



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture and Rural
Development

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Farm Safety: DARD Briefing

22 October 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Frew (Chairperson)
Mr Joe Byrne (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mr William Irwin
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Ian Milne
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Mr Martin McKendry	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mr Michael McLean	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mr David Small	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

The Chairperson: I welcome David Small, who is the deputy secretary in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Martin McKendry, who is head of development services in the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), and Michael McLean, who is a principal officer in the Department. Gentlemen, as always, you are very welcome to the Committee. Members will have had a chance to read the briefing paper, so I ask you to be brief and concise in addressing the Committee. If you could outline the main issues or provide more or new information that is not in your paper, that would be greatly appreciated. Members, I suggest that we keep to our two questions and make them short and concise, please. If there is time, I will do another round of questions. If you do not get to ask some questions, we can always write to the Department and seek answers to them. So, without further ado, do you want to lead off, David? I have to limit you to five minutes, if that is OK.

Mr David Small (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): It should not take more than five minutes, Chairman. Thanks again for the opportunity to present to the Committee on the important topic of farm safety. I do not propose to rehearse the whole history of the Farm Safety Partnership. You will have received that on 8 October, when the partnership attended the Committee. I confirm again the Minister's commitment to farm safety and the Department's commitment to the Farm Safety Partnership. We plan to continue to fully support the partnership's work.

I think that everyone will agree that farm safety is a serious issue for us all. Information and analysis point to the fact that the farming sector is one of the highest-risk environments for accident fatalities. That underpins the importance of the partnership's work. Members will know that DARD has a lead role in seven of the action points in the Farm Safety Partnership's action plan. I have provided the

Committee with a separate update on those specific activities, and I am happy to deal with any questions relating to them. They have included issues on the development of the farm safety awareness training programme, a stronger focus on farm safety in CAFRE programmes and the development of a farm safety postal survey to capture better information and data on farm accidents.

In addition to those actions, the Committee will wish to note that the Department has contributed to a number of other specific farm safety initiatives. One of those is the multimedia campaign that is currently running. DARD has committed £139,000 towards the cost of that campaign. It will run until March next year and is delivered through a media strategy that targets television, radio, press and online. It is designed to be thought-provoking and to encourage farmers of all ages and their influencers — wives, daughters, sons, family — to be more aware of the farm safety dangers around them and to raise awareness of the whole issue of farm safety. Indications are that people have noticed the campaign and are talking about it. That, hopefully, suggests that it is working.

The partnership is looking at other ways to distribute the advertising material to make the most of the capital investment that we have made. For example, the NFU Mutual is considering compiling a DVD for distribution to its clients using a lot of the material that we have already put in place. The Department was also involved recently in power take-off (PTO) shaft week, which was another initiative that was brought forward, recognising that missing or damaged PTO guards continue to be an area of real concern. PTO week was an important initiative, and we worked very closely with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on it.

Other DARD activities have included the farm modernisation programme. Over the three tranches of the programme so far, over £4 million has been committed through letters of offer to successful applicants by providing support to put farm safety improvements in place. The Minister has recently secured additional funding to extend the current tranche of the farm modernisation programme, and we hope to issue letters of offer to successful applicants as soon as possible. As you probably know, the Department is also developing proposals for the next rural development programme to offer a different form of capital support, which should benefit farm safety improvement initiatives.

The Department plans to continue to work very closely with our partners on the Farm Safety Partnership and to consider all the actions that we have taken forward so far. We will work with the partnership to review what has been successful and what has worked. Through that, we will help to develop the next programme of work that the partnership will take forward.

On 8 October, George Lucas, as part of his presentation, explained that a change in farm safety attitudes will not be a quick fix and that it will take time. When you are trying to change attitudes and mindsets, it unfortunately takes time. George Lucas explained that the first action plan was designed to heighten farmers' awareness about the need to think safe when they are in the farm environment. The next programme of work for the partnership will fall out of the review of the previous action plan and will, hopefully, inform where we go in the future. DARD intends to play a full part in that programme of work.

