Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

Indigenous Language Strategies

24 September 2009

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr P J Bradley
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Francie Brolly
Lord Browne
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Dr Huw Onllwyn Jones	)	Welsh Assembly Government
Mr Joe Hamill	)	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Mr Deaglán Ó Briain	)	
Mr Douglas Ansdell	)	Scottish Government
Mr Michael Napier	)	

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

I invite Dr Huw Onllwyn Jones from the National Assembly for Wales to take his seat. Good morning. Please make your presentation, which will be followed by questions from members.

Dr Huw Onllwyn Jones (National Assembly for Wales):

I thank the Chairperson for his introduction and the Committee for the invitation. I am head of the Welsh language unit and media policy unit in the Welsh Assembly Government. It is a great delight to visit this wonderful city once again.

I have not provided a written submission. There are so many things that could be said and a huge amount of information is available in print and online, so I thought that it would be useful to say a few words and to see where the discussion goes. I am happy to provide the Committee with any further information afterwards. Please feel free to stop me at any time during my presentation if anything is not clear or if you wish to ask questions.

The first issue that I will talk about is the protection and promotion of the Welsh language. It is generally accepted in Wales that the language needs protecting. It exists alongside English, which is one of the world's most successful languages considering the number of speakers and countries in which it is spoken. Not only that, Welsh is a language that is trying to bounce back after years of suppression and erosion that began in 1536, when the Act of Union prohibited its use in public administration and in the legal system.

A further blow was a Royal Commission report in 1847, which concluded that education in Wales was failing because people spoke Welsh. That led to the end of the use of Welsh in schools. Added to that, the industrial revolution and resultant wave of migration saw a decline in the proportion of the population speaking Welsh from 80% at the beginning of the nineteenth century to 18% in 1991. There was also a fall in the number of traditional Welsh-speaking communities — defined as containing more than 70% of people speaking Welsh — from 92 in 1991 to 54 in 2001. That shows that, once started, the decline of a language can happen fairly quickly.

However, in the mid-twentieth century, the legal position of the language began to improve. The recognition that Welsh speakers could be at a disadvantage in court led to the Welsh Courts Act 1942, which was strengthened by the Welsh Language Act 1967. The latter provided the right to use Welsh in court, even if Welsh speakers would not be otherwise disadvantaged. The 1967 Act also gave Ministers the power to prescribe Welsh versions of statutory reform. Interestingly, the Act provided that, in the event of a discrepancy, the English version should prevail, thus declaring by an Act of Parliament that the Welsh language's status was inferior.

The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were marked by civil unrest and protest in Wales that led to the establishment of an advisory Welsh Language Board in 1988, which recommended that there should be a new Welsh language Act. That led to the Welsh Language Act 1993, which established a statutory board to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh. It also required public bodies to prepare Welsh-language schemes that set out how they would treat the Welsh and English languages equally, as far as was reasonably practicable and appropriate in the circumstances. Therefore, the 1993 Act is a key element in protecting and promoting the language.

The Welsh Language Board receives approximately £13·5 million a year. About £4·6 million is spent on grants to fund various activities that help promote the use of Welsh. The Athrawon Bro service, which provides community teachers who go from school to school to increase the skills of Welsh-language teachers, is given £3 million. The Welsh Assembly Government itself funds the Welsh Books Council to the tune of £3·7 million for the publication of books and literary magazines in Welsh. Therefore, total direct funding specifically for the Welsh language is around £17 million.

The board also funds a number of projects, the most important of which is Twf, which is Welsh for "growth". That is a key project that encourages the use of the Welsh language in the home. It reflects the fact that the percentage of families in which every member speaks Welsh has fallen and continues to do so. In the 1991 census that figure was 14%, compared with 11% in the 2001 census. Only 7% of three-year-olds are a part of families in which everyone can speak Welsh. Research shows that fluent Welsh speakers, including those from Welsh-speaking families, are much more likely to use Welsh in day-to-day life as they grow older: 87% of fluent Welsh speakers do so, compared with only 29% of those who do not consider themselves to be fluent.

