Gaeilge, the Ulster-Scots Agency, the ministerial advisory group, the Ulster-Scots Academy and other relevant bodies have also been asked and have agreed to ensure that stakeholders known to them will be made aware of the consultations and asked to respond. The documents are available on the departmental website. Each document has a separate web page that explains its purpose and includes links to the consultation document and other relevant information in respect of context, such as the Programme for Government, the St Andrews Agreement and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Those are provided for respondees, who can make their responses online through the website as well as by e-mail or post.

Throughout the consultation period, the Department continues to work with the Irish language and Ulster-Scots sectors to organise a number of events to highlight the consultations and provide an opportunity for public debate about the content of the draft strategies and emerging issues. The Department will also accept invitations to attend consultation meetings that are organised by interest groups. For example, on Tuesday past, Michael attended a public consultation meeting that was hosted by Newry and Mourne District Council. In addition, the consultations will be promoted at events that are held by the two sectors, for example, Líofo on Saturday and Pobal's Rights and Revelry, which is to be held on 6 October. The chief executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency and the director of the Ulster-Scots Community Network are actively considering events where we could

promote the consultation. The network plans to engage with its membership base in relation to responding to the consultation. Over 400 groups are affiliated to the network. That meeting will be followed by a meeting of the Ulster-Scots joint forum, which comprises members of the Ulster-Scots Community Network and the Ulster-Scots Agency. DCAL officials will participate in that joint forum meeting, which will have a focus on the Ulster-Scots strategy.

During the consultation period, if clarification is required on particular suggestions or if further information is required from stakeholder groups about the ideas that they have suggested, DCAL will consider contacting them directly. That may take the form of individual meetings or focus groups, depending on the nature of their suggestions. The views of elected representatives and all those in local government are also very important to the consultation. All MLAs, MPs, MEPs and district councils have been invited to respond to the consultation.

A key stakeholder group — a normally hard-to-reach group — is children and young people. Work is being done by Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency to engage with young people and help them to share in the languages and enjoy, celebrate and share the cultures. We have been making efforts to focus attention on that group. The sustainability of both languages and the heritage and culture depends very much on the participation and involvement of young people going forward. To ensure that we can take on board their views, we have been working with the participation network. Its aim is to help the public sector to engage effectively with children and young people. It has helped us to produce a child- and young-person-friendly version of both strategy consultation documents. We will organise an event during October to allow children and young people to give their views on the strategy.

The DCAL equality unit has a list of section 75 consultees, who have been informed about the consultation. Work to identify anyone we have missed continues. One such group were individuals and groups from the sign-language community. If requested, the Department offers consultation documents in Braille, audiotape or large print. Following actions with Libraries Northern Ireland, it has placed links to the consultation on its website with encouragement to respond. Libraries Northern Ireland hosts Irish language reading groups in many of its libraries. Those groups will be made aware of the consultations and encouraged to respond. It has agreed to advertise the consultations and how to respond on a rolling loop via the plasma TV screens that are located in its main libraries and to supplement that with the distribution and promotion throughout the entire library network of a hard-copy poster and flyer about the consultations.

To ensure that maximum awareness is achieved, we have also used publicity to bring the message to as wide an audience as possible. Advertisements were placed in the three main newspapers at the start of the consultation. There was a press release from the Minister, which attracted coverage in the local media. Given the length of the consultation period, we plan a further press release about the participation network and the availability of that young-person-friendly document. We will supplement that with platform pieces in the local media up to the close of the consultation in November.

The announcement of the consultation was also displayed in the news story section of the departmental website. Again, we are relying on the efforts of Foras na Gaeilge, the Ulster-Scots Agency and others from both sectors to raise awareness of the consultation and to make the people with whom they are in contact aware of it.

DCAL has undertaken significant work to ensure that the knowledge and awareness of the strategy is as widespread and comprehensive as possible. We continue to proactively identify stakeholder organisations to make them aware of the consultation documents and encourage them to respond.

For example, following consultation with Comhaltas Uladh, DCAL intends to meet its representatives again to discuss their ideas for raising knowledge and awareness about the consultations and the responses to it. The marching bands community has also been identified as a stakeholder and will be contacted in relation to the Ulster-Scots consultation. DCAL officials are happy to meet any stakeholder if that will facilitate more meaningful responses to the consultation process.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much for your presentation. This is, obviously, the first opportunity that the Committee has had to discuss the strategies. We were disappointed from the outset that, despite the Minister's assurance that we would receive a briefing in advance of the consultations being published, we were just presented with the final document with no briefing. That said, however, we are where we are.

I understand why we are here in relation to the strategies, the context being the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the commitment that has been given through the Programme for Government. There will be other opportunities for the Committee to go through the documents in detail and for members to respond through their respective parties.