That is all that I want to say by way of introduction. As you said, you had the partnership's presentation two weeks ago. I have presented a paper on the specific DARD actions, and we are happy to take questions on any of that.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much, David, for being brief and concise. I really appreciate that. Thank you for your presentation. You will know how important this issue is to the Committee. I will try to limit myself to two questions. We have the figures for fatalities, and everyone knows them, everyone knows sees them, and everyone feels them. However, we then have the injuries that are not reported, such as the smallest cut on your finger that can grow into something else, a broken leg or something major that has not been reported in the way that it should be. How concerned is the Department about that, or is it simply the case of your saying, "It is not our remit; it is the remit of the Health and Safety Executive and is nothing to do with us."?

Mr Small: The Department is very concerned about that. If possible, I would prefer to talk not only as a member of DARD but as a member of the partnership. We have committed ourselves to the partnership's work, and we try to work jointly with the HSE and our other partnership partners. You are right: there are lots of injuries that are not routinely reported, and we are very aware of that. With the partnership, we are looking at how we can attract and secure better information and better data on near misses and serious accidents that are not reported and that we are not aware of.

We are planning a postal survey through which we hope to target over 8,000 farmers so that we can try to extract more information about the kind of accidents that have occurred that may not have been reported, the circumstances, how it happened and what might have been done to avoid it. So, we are very aware that we do not have a full picture of everything that happens. As you said, we are aware of the fatalities, but there is much more below that. Through the postal survey, we hope to get much better information and data that we can work with to develop our next programme of work. The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association (NIAPA) are partners with us on the farm safety partnership. Hopefully, with their assistance, we can begin to obtain the kind of information that we need.

The Chairperson: In the recent debate that we had in the Chamber, the Minister alluded to the fact that the farm modernisation programme was the rural development tool to assist in this fight. Have you studied the outcomes of that? How specific is farm safety to that modernisation scheme? I do not want to pre-empt your consultation, but are you considering something more specific on farm safety in the rural development programme?

Mr Small: Yes, we are. Although the primary aim and core purpose of the farm modernisation programme is to modernise farms, under tranche 3, 37 items that we believe contribute strongly to farm safety are eligible for financial support. They include things such as cattle crushes, calving gates, sheep roll-over crates — I do not profess to know what those are — cranes for handling bulk bags and a range of items that we believe contribute to health and safety. I know that one of the UFU's concerns has been that the programme is essentially targeting improvement on farms and improving competitiveness. That is correct, but we have liaised and taken advice from the UFU and from the Health and Safety Executive to try to identify and incorporate the kind of items that will deliver most for farm safety. I think that we now have a good list of farm safety items that farmers can take advantage of.

Certainly, when we move into the next programme period and are developing the next farm business investment scheme, we will want to look at what kind of items would be of assistance that we perhaps cannot deal with under the current farm modernisation programme because it has a limit of £4,000. We will look at bigger items and take advice on what items will deliver best. We take that seriously, and we take advice.

Mr Byrne: Thanks. I welcome the presentation. I know that it follows on from both the debate and the presentation that we had recently. In the past, I raised the issue of getting CAFRE involved in providing practical courses for young farmers and, indeed, refresher courses for established farmers.

Mr Small: CAFRE has been playing a very strong role in delivering through the partnership. Raising awareness and changing mindsets and attitudes, through the provision of information, are some of the big issues that we are trying to address through the partnership's work. Although other partners in the partnership have been doing their own bits of work, most of DARD's efforts have been through CAFRE and our DARD Direct office network. CAFRE has run many workshops over the past year, and farmers attending every one of those workshops have received specific information on farm safety. That message has been developed in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive. So, I think that CAFRE has played an important role.

Mr Martin McKendry (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): Were you concentrating more on young people or farmers, or was your question broader, Mr Byrne?

Mr Byrne: I am concerned particularly about young people who are doing full-time courses. How much farm safety awareness and practical training do they get on those courses? Are there any refresher courses for long-established farmers?

Mr McKendry: We have about 750 agriculture students this year, every one of whom would have had an introduction to health and safety from HSENI as part of their induction programme. All agriculture and horticulture students receive health and safety presentations in their first week. In addition, with the PTO farm safety week occurring around the second week of term, this year we had quite a drive on the practical skills that are associated with putting guards on PTOs and so on. That, again, was delivered by HSE.