Additional research shows that, even in families in which both parents can speak Welsh, only 82% of them use it with their children. That drops to 40% in families in which only one parent can speak Welsh. In families, therefore, there is a problem with transmitting the language to the child.

The Twf project is important to us, because we think it is unlikely that Welsh will thrive as a

community and social language if too great a percentage of those who speak it learned the language at school. It needs to be, for as many people as possible, the language of the home.

The Welsh Language Board is involved in other projects that involve working with young people. It also works with the private sector and the voluntary sector to encourage the voluntary use of Welsh. Furthermore, it markets the benefits of Welsh-medium education.

There is a statutory requirement for public bodies to prepare Welsh-language schemes, and the board has a key role with that. More than 500 such schemes exist, and they have led to an increase in the services that are available in Welsh, including forms, online services and publications. More helplines are also available in Welsh, but face-to-face services can be patchy, depending on where in Wales they are provided.

Take-up of services can also be patchy. That can be for historical reasons. For example, it is still a fairly new requirement, and people are used to dealing with public bodies in English. Alternatively, they may have tried to use Welsh, and had a bad experience as the service may not have been available or may not have been very good. Sometimes, there is low awareness of what services are available. Furthermore, people may lack confidence in using Welsh, for example, when filling in complex tax forms.

Enforcement of schemes is limited and inflexible. The process of preparing schemes is bureaucratic. The ownership of schemes across organisations can be patchy, and Crown bodies are not required to prepare schemes, but they can do so if they wish. To date, only half of Government Departments have a language scheme. As a result, the Welsh Assembly Government are seeking legislative competence to modernise the legislative framework of the language. That process is set out under the Government of Wales Act 2006, whereby the UK Parliament can confer competence on the National Assembly for Wales to let it legislate in certain fields via a new instrument called a Legislative Competence Order. We are seeking that competence now in order to legislate to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh, and for the treatment of Welsh and English on a basis of equality. The process began in 2007. We are still trying to secure that competence two years later. Therefore, it has been lengthy and cumbersome.

We are also seeking competence to legislate to protect the freedom of Welsh speakers to speak the language with one and other. That legislation will not place a duty on anyone; rather, it will

be used to stop employers, for example, introducing a blanket ban on speaking Welsh in an office. The legislation will enable us to establish linguistic rights in the provision of services; confirm the official status of Welsh and English in Wales; and establish the post of language commissioner. That is a fairly big and important project for us.

The Government of Wales Act 2006 also placed a statutory duty on the Government to have a Welsh-language strategy and a Welsh-language scheme. Stet Iaith Pawb: Everyone's Language strategy, which was published in 2003, sets out a vision for a bilingual society in Wales. It also sets targets that are aimed at increasing the number of Welsh speakers, and to halt the decline in the number of Welsh-speaking communities. That strategy is under review, which reflects the fact that we are hoping to legislate for the language. Furthermore, there is a feeling among stakeholders that targets that were set in the original Iaith Pawb strategy were too ambitious or not clearly defined, that ownership of the targets was not clear, and that there was no clear link between the vision and the targets. Therefore, we have quite a job to review the strategy.

The Government is also responsible for education policy, which is of huge importance to the Welsh language. The language was included in the national curriculum in 1988, and there are now 464 Welsh-medium primary schools with 53,000 pupils attending, which is an increase from the 44,000 pupils in 1991. There are also 54 Welsh-medium secondary schools, and 40,700 pupils attend those schools.

The growth in Welsh-medium education is the result of many English-speaking parents sending their children to Welsh-medium schools. The schools have a good educational track record. Welsh is seen as a valuable skill that can help with employment in later life, and it enables the children to enjoy Welsh language culture and events. There is also a feeling that a child who lives in Wales should be able to speak Welsh.

As I said earlier, there is an issue with the fact that 18% of children attend Welsh-medium primary schools, but only 7% of those children come from Welsh-speaking households. Therefore, the home language for most of those children is English, and the challenge is to extend the use of Welsh beyond the classroom. There is also a drop-off between primary and secondary schools, as parents sometimes feel that their children have had a sufficient grounding in the language, or are perhaps worried about having to help them with their homework, so they move their children to English-medium education.