It will be interesting for us to read the responses to the consultation, and, no doubt, you will come to us at your earliest opportunity with that analysis. However, I have to say from the outset that, from my position, what I feel is being proposed in the Irish language strategy reads more like the principles of a Bill than a strategy. I do not see how you can fail to outline in the document the responsibilities that the Assembly has in relation to the charter. It totally ignores what has been done to date in relation to that and the responsibilities of the Assembly with regard to the charter and through legislation.

I see this as being presented as a wish list and an aspiration, and I take issue with the document. I believe that it stands outside the spirit of the charter to which the UK Government have signed up in the interests of protecting the language. The goal that has been set out is to create a bilingual Northern Ireland. I will resist that, as will my party.

I know you said that this is about the consultation and that maybe there is no requirement on the development of that. I am not really sure what you meant by that. In advance of presenting this for wider consultation, and because this is far-reaching and impacts on every aspect of life in Northern Ireland, what discussions did you have with other focus groups that sit outside the traditional stakeholders or other Departments? Have any costings been attached to this?

**Mr Scott:** Both draft strategies were prepared by DCAL officials in the context of the framework of the strategic objectives and actions set out in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which is an international convention that is designed to protect and promote regional and minority rights.

DCAL engaged with Pobal on the draft Irish strategy. Pobal is funded through the North/South body Foras na Gaeilge and has been extensively involved in consulting on Irish language legislation in the North and on a framework to support the development of the language.

**The Chairperson:** I am sorry, Arthur, would you mind speaking up? Hansard is finding it difficult to pick up on what you are saying.

**Mr Scott:** Do you want me to repeat it all? DCAL officials prepared both strategies in the context of the framework of the strategic objectives and actions as set out in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which is an international convention that is designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages.

DCAL also engaged with Pobal on the draft Irish language strategy. Pobal is funded by Foras na Gaeilge, one of our North/South bodies, and has extensive experience in and knowledge of working with the sector and wider interests on what is needed with legislation and a strategy or framework to support and protect the development of the Irish language. It was appropriate to build on that expertise and research, which was funded by money from the Governments in the North and the South, rather than for the Department to go out and recreate it. So, that was a source of expertise from which to draw.

Likewise, we engaged with the Ulster-Scots Agency and the ministerial advisory group on the Ulster-Scots Academy on the strategy for Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture. Although I note your points on your perception of the strategy, a consultation is not a decision; it is really about shaping what the strategy should be. It has to recognise and take account of the wider framework that already exists. Certainly, that was the Department's intention.

Notwithstanding the European charter, the Executive have a specific legislative commitment to develop a strategy. I trust that, through the consultation process and agreement on the strategy, we can eventually arrive at consensus. The draft strategy is designed to encourage and promote debate and discussion so that we can arrive at that position. It is not a de facto end result; it is there for that purpose in particular. It is about shaping the strategy and, in particular, ensuring that we capture and get an assessment of what is needed, to support and develop the Irish language community and those who, perhaps, do not have access to Irish at the moment, are interested in it and may want to access it — likewise, for the Ulster-Scots community.

**The Chairperson:** Do you accept that the document is the basis of consultation for a Bill?

**Mr Scott:** No, I do not accept that, Chair. The Minister clearly articulated to the Committee, and to the Assembly, her position on an Irish language Bill and the priority that she affords to it. The strategy obviously refers to it because it would have been quite inconsistent not to have done so given the Minister's position on an Irish language Bill and because the commitment to it in the St Andrews Agreement is quite clear.

**The Chairperson:** I accept that the range of stakeholders that you have consulted in advance of publishing the document is quite narrow. However, would it not have been wise to have had a discussion with other Departments about it?

**Mr Scott:** Under Treasury guidance, when you have consulted at the point where there is an opportunity to shape the strategy, consultation documents too often emerge very well developed and there is little opportunity to apply other opportunities or thinking, because people have become set in their ways.

Again, on the issue of costs, the strategy will eventually go to the Executive for agreement. It will be cross cutting, and costs will be considered. However, at this early stage, we were looking for the views of the communities in particular and what they require, rather than the Department setting out constraints by saying, "We cannot do this" and "We cannot do that". The point was really to assess what the Irish language and Ulster-Scots communities feel they require to support and develop their language, heritage and culture, and then to look at costs.

**The Chairperson:** Your focus in the consultation is really to go to the Ulster-Scots community with the Ulster-Scots strategy and to the Irish-speaking community with the Irish language strategy.

**Mr Scott:** No. The strategies are for the entire community. Obviously, people who are already engaged in the language, heritage or culture of either community will have a particular viewpoint. However, it is a strategy for the Executive and for all those who are interested, irrespective of the community they come from.