Any practical that a student goes to across the farm anywhere at Greenmount does a risk assessment first. The student will be talked through the risk assessment to ensure that they understand it.

Two other areas were covered this year, the first of which was rail safety. We did some work with Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) to raise awareness among young people, especially those who were moving livestock close to railways. This year, the Ulster Farmers' Union launched a challenge to further education (FE) students to come up with some ideas about how to improve health and safety on farms. From that, there was talk of taking it on to storyboards and videos and so on.

I will give you some figures relating to farmers. Since November 2012, we have had around 260 workshops, with over 8,500 farmers attending. Health and safety was a part of those workshops, whether it was handing out leaflets or the larger-scale open days at Greenmount at which the HSE was present. An adviser would also have given information, such as on slurry mixing, at the end of a training event at particular times of the year. In the summer, we were doing some forage workshops at which we highlighted the need to be careful with children at home. We wanted to continually keep the message up front and sustained.

Mrs Dobson: I also thank you for your presentation. I want to follow up on the issues that the Deputy Chairperson raised. Do you agree that young farmers should be a major target for the farm safety awareness campaign? I am asking that because I hosted members of Bleary Young Farmers here at Stormont last week, and I was surprised to hear that they had not been contacted or made aware of the farm safety partnership. Are you working with the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster to address that?

Mr Small: Yes; the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster is represented as a partner on the farm safety partnership.

Mrs Dobson: It is quite surprising that —

Mr Small: I am surprised that a young farmers' group has not been made aware of what the partnership has been doing. Apart from anything else, there has been a lot of press coverage over the past 12 months, and we have worked very hard to make sure that the message that we are trying to get out is promoted as widely as possible. Every partner in the partnership has signed up to a commitment that health and safety is a core agenda item at every meeting and event. That means that every event should start or finish with a strong health and safety message that is based on the SAFE acronym. So, I agree that that would be disappointing.

Mrs Dobson: I was surprised, because the TV advert is hard-hitting.

Mr Small: I will take note of that.

Mrs Dobson: The clubs said that a presentation would be welcome. They were enthusiastic when I spoke to them about it. I feel that they are best placed to inform their fathers and grandfathers about safety. Some were concerned when we discussed the risks with their fathers or grandfathers having always worked in a certain way, with the result that they would, therefore, do the same. They were very willing to change and to pass safety information on.

Mr Small: It is really important that we target those individuals.

Mrs Dobson: It would be good if you could do that.

Mr Small: We had an interesting and relevant bit of anecdotal evidence from an engagement between the Health and Safety Executive and a group of students. The students were asked how many of them had carried out a farm safety assessment. Everyone had done it, so I hope that the message is getting through to young farmers. I think that young farmers are willing to grasp a new message such as this and to appreciate its import.

Mrs Dobson: Very much so. They kept asking me how they could find out more, and they said that they wanted a presentation. Perhaps that is something that you could follow through on.

Mr Small: I will happily raise that at a partnership meeting. As I said, those young people are represented on the partnership.

Mrs Dobson: This question also follows on from the Deputy Chairperson's comments. The Minister informed me recently that the average number of people attending farm safety awareness courses is

14, which is a small number. Are resources being targeted effectively to achieve maximum benefit? What more can you do to increase the numbers that are attending?

Mr Michael McLean (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): Accessibility is very important. We designed the course specifically around the SAFE acronym. If we are thinking about getting it going quickly, 60 focus farms are operating in the Province, and 38 have the facilities to house probably up to 20 to 25 people. So, obviously, we try to recruit. There is a minimum attendance rate of about 12. We try to get the throughput by holding the courses in the mornings and afternoons, and even in the evenings. We use community centres to target specific groups to try to get that throughput in the numbers.

Mr Small: We are getting larger numbers.

Mr McLean: We are getting larger numbers through, and we appreciate that. That is what we did recently to encourage that throughput.

Mrs Dobson: The Minister informed me that you are reviewing your action plans. Can you give us an indication of its likely outcome?

Mr Small: We are reviewing the overall farm safety partnership action plan in consultation with other partners. I cannot answer the question, because we are really just at the starting point. The current plan will run until March 2014. Between now and then, we want to review what measures worked well and decide where we go with the plan. We will look further at farm safety awareness training to decide how —

Mrs Dobson: To maximise, yes.