Other important factors in the growth of the Welsh language is the UK Government's support of around £95 million per annum for S4C, the Welsh-medium television channel, and its support for Radio Cymru, the BBC's Welsh-language service.

The 2001 census showed that 20·8% of the Welsh population was able to speak Welsh. That is about 580,000 people, and represents an increase from the 18·7% figure that was recorded in the 1991 census. The greatest increase was among young people, with the proportion of those aged between five and 15 who were able to speak Welsh rising from 25% to 40%, which was due mainly to the increase in those attending Welsh-medium schools. However, as I said earlier, 18% of primary-school children are taught in Welsh-medium schools, meaning that there is a gap between that figure and the 40% of Welsh-speaking 5- to 15-year-olds recorded in the census. Therefore, those figures must be treated with some caution, because probably half of that 40% are learning Welsh as a second language in English-medium schools, meaning that their exposure to, and fluency in, the language will be limited compared to those who receive Welsh-medium education.

Support for the Welsh language in Wales is evident. More than 80% of those who responded to a Welsh Language Board survey said that they thought that Welsh was something to be proud of. Some 75% saw the language as something that belongs to everyone in Wales, and 81% agreed that it is important for Welsh culture. Furthermore, a BBC poll in February 2009 found that 47% of respondents agreed that new laws are required to help to promote the language and to ensure better services for Welsh speakers. However, 68% felt that the language is hard to learn; 57% said that Welsh is heard less frequently these days; 46% saw it as relevant to modern-day life; 41% think that it will be stronger in 10 years time; and 36% saw it as a dying language.

Although, much work lies ahead, there is cause for optimism. The contribution of Welsh-medium education remains a key factor, because more young people are learning Welsh at school. We must nurture support for the language, ensure that the number of homes in which Welsh is spoken does not decline, and give people more opportunities to use the language and to enjoy doing so. There are good and bad aspects, but we have much work to do to keep it going.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for your comments. Go raibh maith agat. That means thank you in Irish. I should

have taken the time to learn how to say “thank you” in Welsh. In fact, what is “thank you” in Welsh?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

Diolch means thanks, and diolch yn fawr means thanks very much.

Mr McCarthy:

Will you spell that? *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

I have a strong interest in supporting Government action that promotes indigenous languages. My interest is in the Irish language. My children are receiving an Irish-medium education, and I did a degree at Queen’s University in Celtic studies. What do you think of the suggestion that language promotion is too costly?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

The Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Language Board and the Welsh Books Council spend about £17 million on language promotion. That is not a huge amount of money in comparison with the size of the Welsh Assembly Government’s Budget; however, quite a lot is being achieved with it.

The money funds a wide range of activities, many of which are community based, and provides good learning opportunities for young people. For instance, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, which is the Welsh language youth movement, receives about £600,000. It has 50,000 members and undertakes a wide range of activities for young people. Governments should fund those activities regardless of the language, because they benefit young people. However, we must ensure that they direct money to help support activities that are run through the medium of Welsh.

The money also funds the Mentrau iaith, which are language initiatives that serve each county in Wales. Those also provide social opportunities for people of all ages and help businesses to increase their use of Welsh. That leads to a better relationship between companies and the customers that they serve. If you believe that language is part of your culture and is worth having, that it helps create a sense of community and a feeling of belonging, and that it is an important part of your heritage, it is worth investing in.

Mr Brolly:

Go raibh míle maith agat. Thank you very much. I am Irish language enthusiast, who was able to speak Irish reasonably well when I was 10 years old. It was all downhill after that, though. I still speak Irish, and I taught it formally for 40 years when I was secondary-school teacher. I also taught Irish informally to parents of children attending either the naíscoil or the bunscoil, because many spoke to their children in English —

The Chairperson:

And, your question is?

Mr Brolly:

How important is the statutory support that the Welsh Language Act 1993 gives to the preservation and promotion of the Welsh language?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

It has been immensely important and has changed the perception of the status of the language. As I mentioned in my presentation, the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was a time of civil unrest when otherwise good, law-abiding citizens painted road signs green and did not pay their bills until they had forms and so on in Welsh. People were being sent to jail because of those activities.