**The Chairperson:** If you were to read the document, you would see that it is much more far-reaching than merely sitting in those particular communities. It obviously impacts on every aspect of life, particularly when you are going through to public administration and day-to-day living.

**Mr Scott:** Yes, that is the point that I am making, Chair. Obviously, there are different stakeholder groups in our entire community, and, obviously, those who are involved in the Irish language community have a particular viewpoint. Hopefully, these strategies will eventually be prepared and agreed by the Executive for the entire community and anyone who is interested in Irish or Ulster Scots, irrespective of what part of the community they come from.

**Mr Irwin:** The Chair covered some of the questions that I was going to ask. I have concerns about the strategy. It is very far-reaching, and I feel that some of it would be very difficult and costly to deliver. The costings would certainly need to be looked at. I believe that the Irish language is being protected at this time. Given the small number of people in Northern Ireland who speak Irish or Ulster Scots, this is overkill. I can see difficulties ahead. The protection of a minority language is one thing, but this goes much further.

**Mr Scott:** Part of the strategy is about protection, but it is also about development. If you look elsewhere, such as the South, you will see that they have a 20-year strategy. The strategy should be bold, far-reaching and should look ahead, but, as I pointed out in my earlier reply, one of the statutory obligations is that the strategy can be reviewed or changed. At this point, there are issues with limiting our thinking around cost and what might be. Assumptions are being made about timescales, but that is among a lot of the details that have to be worked out. Yes, there could well be costs, but if one adopts a different approach to how the implementation will be, which is obviously further down the process, that can perhaps be addressed. Primarily, it is about finding out what people require and what is needed. Issues of costs, when it can be done and the practicalities will come later. The point is to try to get broad agreement of what needs to be done to develop, support and sustain Irish — and Ulster Scots — on a long-term basis.

**Mr Swann:** Arthur, thanks for your presentation. I agree with the two members who have just spoken, and I do not think that anyone in the room will be surprised by that. I think that the disparity between the two documents starts in both ministerial forewords, which are on the first pages. The tone, tenor and disparity between the words and the phrasing sets the Ulster-Scots strategy at a clear disadvantage and on the back foot and that carries on through.

You referred to the work by and your engagement with Pobal during the consultation on the Irish language, because it is a funded North/South advisory body under Foras na Gaeilge. Is this a DCAL document, or is it a Pobal document?

**Mr Scott:** This is a DCAL document. I was pointing out that DCAL had been funded by public money; I was not making the point that we consulted with Pobal because it was a North/South body. I was making the point that we consulted with it because it had the relevant expertise and knowledge, and it meant that we were not required to go out elsewhere to get that information. It was funded publicly. Therefore, I was making the point that it was logical to use that research, which the taxpayers, North and South, had paid for, rather than to incur additional expense.

**Mr Swann:** If I were to compare this strategy document with the Pobal strategy for the Irish language and its future development, how similar would I find it to what that organisation wants?

**Mr Scott:** I would argue that this document is different. Obviously, it will contain aspects of what Pobal is saying, which I am sure is just what you would see if you looked at the Ulster-Scots Agency, the work that the Department is doing with the ministerial advisory group on the Ulster-Scots Academy, and the Foras na Gaeilge strategy. You would see consistencies, because, in a sense, this strategy should provide an overarching framework for the work of all the bodies that are involved in promoting and developing language and, in the case of Ulster Scots, heritage and culture.

**Mr Swann:** You seem to have had consultation with Pobal over the Irish. Who was the equivalent body for the Ulster Scots?

**Mr Scott:** The Ulster-Scots Agency, which has statutory responsibility for the language, culture and heritage, and the ministerial advisory group on the Ulster-Scots Academy.

**Mr Swann:** How much engagement did you have with those people?

**Mr Scott:** We held two workshops, which I attended, and Michael had sessions with Pobal. I do not have the exact details, but we could write to you with them if you want. There were at least two half-day sessions with the Ulster-Scots Agency and the ministerial advisory group.

**Mr Swann:** Two half-day sessions? Do you have any idea —

**Mr Scott:** You have to bear in mind that, as sponsor for the North/South language body, I am in regular contact with Foras na Gaeilge, the Ulster-Scots Agency, the ministerial advisory group and the Ulster-Scots Academy. I meet regularly with them to discuss a whole range of issues, as well as their concerns. Over time, the Department builds up some knowledge and awareness of those sectors' needs and concerns.

**Mr Swann:** You have to appreciate that I am trying to establish how much these are departmental papers that are providing —

**Mr Scott:** I thought that I made that clear. They are departmental papers.

**Mr Swann:** That is what I am trying to establish, Arthur, and why I am asking you.

**Mr Scott:** Sorry, let me be quite clear, then. These are departmental strategies. They are not anyone else's strategies. They were drafted by officials and approved by the Minister. They are departmental strategies.