Mr Small: — we want to roll that out and consider where we go with that initiative.

Mrs Dobson: Thank you.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the work that has been done on this. I also welcome that efforts have been made to reach young people. I think that, if we are to change mindsets, it has to start with young people. There is absolutely no doubt about that. I have said this before, but there is an idea that accidents do not happen to the many farmers who have worked with animals and machinery all their lives; they happen to someone else. That is because the idea is that those farmers know their way around and it is something that they do every day.

When one looks at the percentages of fatal accidents, one sees that 27% happen when people are working with animals. Farmers work with animals every day and feel relatively safe doing that. There have been as many fatalities from working with animals as with machinery. I do not know about you, but that surprised me, because I am a farmer myself. The number of fatalities that happen as a result of falls also surprised me. So, the reasons for fatalities can be broken down almost evenly.

I think that the farm safety ad on TV is very important. If awareness is to be raised, people have to realise that this can happen to them, and getting that message out there is vital. We all saw the TV ads on car accidents, and they certainly focus minds. Small numbers attend some of the meetings, and that probably sends out the message that most farmers feel that such accidents will not happen to them. Therefore, it is important that that message gets out, but it is not easy. It is very easy to criticise how messages are going out, but, as a farmer, I still feel that it is quite difficult to get that shock message out that it could happen to you. I feel that the TV advertisement, as shocking as it might be, can be quite good in that regard.

Mr Small: The partnership is reviewing the effectiveness of the television and radio advertisements that we have running. We were very aware of the benefits of a hard-hitting media campaign, but we had to try to balance that with what seemed reasonable, without going completely overboard. We were discussing that again recently when considering where we might want to go the next time around or whether the ad was hard-hitting enough. Some partnership members think that we could probably go a bit further. I agree with the general point that you are making, and it is something that we will review as we go forward.

Mr Swann: Thank you for your presentation, gentlemen. How long ago is it since the Department got rid of its health and safety department?

Mr Small: We had a health and safety adviser at one point.

Mr McKendry: I think that the health and safety staff moved across to the Health and Safety Executive around the mid-1990s. They created the expertise in the Health and Safety Executive that went across all parts of all industries.

Mr Swann: Do you think that it was a mistake to lose the specific and focused agriculture health and safety perspective at that stage?

Mr Small: I think that you could argue it both ways. My feeling is that the Health and Safety Executive brings a lot of expertise to the whole issue of health and safety, and it can apply to the agriculture sector the broader expertise that it gains from across all the sectors. We are now working extremely closely with the HSE, and, in a way, I think that we have the best of both worlds. We have DARD very much engaged on farm safety, plus we have the benefit of all the health and safety expertise. The partnership approach that we are taking means that we are drawing in expertise from the NFU Mutual, Young Farmers' Clubs, the UFU, NIAPA and the other partners. I think that we have a good model.

Mr Swann: Does the Health and Safety Executive have a dedicated farm and agriculture specialist or general health and safety experts?

Mr Small: I think that it has farm and agriculture safety specialists, and they are very committed to dealing with farm safety.

Mr Swann: I was wondering whether there had been a loss of focus.

Mr Small: No. I think that the model is good.

Mr Swann: I have one more quick question. You mentioned the number of fatalities: 47 in Northern Ireland; 243 in GB; and 142 in the Republic of Ireland. How is that as a percentage of the number of farmers? Do you have that information?

Mr Small: I do. The measure that is normally used is a five-year fatal accident rate per thousand. Northern Ireland's rate is 12.8, and the figure in the South is 17. We have wider figures, which were quoted at the previous presentation, for the United States and Germany of around 30 each. Of the four, we have the lowest level of fatalities, but our view is that that is far too high and that we need to continue the work that we are doing to try to bring the figure down even lower. The aspiration is to get it to zero, because I do not think that any level of fatality is acceptable. That will be a major challenge, but I think that all partners are up to the challenge.

Mr McMullan: What can be done to make safety a wee bit more compulsory? I know that we are doing a lot ourselves, but what is being done on farms? We seem to be arguing and debating the same thing all the time.