At the end of the 1980s, it was recognised that the situation was unjustifiable. At that time, the Welsh Language Act 1967 had declared by an Act of Parliament that the Welsh language had an inferior status to English. That was one of the key arguments that convinced Ministers in the Welsh Office that the situation needed to change. That led to a change in the national psyche about the status of the language and, obviously, the need for public bodies to prepare Welsh-language schemes has led to a tremendous growth in the number of Welsh-language services that have been made available.

That is only half of the equation; we are seeing an increase in the supply of services, but, as I said, the level of take-up of those services is slightly disappointing. The reasons for that are quite complex. Quite often, when people try to use a service in Welsh, they find that it is not as good as the service in English. For instance, a post office may not have available the Welsh-language version of a passport application form, and people sometimes have to put extra effort into using a

service through the medium of Welsh.

Attention is being turned from the delivery of the service to trying to boost take-up. A marketing campaign is being run under the 'Mae gen ti ddewis' campaign, which translates as "You have a choice". If public bodies can guarantee that they have a good Welsh-language service available, they need to market it to their customers. That campaign is working; quite soon after the campaign was launched for a specific service, take-up has increased by 50%.

The statutory provision of the services has been important, but public bodies must also work on the softer issues and work with the public to make them realise that the services are available, that they work and that it is OK to use them. After 500 years of suppression, the situation has changed slowly, and people must be educated.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you for your presentation. It contained much detail, which we will discuss in due course.

The Chairperson:

Kieran, a full discussion has been scheduled for next week's meeting. The emphasis of today's meeting will be on receiving evidence.

Mr McCarthy:

Did you find much of a difference after the most recent language Act was passed? Of course, we are all very proud of our heritage. You said that the legislation was worth having, and I agree with that. However, as with everything, there is a cost. What are the advantages of promoting the Welsh language? I support your promotion of the language, but where can you promote it outside of Wales? Surely, you cannot go to another country and talk in Welsh and expect a response. Finally, have you encountered any opposition in Wales to what you are doing?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

You are right; Welsh is spoken only in Wales, apart from Patagonia, where a small community speaks Welsh. Not many people from Wales go there as it is so far away. The Welsh language is part of who we are, and for Welsh speakers, it is part of our history and it links us with our community and with our families. It is a very important part of a Welsh speaker's personality. If people are unable to use the language when dealing with the public sector, or are told that they

cannot speak Welsh, they feel as though part of them is being snuffed out. It is important that we recognise that, and that we value the language and invest in it in the same way that we invest in all other aspects of life that we value. As I said, that data collected by the Welsh Language Board shows general support for the language: 81% see it as something to be valued.

In any community, there is a broad spectrum of views and often the board or public bodies will get letters from people asking how they dared to send bilingual forms and complaining about a waste of resources.

Mr McCarthy:
You get letters as nasty as that?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:
Letters will appear in the press from the usual suspects. Such opposition from a vocal minority will always exist, but we cannot develop policy and legislation to cater for a vocal minority that will be opposed to the language whatever we try to do. The fact that so many English-speaking parents send their children to Welsh-medium schools shows not just a soft support for the language but that people are prepared to make a quite substantial investment in the language.

People also ask why their children are being taught Welsh in school, rather than German or French or Spanish. However, as more and more jobs require the ability to speak Welsh, and since most of those children will stay in Wales when they grow up and look for a job, it could be argued that it will be more beneficial for them to learn Welsh than to learn any other language.

Mr McNarry:
I will call you Huw. You are very welcome. Thank you for your kind remarks about our capital city.

Most people know what my position on the issue is, but you may not. I do not see the need for legislative competence for the Irish language. In that form, it is divisive and attached to Irish republicanism and it is used provocatively by Irish republicans. However, that does not prevent me and others from my background from respecting those who wish to embrace it and, as you said about your language, to value it.