**Mr Swann:** They are ministerially approved. Going back to the Chair's point about the Irish strategies really being the basis for the establishment of a Bill, to me that becomes evident when you compare the Irish language and Ulster Scots. It is especially evident at paragraph 4.8 of the strategy on the

Irish language, which refers to actions in parts of legislation for the status of the language. If it is already talking about legislation, I cannot understand how this is not the prerequisite for or forerunner to a Bill, whereas there is no reference at all to the same protection or equality in the Ulster Scots draft strategy.

**Mr Scott:** As I pointed out, it would have been quite inconsistent for the strategy not to have addressed the areas documented at paragraph 4.8 in the Irish strategy. We consulted with the ministerial advisory group and the Ulster-Scots Agency on the Ulster Scots strategy. We asked them about gaps and whether there was anything that we had not covered, and they were content. The agency has a statutory responsibility for promoting the language. Based on its expert advice and detailed knowledge of the sector, it said that it was content.

**Mr Swann:** Was that organisation able to see the Irish language document when it was making those decisions? I am trying to establish whether the two consultation processes were —

**Mr Scott:** No, it was not able to see the Irish language documents. The documents that we engaged with others on were not these documents. These are the final documents; they are the Department's documents.

**Mr Swann:** So, when the Programme for Government requires Irish language and Ulster-Scots strategies to go forward together, do you run two separate processes to establish these kinds of documents?

**Mr Scott:** The two strategies are separate, and the Minister has explained to the Committee the reasons for having them separate. Both languages are at different states of development, and on taking up office, the Minister made it very clear that she intended to bring forward separate strategies. So, they are separate strategies.

**Mr Swann:** There are no synergies in them at all?

**Mr Scott:** They are separate strategies.

**Mr Swann:** So, could one be delivered without the other?

**Mr Scott:** That is an interpretation that you place on it, but it is not the Department's intention.

**Mr Swann:** But they could be. It is not an interpretation; it is a question, sorry.

**Mr Scott:** Are you asking me whether they could be?

**Mr Swann:** Could one be delivered without the other?

**Mr Scott:** They could be delivered separately, but that is not the intention. The intention is to bring them forward and to deliver them both. Are you asking me about the timing with them? Yes, the timing depends on what happens in the consultation, but our intention is to bring both strategies to the Executive for approval. Implementation could be another matter, because they are different in what is being asked for and what is being addressed.

**Mr Swann:** Sorry, Chair, could I just clarify that last point, especially with regard to timing? No matter whether these two consultations are prepared and developed at the same time, could one be initiated prior to the other?

**Mr Scott:** I made it very clear, Chair, that the Department's intention is to bring both strategies to the Executive for approval at the same. You asked me whether they could be done separately, and I said, yes, they could. That is not the intention. Let us be very clear about that. You asked me a hypothetical question, which I answered. I think that I have made it quite clear that the Department intends to bring both strategies to the Executive at the same time to be approved.

**Mr Swann:** When you referred to timing, I took it to be timing that was —



**Mr Scott:** I was then addressing your question in the context of implementation and whether they could be implemented in different time frames. Yes, I think that they could, because, at the moment, as drafts, they are different. Obviously, when they are agreed, they could be different again. Both strategies' needs and requirements are slightly different, so there could be a different time frame for implementation of some aspects. However, the intention would be to monitor and progress towards implementation. It would be unrealistic to expect that, where you have two things that are different, they will be done at exactly the same time. The details in them will be different. How they will be implemented and the targets that are set will probably be different, but progress towards their implementation will be monitored regularly. You will have the review facility under the statutory obligation. Should the strategies prove not to be relevant, or if there is a significant change in needs, they would need to be adjusted.

**Mrs Hale:** Good morning. Similar to the Chair and other members, I am concerned that the document will be very far-reaching and will affect every area of life. Paragraph 4.7 of the draft Irish language strategy refers to media and technology, and I am perplexed that paragraph 4.7.2 appears to dictate and demand what happens in private bookshops. Is that really feasible? Will private proprietors actually have a say in what they can sell to their customers? My girls and I are ferocious readers, and we spend a lot of time in bookshops. Having spoken to the owners of those shops, I know that they are quite concerned about this. So, is it feasible, or is it just an aspiration?

**Mr Scott:** The strategy is there for comment, so, obviously, we will reflect on responses to the consultation.

**Mrs Hale:** Do you see that as an outcome? Will the document end up demanding that private bookstores have to show these promotional materials and window displays?

**Mr Scott:** Again, it is a strategy. If that is what ends up in the final document, how it will be implemented is a discussion for another day.