There is also the question of outlying farms. Farm safety on outlying farms is something that has not been hit on. There are issues with electricity and the like. In the countryside, there is a lack of mobile phone coverage, which is vital for farm safety. Mobile phone coverage is abysmal in my area, but the phone companies do not seem to care. They say that there is nothing that they can do about it. Those are a few of my concerns.

Mr Small: The partnership has debated long and hard the balance between education, raising awareness and the other aspects of regulation and enforcement. At the beginning of the process, we wanted to switch farmers on to the issue of farm safety through the education work and through the guidance that we plan to put out through the media campaign, rather than move directly to more regulation and more enforcement. Our fear was that that would turn them off the whole subject. It is very difficult, because comparing a farm to the construction industry is not comparing like with like, and that was debated at the previous presentation. When you are dealing with a large corporate construction company, you can apply all sorts of levers, but those are much more difficult to apply on a farm with a single farmer who perhaps has just suffered the most awful injury in an accident. If you then come along and prosecute the guy and impose a fine, that could put the farm out of business. It

is a very difficult and delicate issue to try to deal with, but we are aware of the issue. At the previous presentation, George Lucas agreed that the partnership needs to look again at what more we might be able to do on enforcement and regulation while keeping things as balanced as we can.

At the moment, any business that employs more than five employees, including a farm business, has to have a written safety policy and risk assessments in place, and that is equivalent to the safety statement requirement in the South that was referenced at the previous presentation. That is already in place, and failure to do that will result in some sort of enforcement approach. It is a delicate issue and one that we are alert to in the partnership, and we need to think carefully about how we might deal with that. In doing so, we will want to work with our partners such as the UFU and NIAPA to make sure that we get the balance right. I agree that we cannot just ignore it, but it is about striking the right balance between education and enforcement regulation.

Mr McMullan: Has anything ever been done on the question of slats? That is where a lot of accidents happen, and there is a lot of talk about them. Nothing has really been done, has there?

Mr Small: Martin, do you want to comment on the physical issues?

Mr McMullan: From the point of view of the manufacturers. They have a role to play in safety as well.

Mr Small: There are two aspects. There is the education bit and all the advice and information that we put out to farmers about the risks of slurry and the risks associated with slats. However, there are issues with the manufacture of the product itself.

Mr McKendry: That is an issue in underground tanks as opposed to above-ground slurry stores, which remove that risk. We had a safe scheme of work on working with slurry, mixing slurry and spreading slurry, and DARD commissioned the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to look again at that safe system of work this year. That is being carried out at Hillsborough. You asked the last group whether there is anything else in Europe or worldwide that we are missing and whether there are any gaps in the knowledge on which we need to provide further research or development work, especially on working with slurry in confined spaces. That work is ongoing.

Mr Small: We acknowledge that managing and handling slurry is one of the core areas of risk and one of the issues named in our acronym "SAFE". It is a complex issue and will not be addressed through a quick fix. Martin will be very helpful in pointing us in the right direction through the research. In the meantime, we need to maintain all the work that we are doing on giving out good information and advice to farmers and on raising awareness of the dangers of working with slurry. Meanwhile, we should let the research carry on.

Mr Milne: I have just come in, and I am sorry for missing the presentation. I recently visited a farm to see the farmer and his wife. When I got there during the day, two young children of five and seven years of age were running around the farm, and when I asked where the parents were, they told me that they were away in the outer fields looking at cattle, or whatever. In my opinion, we can introduce a whole lot of things, but real education is needed on farms to educate parents not to leave children of that age hanging around a farm playing with toys where there is machinery and all sorts of dangers, such as slurry. There is a combination of stuff. Perhaps you are already focused on it, so excuse me for my ignorance, but I think that the focus has to be on educating people who own farms in every aspect of safety. That is just a statement.

Mr Small: I agree. We have already talked about the importance of changing mindsets, of education and of creating a better awareness of the fact that a farmyard is actually a dangerous area. It is really important that we get that message out. We hope that the stuff that we are doing through the media campaign and the information that we put out, as well as the work that HSE is doing in primary schools, will get information back into households that farm areas can be dangerous and that parents and farmers all need to be very aware of the dangers on farms.

Mr Milne: It becomes a way of life with farmers that it is OK to go away to the field to plough or to check cattle and leave the children there, because they have always been all right.