Is there a geographical predominance of Welsh speakers? Is there a political dimension behind the introduction of the Legislative Competence Order about which you spoke? Is the language primarily attached to the separatist nationalist lobby in Wales? I ask those questions because I do not know the answers and it is important that I find out the answers. How widely is the language used at the Welsh Assembly? When you referred to greater use of the language in the home, you spoke about young children learning the language in that environment and you made the point that parents saw that as a likely help towards later employment. I am concerned about the rights issue with that. In what fields of employment do you think that Welsh would be of benefit?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

A higher percentage of Welsh speakers live in the north and west of Wales. That declines towards the south-east. A lot of people live in Cardiff, so there is a large number of Welsh speakers there, even though the overall percentage is low. I can send you the data from the 2001 census and some analyses that the Welsh Language Board conducted so that you can see where the Welsh-speakers live.

You asked about the political dimension behind the Legislative Competence Order and whether it belongs to the separatist nationalist lobby. Wales has reached a position in which 81% of people who were surveyed are proud of the language. That is reflected by the main political parties in Wales. We have a coalition Government, which comprises Labour and Plaid Cymru —

Mr McNarry:

So do we — allegedly.

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

That Government introduced the proposals for the Legislative Competence Order. It was a Conservative Government that brought in Welsh Language Act 1993 and S4C, and Welsh was included in the national curriculum by a Conservative Government. Therefore, the language is supported throughout the community and by the political parties in Wales. It is considered a vote-winner, rather than something that will lose votes.

You asked about use of Welsh in the Welsh Assembly. The Welsh Assembly is a bilingual organisation, and simultaneous translation facilities are available for plenary debates and

Committee meetings. Witnesses who appear before the Assembly can provide their written submissions in Welsh and can speak in Welsh if they wish to do so. Our equivalent of Hansard publishes bilingual transcripts of plenary sessions. If someone speaks Welsh during a Committee meeting, the minutes will be translated.

Mr McNarry:

I understand the facilities. How widely do Members use Welsh during debates?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

Not always. The Welsh Language Board wants Assembly Members who can speak Welsh to use the language all the time in Committees and in plenary sessions. Sometimes, some Members do not; I am unsure of their reasons. Perhaps sometimes people feel awkward using simultaneous translation facilities in meetings such as this, and some people feel awkward making the language switch. However, people need to gain experience of using simultaneous translation facilities to feel comfortable doing so. However, Welsh is used quite naturally in the Assembly.

You asked about the issue of the language and employment. In some places of employment, such as Welsh-medium schools, the ability to speak Welsh is essential. There are more and more of those schools, so that is an obvious job opportunity. Furthermore, it is now Government policy to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh. It is also Government policy that public bodies must ensure that they treat both languages equally when providing services to the public. That is contained in an Act of Parliament. To do that, Welsh language schemes need to set out how they will, over time, ensure that they can provide, for instance, face-to-face services in Welsh in jobcentres or in the Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Mr McNarry:

Is the use of Welsh essential in courts?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

I will finish discussing public bodies generally. There is a balance between stating whether knowledge of Welsh is “essential” or “desirable”. It is essential for employment in a Welsh-medium school, whereas adverts for jobs in public bodies often state that knowledge of Welsh is desirable. Those bodies consider the mix of skills and decide whether they need a Welsh speaker in the office, whether they are able to provide a service in Welsh and how they can improve the

team.

People now have the right to speak Welsh in court, and simultaneous translation facilities are provided.
I have not yet seen any adverts that require judges or magistrates to have knowledge of Welsh. There is a balance between the legislation for the language, and race-relations legislation.

Mr McNarry:
Have there been situations as ridiculous as someone being stopped by a policeman and questioned, and demanding that the policeman speaks to them in Welsh, otherwise it is an infringement of their rights?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:
If someone was stopped by a policeman and he or she asked for a Welsh-language service, that person could expect to receive one. I do not know of any cases in which anyone has brought a formal case against a police force on the grounds that their basic human rights have been ignored. However, most police forces would be able to provide the person with a Welsh-language service, even if they have to take the person back to the station to do so.