**Ms McCorley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirigh, agus gabhaim buíochas as an chur i láthair. Thank you for the presentation. I commend you on the work that has been done on both strategies. I listened to other members' comments, and I would like some clarity. You mentioned that both languages are at different stages under the terms of the European charter and that they have to be treated differently. Indeed, the committee of experts has stated on more than one occasion that we must treat each language according to its own situation and stage of development and that we cannot hold one language back on the basis that the other is not at the same stage. That is very clear. I am glad that we are finally at this stage and that we are in a consultation process for an Irish language and an Ulster-Scots strategy. It is a very long time coming, so it is good to be here.

Obviously, you cannot dictate who makes submissions, but you have done a lot of work to encourage as many people as possible, and that is good. The responses will obviously feed in to what comes out of the process. People with Irish language backgrounds who wish to live their lives through the medium of Irish meet with resistance from some public agencies and public bodies. Will you encourage responses from and have particular meetings with public authorities that will have responsibilities for facilitating people to do their business through Irish? We know that the many thousands of children go through the Irish-medium education system are fluent Irish speakers and should be entitled to do their business in that language.

**Mr Scott:** Departmental officials are quite happy to have discussions with a council or any group that is interested in either strategy. I am obviously encouraged by our invite to Newry and Mourne District Council. All that we can do is make the offer and impose ourselves on bodies. We have circulated both strategies to all district councils and asked them to comment on them. The offer exists to attend and assist in any way that we can in consideration of the consultation process. Likewise, if they are interested in doing anything on either language, the agency, Foras na Gaeilge or the Department will be happy to assist them.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirigh, agus gabhaim buíochas leis na hoifigigh ón Roinn. I thank the departmental officials for their presentation. Critical to the discussion on this are the key areas of action in both strategies. Although there may be neither a certain degree of coterminosity between them nor a symbiotic relationship, that is reflected in the consultations with the various stakeholders. I note that, in the Ulster-Scots strategy, you have cast the net fairly wide, including what you refer to as the "marching bands community". The nature of the developmental work in the Irish language means that it stretches much further than those organisations that are directly involved in

Irish language promotion. Quite a number of organisations promote the Irish language but are not Irish language promotional organisations. I am thinking of sporting, cultural and economic organisations. The GAA obviously springs to mind, as well as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and even organisations such as Forbairt Feirste. Have they been included as stakeholders in all the consultations?

**Dr Michael Willis (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** I am fairly confident that we have been in contact with the groups that you named, but I assure you that I will check that. I am meeting Comhaltas Uladh tomorrow to talk with it, and I have written to Ryan Feeney from the GAA to discuss ways in which we can take things forward under the auspices of the GAA. I also received communication this morning from an Irish language officer in, I think, Magherafelt. They are planning to have an event, but we have not firmed up the details of that yet. However, we have agreed to attend the event to talk about the strategy document. I am particularly keen to make sure that we have not somehow missed out any groups. We have tried really hard to be as comprehensive as we can.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I suppose, Chair, that, given that the response depends on the analysis, it is like the piece of string analogy. You talk about eight to 12 weeks, but, in real terms, when are we looking at getting a report back? Will the analysis take until the end of next March or thereabouts?

**Mr Scott:** It will probably take until some time around February.

**Mr Hilditch:** I concur, support and endorse many of your comments this morning, but, to be honest, I come from a background of having neither language. However, there is a wider community out there, Arthur, and I think that you referred to it at some stage. Maybe I am getting too long in the tooth, or maybe I am cynical, but consultation in recent years has not really meant taking away or adding to anything; it has really meant, "This is where we are". Consultations nearly translate into information now rather than consultation. You have given a different meaning to the old term "consultation". Are you comfortable with the terminology that you are using at this stage for what is a very detailed document?

**Mr Scott:** Yes, I believe that this is a genuine attempt to carry out a consultation. I would have thought that I had at least outlined the steps that we are taking to try to include as wide a variety of responses as possible, to engage as many people as possible and, in particular, to showcase the work that we are doing with children and young people. In my Civil Service experience, that has not always been the case, so that is different from the norm.