Mr Small: The distinctive point is that the farm is also a home.

Mr Milne: Exactly. It is a home. It is where the children feel comfortable.

Mr Small: There are mixed issues with that.

Mr McKendry: You made an interesting point about educating parents. In the schools' competition that was run by the Health and Safety Executive, there was some evidence that children were going home to educate their parents about some of the risks. Therefore, it comes from both angles.

Mr Small: Children are a very effective mechanism for getting information into households.

Mr Buchanan: I am sorry that I missed your presentation. I was here for the previous one. We had debates, and so forth, on that. The last thing that farmers want to see is somebody imposing something on them. Does the Health and Safety Executive have sufficient powers to make a farmer bring his farmyard up to standard if it finds it be unsafe?

Mr Small: I cannot answer entirely for the Health and Safety Executive. However, I believe that it does. Recently, HSE officials went out to over 1,000 farms. I know that on some of those information visits, they offered advice on farm-safety issues that they may have seen when they arrived at the farmyard. They were involved in putting stop notices in place to prevent items of machinery being used because they were quite clearly unsafe. They would immediately put a prohibition notice in place. They certainly have enforcement powers, and I think that they have powers to require changes to be made on farms. Again, they need to manage how they use those powers carefully.

Mr Buchanan: Education seems to be a big focus. Does your partnership issue leaflets to all farmers? For instance, when the form is sent out for single farm payments or some other thing that goes to the farming community regularly, is it possible to include some type of leaflet that brings to farmers' attention the dangers that there are on farms? Even if it were only a single leaflet marked on both sides, it would bring to farmers' attention the potential for great danger unless they are careful in everything that they do on their farm.

Mr Small: We do that with the 'Helping Farmers Comply' leaflet, which goes out with the single farm payment. Aspects of that are about helping farmers to comply with all the safety for our single farm payment requirements. However, there are farm-safety messages in there as well. The difficulty is that we know that, in many circumstances, farmers open their single farm payment envelope very late in the day. They will certainly look at the single farm payment application and ensure that it is submitted. There is no guarantee that they will read all the other leaflets. This year, for example, we have been asked to put out a specific leaflet on rural crime. We will probably do that, because it is a big issue at present. If you put too many leaflets in, farmers tend to open the envelope and toss the leaflets to the side. However, it is something that we do and to which we are committed to making a big effort, because we realise that getting information to farmers is probably the way in which to address most of the safety issues.

The Chairperson: OK. Ian wants back in again. I remind members that we have only five minutes before we have to adjourn.

Mr Milne: Thanks very much, Chair. I will be very brief. Thomas asked about leaflets going out. Coming up to Christmas, a calendar is sent out that relates strictly to farming. Families put it up. People do hang calendars. You could have different issues for each season. It is a just an idea.

Mr Small: That is the main vehicle of —

Mr Milne: It would be seen. The rest of the stuff goes in the bin.

Mr Small: I think that that is the main vehicle of the Health and Safety Executive's primary-school targeting work. Its health and safety work with primary-school children is based on a calendar that the children produce. Each month will have a picture of a health and safety risk, which is drawn by a child. That calendar then goes out to households.

Mr Milne: Is that not something that the Department could —

Mr Small: It is being done already.

Mr Milne: It is already being done. That is fair enough.

The Chairperson: We are stuck for time, gentlemen. Thank you very much for your presentation. I have one small question. Oliver asked it at the previous presentation that we had on the Dairyman project. He brought health and safety into it. It was about contractors on farms and the fact that there seems to be difference in techniques and regulations between Europe and here, whereby there is a certificate of competence in some quarters for contracting work. Is that on the radar? When we talk about compulsory measures, is that something that has been discussed?

Mr Small: I do not think that it is something that we currently require. I picked the point up at the previous presentation as something that I will bring back to DARD and the partnership for them to look at why we do not do that if we are not currently applying it and whether it is something that we should consider.

The Chairperson: It may be useful if we have figures for accidents — not necessarily fatal accidents but accidents that have been recorded — and how many involved farmers and contractors to see how big an issue that is and whether it is a problem. Indeed, it may not be.

Thank you very much for your presentation and answers on what is a very serious issue. It is one that the Committee takes very seriously.