Mr McNarry:
Therefore, there is no requirement on the policeman to be able to speak Welsh to carry out all their duties. Is that correct?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:
A few years ago, the North Wales Police introduced a requirement that anyone applying for a job with them would need to be able to speak Welsh to level 1 competency. It should be borne in mind that they operate in an area with a heavy concentration of Welsh speakers. There are five levels of competency; 5 being completely fluent, and 1 being basic. Level 1 would include the applicant being able to pronounce the names of places such as Rhosllanerchrugog, and to be able to say “bore da”, which means “good morning” in Welsh. That has worked for them, and if people from Birmingham, for example, apply for jobs with the North Wales Police, the force would send them materials and a CD so that they can achieve level 1 competency. The point is to ensure that everybody who works for the North Wales Police understands that there is this language; it is a bilingual community; and they need to have a good relationship with that

community. Respect for each others' language can help with that process, and that has been a very successful policy for the North Wales Police.

Mr McNarry:

When the Welsh go down into the scrum, what language do they speak when they are backing up?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

What language do they speak in the scrum? I am a Cardiff City fan, I am afraid, I do not know about scrums.

Mr McCartney:

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh agus go raibh maith agat as do thuairisc.

It was obvious from your presentation that one of the key elements of the enhancement of the Welsh language was the Welsh Language Act 1993. Will you paint a picture as to what would have happened had that Act not existed? Secondly, if you were to advise the Committee, bearing in mind that part of our work is to provide advice and support to the Minister about best practice for the promotion and development of the Irish language, what would the key elements of that advice be? Thirdly, what benefits has bilingualism brought to Wales as a country and as a people since 1993?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

Had there not been an Act in 1993, we would not have seen the increase that there has been in the number of services that are available to the public through the medium of Welsh. That is the main point.

We have moved from a situation in which my mother's friends were getting into trouble for not paying their bills, signs were being painted and there was general unrest, into a more inclusive society, in which the legislation has ensured that people's rights, dignity and their identities are properly catered for. That reflects what is happening generally with the equalities agenda. Government policy across the UK is to ensure that we have an inclusive society in which everyone feels valued. Public bodies realise that.

Some organisations that are based in England do not quite understand what it is all about. However, as soon as they are informed that the Welsh language is an equality strand in Wales, the penny drops straight away and they see how it fits in to the agenda and why they need to think about the needs of Welsh speakers.

Importantly, the Act also established the statutory Welsh Language Board, which has a duty to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh. The board provides advice to organisations and to the private, voluntary and public sectors, and distributes grants. Benefits have been reaped from that process. For instance, the Mentrau iaith, which are county-based language initiatives, are like a one-stop shop for the Welsh language. If the owners of local fish and chip shops, for example, want to have a bilingual sign and menu, they know that they can go to the Mentrau iaith to receive the advice that they need.

There were no Mentrau iaith in 1993, but there is now one in every county. They have used the money that the board gave them as pump-priming to draw in funding from other sources. It is a field that has grown and has provided employment to the Mentrau iaith staff in each county. One of them, in Carmarthenshire, has gone into the field of training. It now delivers training for Government agencies and the like through the medium of Welsh. All that kind of activity has grown tremendously since the implementation of the 1993 Act.

You mentioned best practice for Ireland; however, the situation in each country is different. All that I can say is that, by all means, come and learn more about what we do in Wales, including what has worked for us and what has not. I do not feel qualified to tell you how to run your affairs in Ireland.

Mr McNarry:

You could begin by acknowledging that this is not Ireland: this is Northern Ireland.

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

I beg your pardon. I apologise for that.

Some of what we have done in Wales has been successful. There have been quite a few successes, but some things have not worked as well for us. Some of the challenges that we face are very difficult. As I mentioned earlier, the use of Welsh in the home is important to ensure

that we have natural Welsh speakers who feel that they want to use the language socially and pass it onto their children. However, influencing parents' decisions in their homes is difficult. It is almost necessary to get to them before they conceive the child, because people start talking to the child while the mother is pregnant. Once a pattern has been set with a person, it is difficult to change it. Affecting people's decisions in a very personal part of their lives is quite a challenge. Some interesting psychology is involved in that process.