It is a transparent process, and there will be a report. All the responses received from those who are actively involved in the Irish language community or the Ulster-Scots community will be available for everyone to see, and people will see what emphasis has been placed on the responses that have been received. So, that is something to judge in the future. At this point, we are encouraging people, as taxpayers, to get interested and to make their points, even if they are interested in neither language or culture. So, we could try to encourage as wide a range of interest as possible. We also have contacts with the business community, because if the strategies are successful, there are opportunities in the Irish language strategy and in the Ulster-Scots strategy to seize economic benefits. Yesterday, the ministerial advisory group had a session with people dealing with cultural tourism. District councils, tour operators and people were interested in looking at what Ulster Scots has to offer by way of interesting places to visit, stories, and the history of the people to try to whet their appetite. That builds on the work from the cultural apps pilots, which the Department sponsored with the Ulster Historical Foundation, and links it to digital technology. So, apart from the opportunities that having a detailed knowledge of Irish or Ulster Scots might open, this is about creating new economic opportunities. Likewise, an application is being developed with the GAA and Comhaltas to give people information about what is on and where to go. Those apps are available for the local community. It is an opportunity for the digital technology business to get involved with culture. It is also an opportunity to showcase our rich cultural mix to audiences from outside the island.

**Mr Hilditch:** Following on from that, people such as myself who are not involved in languages have seen developments happen at a certain pace over the past number of years, probably since the signing of the Belfast Agreement. Looking at these documents, we can now see things moving at a different pace.

On the consultation side, I know that you said that there was probably no consultation with people other than language users, and so forth. Mixed with that is the issue of cost. Surely the production of

the documents will have an impact on, for example, local government, which is my background. You referred to economic benefits and to how it can drive tourism and that sort of thing. So, surely some thought must have been given at some stage to costings and how this would impact on other levels of government and agencies.

**Mr Scott:** I accept your point. Perhaps that is the old-fashioned approach to estimating costs, but if you are really serious about engaging with people to find what they need and require and how government should go about meeting that, why constrain your design thinking with cost? Why do you find out what it is that you want to do, look at the best way of doing it and then decide on it, cost it and see what is available before allocating your budget accordingly? Doing it the other way puts you in a straightjacket before you start, because you would be saying, "We have only x, and we have not thought of z, b or d."

**Mr Hilditch:** There is a very simple answer to that. You can cut your cloth accordingly, but maybe that is why we are in this economic situation.

Moving on, I would like to ask —

**Mr Scott:** Sorry, Chair, I just want to pick up on that. I was not suggesting for one minute that we should not be conscious of the need to use departmental resources effectively or efficiently. I was trying to make a point that constraining design thinking by cost can have an adverse outcome on your ambition or what it is you want to achieve. If there is only x amount of money, I readily accept that. It is then a question of prioritising, out of all the things that you need to do, what are the most important and the time frame in which you do them so that they can fit the budget that is available.

**Mr Hilditch:** But then you are creating falsehoods and false impressions with the public out there.

Moving on anyway —

**Mr Scott:** Sorry, again, in establishing the need —

**Mr McGimpsey:** On a point of order, Chair, it is not in order for people coming in here to give evidence to the Committee to talk down members and interrupt them.

**Mr Scott:** I am sorry, Chair, I did not —

**Mr McGimpsey:** That is what you are doing. That is the second time that you have done it.

**Mr Scott:** I apologise to the Committee.

**Mr Hilditch:** I certainly was not asking a further question. I was only making a comment. I was not asking a further question and was not seeking any further comment or clarification on the answer.

**The Chairperson:** We have finished with that. Are you happy enough with the response?

**Mr Hilditch:** Yes. Can I ask a final question?

**The Chairperson:** Yes.

**Mr Hilditch:** When the consultation closes around November, you indicated that there will perhaps be a report around February. What is the process after that?

**Mr Scott:** When the analysis is complete, the report will be prepared as an Executive paper, because the costs and some of the issues we are talking about are cross cutting, and it will be taken to the Executive for consideration and agreement.

Again, Chair, I apologise. That was not my intention. I simply did not want it recorded that I had somehow suggested that the importance of public money was being set aside. I was really just trying to emphasise the design principle in trying to capture the essence of need and the possibilities of how that could be best achieved.

**Mr Hilditch:** And I have my own impressions of what that entails.

**Ms McCorley:** Go raibh maith agat arís, a Chathaoirleach. I just want to add something extra to the conversation. Costs are an issue; there is no doubt about that. The Irish language started its revitalisation and its athbheochan, which means reawakening, particularly in Belfast at the beginning of the 1970s. That caused the Irish language to flourish and to get to the point where we are now, largely without much public funding. That came much later. Commitment, energy and love of the language can be the best motivators and the best way to develop the language. We also need governmental commitment. Since Líofoa was launched a year ago, approximately 2,300 people have made a commitment to the Irish language, which shows that a lot of people wish to speak Irish and have the necessary drive and commitment. That is evidence of the need for further government action.

**The Chairperson:** Do you have a response to that?

**Mr Scott:** No, Chair.

**Mr McMullan:** I will be brief. I welcome the gentlemen's comments. I was getting a bit lost in all the questioning this morning, because it is more like an inquiry than a question-and-answer session. I was glad to have the issue of costs explained. I am sure that members across the table would agree that if costs start to be cut, content will be cut, and we may not get the full picture. That is important. If costs are being cut, that tells me that there is not 100% interest in what is being done. Are the latest census figures any different to the statistics at the end of the consultation document?

**Dr Willis:** My understanding is that the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) census unit has not announced when the 2011 census figures will be available. So the short answer is that we do not yet know. One would hope that they will be available soon, and it will be interesting to see what they show compared with the 2001 census figures.

**The Chairperson:** When people indicate that they are an Irish language or Ulster-Scots speaker in the census, is any random testing carried out to verify that?

**Dr Willis:** Again, my understanding of the process is that the questions — I am not aware exactly what the questions were — were asked on the census form, and it was up to each person in a household to answer them in the way they felt best applied to them.

I previously headed the research and statistics unit in the Department and worked in NISRA for a while. There was considerable debate, and many workshops were held, to develop the census questions for both languages. As I said, I was not directly involved in that, but I know that NISRA's census unit would be best placed to give advice on the content of the questions.

**The Chairperson:** It might be useful for the Committee to contact the census unit to find out whether there was any verification of the answers to those questions.

I have an issue with the discussion about costs, given the economic situation that we are in. We have to be mindful that we are custodians of a budget, and we have to make sure that it is spent wisely. Certainly, our constituents will not thank us if we are seen to be wasting money.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Can your strategy be delivered without legislation?

**Mr Scott:** I imagine that it could all be delivered without legislation.

**Mr McGimpsey:** So you do not need an Irish language Act to deliver the strategy.

**Mr Scott:** That depends on the implementation of the strategy. Questions were asked about whether it would impact on businesses. Sometimes, if a strategy is agreed by the Executive, it would become the responsibility of each Minister to implement that agreed strategy. If the strategy extended further afield into the public sector or business, would it be advisory or mandatory? Were it to be mandatory, legislation would be required.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Are you saying that if it is advisory, you do not need an Irish language Act, but if it is mandatory, you do?

**Mr Scott:** That is right.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Is that the conclusion? If it is mandatory, you need an Irish language Act, and if it is non-mandatory, you do not. Is that what I am hearing?

**Mr Scott:** If there is Executive agreement to do it, the assumption would be that Ministers would do it. I am speculating, but if for some reason a Department failed to comply, there may be a need to legislate. The key thing on legislation is that there is a commitment in the St Andrews Agreement to bring forward the legislation.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Who agreed that?

**Mr Scott:** It is in the St Andrews Agreement; the parties to that —

**Mr McGimpsey:** The St Andrews Agreement and an Irish language Act. Who actually agreed that?

**Mr Scott:** The two Governments.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Which two Governments?

**Mr Scott:** The British and the Irish.

**Mr McGimpsey:** That was Tony Blair and his Government.

**Mr Scott:** I am sorry; it was the two Governments.

**Mr McGimpsey:** That was Tony Blair and his Government. I was at St Andrews, you see, and Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern agreed. They are both history, and we now have devolution. It is in the consultation document that this is agreed by the Government. However, as I understand it, there is no agreement. I sat on the Executive after 2007, and there is no agreement in the Executive either. So in fact there is not governmental agreement on an Irish language Act.

**Mr Scott:** Sorry; I was referring to the agreement between the two Governments. Executive responsibilities for the strategies are set out in section 28D.

**Mr McGimpsey:** So the agreement is between the British Government and the Irish Government and not the Belfast Government. Has the strategy been costed?

**Mr Scott:** No; the strategy has not been costed.

**Mr McGimpsey:** OK. I am interested in this, having been in business all my life. Paragraph 4.9.1 of the consultation document states:

*"Private sector companies should be encouraged to develop services through the medium of Irish and use Irish language signage."*

How will you encourage that? How are you going to encourage private sector companies to develop services? I had a building company, for example, and employed anywhere between 30 and 100 men who came onto a site to lay brick and block and all the rest of it. In that situation, how would you encourage me to develop services?

**Mr Scott:** The Department is seeking feedback and comment on the suggestion that we should be doing that. Depending on the responses to the consultation, it becomes a question of how you would do it. Would it be by encouragement or by incentive? Would there be grant schemes? The Department for Social Development, for example, do neighbourhood renewals and provide grants to do up shopfronts. Should part of that include support to put up shop signs in the language?

**Mr McGimpsey:** What are the business organisations saying to you on that? I presume that you have talked to the Institute of Directors and —

**Mr Scott:** We are arranging to talk to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and to business interests.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Excuse me; hold on a minute. I am still talking. The process here is that I let you talk, and you let me talk. Have you talked to the Institute of Directors and other business organisations, whether they are in tourism or manufacturing? Have you talked to any of them about encouraging their private sector companies "to develop services"? Who have you talked to?

**Mr Scott:** We have contacted all of them, and we are keen to speak to them.

**Mr McGimpsey:** So you have not spoken to them.

**Mr Scott:** We have not spoken to them as yet.

**Mr McGimpsey:** So that is still an aspiration, and we have talked about the St Andrews Agreement. By the way, Arthur, do you speak Irish?

**Mr Scott:** No.

**Mr McGimpsey:** You do not.

**Mr Scott:** I do not believe that that question is relevant, Chair.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I mean — I am asking you a question —

**Mr Scott:** I think that my personal abilities are not relevant.

**Mr McMullan:** Chair, this is harassment.

**Mr McGimpsey:** — because you are guiding the strategy.

**Mr McMullan:** On a point of order, Chair. This really is getting away from the context of the meeting, and it is getting personal.

**Mr McGimpsey:** No, it is not

**The Chairperson:** I accept that that is a point of order.

**Mr McMullan:** It is getting very personal, and I take exception to that and want the Chair to rule on it, please.

**The Chairperson:** Mr McGimpsey, can you respond?

**Mr McGimpsey:** I withdraw that question. That is no problem at all. It just interests me that when you are doing something, you have an expertise. Tell me this, then, Arthur. Looking at the basis for the strategy, we go back to the Belfast Agreement 1998, which agreed to a series of obligations, not an Irish language Act:

*"take resolute action to promote the language ... facilitate and encourage the use of the language ... place a statutory duty on the Department of Education ... seek more effective ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television".*

Were all those undertakings adhered to? Was all that done?

**Mr Scott:** The reference in the strategy document sets out the context to the strategies. I am not in a position to respond to the question of how far these have all been advanced.

**Mr McGimpsey:** That is your basis of work; that is your work plan that was set out in 1998. I presume that you are still doing things such as "resolute action to promote the language". I am asking that because other steps were taken at that time on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to do with part II and part III status.

**Mr Scott:** Work is ongoing on a number of the areas that you highlight.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Yes, and those are still ongoing —

**Mr Scott:** Yes. The strategy is seen as a —

**Mr McGimpsey:** — and those are delivering or have been delivered in the case of part II and part III status. That has been delivered.

**Mr Scott:** Some aspects of those might have been delivered, and some are still being worked on.

**Mr McGimpsey:** It is work in progress. That is your workload, your work plan. You then have the joint declaration in 2003 to do with Irish language film and television, and that was delivered.

**Mr Scott:** Yes, more latterly in relation to Ulster Scots.

**Mr McGimpsey:** It was also delivered in relation to Irish. Irish language broadcasting received around £11 million or £12 million at that stage.

**Mr Scott:** Yes. They continue through Northern Ireland Screen, which has responsibility for that.

**Mr McGimpsey:** That was a very substantial investment. We touched on the St Andrews Agreement, and then we had the European Charter. I am trying to get up to date. Very substantial investment and work have gone into Irish and Ulster Scots to get us to where we are. We are now on this strategy, which has not been costed. As far as I can see, you will need legislation to do what you want to do. There are no costings. We are not sure from the answers that we have been given whether we need legislation, but it seems to me that it will be essential for the lines that have been put down here. There have been no general discussions with business organisations.

**The Chairperson:** Arthur, do you have any response to those questions?

**Mr Scott:** I think that I have already answered them.

**The Chairperson:** No other members have indicated that they wish to speak. Would you like to come back in, William?

**Mr Irwin:** I am not sure whether the figures are in the document. Do you know how many people in Northern Ireland actually speak Irish?

**Dr Willis:** The figures are included at the back of the consultation document. The most recent census put the figure at about 10% of the population. Table 1 of the consultation document shows that 10% of respondents have "some knowledge of Irish".

**Mr Irwin:** Having some knowledge of Irish is a completely different thing from being able to speak Irish. We could all say that we have some knowledge.

**Dr Willis:** It is linked to my earlier point about the question that was asked in the census. That is why, as I said earlier, it would be interesting to establish the wording of the questions that were used in the census.

**Mr Irwin:** I very much doubt that the number of Irish speakers in Northern Ireland is anything like 10%. I would be very surprised if it were more than 1% or even 0.5%.

**The Chairperson:** As you will gauge from the conversation, opinion is clearly divided on this matter. We will follow up on progress on the consultation, the responses and your final report. We will look forward to having this discussion again.

**Dr Willis:** I will follow up on Mr Irwin's point. I have just noticed table 2 in the consultation document, which contains the results from the 2007 omnibus survey. It indicates that 18% of respondents had "some knowledge of Irish". Again, it depends on the way in which questions are phrased, but that is an indication of how the different survey methods can indicate different things.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you.