There are several benefits of bilingualism. It helps us to create an inclusive society in Wales in which all people feel valued, whatever language they wish to use. It has got rid of the social unrest and the protests that we saw in the 1960s and 1970s. It also shows to ourselves and the rest of the world that we are proud of who we are and of our background. It helps to distinguish us as Wales; a country with a strong identity that could otherwise be swamped by the other cultures that surround us. Therefore, it helps to create a strong sense of place and belonging. In addition, data and evidence that is supplied by the Wales Tourist Board shows that people who visit Wales appreciate its bilingualism. They enjoy it and it adds to their experience.

Mr McCartney:

You said that 36% of people felt that the language was dying. Is that just a passive comment or is it an oppositional position?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

I do not think that they said that because they are opposed to the language.

Mr McCartney:

So, it is just a passive comment.

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

Yes, it is.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for taking the time to come across to Belfast. I appreciated in particular the setting of all your comments in a historical context, because it was helpful to those of us looking in on the Welsh language from outside.

You were very positive when you said that Welsh is a language for everyone. I take it that it would not be used as a weapon against a section of your community?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

What do you mean by "weapon"?

Mr K Robinson:

I mean a linguistic weapon.

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

No, it would not. The journey of the Welsh Language Board, from its establishment in an advisory capacity to its establishment as a statutory board, would not have been successful if the population of Wales who did not speak Welsh were not included. That was considered in every decision and every piece of work that was undertaken. It is important to bear in mind and work with the sensitivities, needs and concerns of the section of the population who do not speak Welsh.

Members who do not speak Welsh have always been appointed to the board, because it is important to get their perspective. Welsh speakers make up only 20% of the population of Wales, and that number is even smaller when taken as a percentage of Welsh-speaking families. Therefore, support for the language from the wider community is important.

Mr K Robinson:

When you talked about the possibility of employment in the future, you mentioned that a knowledge of Welsh might be desirable or, in some cases, essential. That rang alarm bells in my head, because we have seen a language being used to discriminate against a section of the population in a neighbouring state. As a result, that section of the population emigrated to countries across the world, including Northern Ireland. Consequently, that is a very sensitive subject here.

The late Reverend Brett Ingram, who was the rector of Killeeshil in County Tyrone, worked on an academic thesis that considered some of the townland names in Northern Ireland and across the island. His thesis seemed to point to the fact a lot of words that are being used on this island were rooted in the Brittonic languages and did not have the assumed Gaelic/Irish root. What is

the exact origin of the Welsh language? The label 'Irish' is generally accepted here, yet the Irish spoken today is only a concoction that was put together in the 1930s. Chairperson, you will find that lots of different bits of Irish were put together in Mr de Valera's era.

The Chairperson:

That was not in my syllabus at Queen's.

Mr K Robinson:

You see what you missed?

Mr McNarry:

That is why you are brainwashed. Had it been in it, you may have had a wider view. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

Professor Stockman come back, I need you now. *[Laughter.]*

Mr K Robinson:

Huw, could you give me a precis on the origin of the Welsh language? Is it a Brittonic or a Gaelic/Celtic language? I have listened to your comments in your native language and to other words floating around the room, but they do not strike me as being all that close together.

The Chairperson:

Ken, are you asking whether the languages are Celtic cousins?

Mr K Robinson:

No; I am asking whether the original roots of the languages are different.

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

You are absolutely right that the issue of employment is a sensitive one. However, there is a balance between Government policy in promoting and facilitating the use of Welsh, and other legislation that covers issues such as race relations. It is complicated though, because language itself does not place someone into a particular race — there is no such race as 'Welsh speakers'. An English-speaking person in Wales and a Welsh-speaking person in Wales belong to the same race, so cases of discrimination under race relations legislation cannot be brought. That is an

issue that the freedom of Welsh aspect of our legislation bid could help with.

The origin of the Welsh language is an academic question. Perhaps I could just send you material on that issue.

Mr K Robinson:
That would be helpful. Thank you.

You raised the matter of race relations, and that is the point that I was coming to next. What do you do with a young child in Cardiff, for example, who speaks Hindi in his or her home, and who is then faced with speaking Welsh in school, yet the majority of the people in the area speak English? What particular steps do you take to work with that child and his or her family to make them feel part of your Welsh community when, obviously, there are language difficulties?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:
First, the parents have the choice of whether to send their child to a Welsh-medium school or to the English-medium school. If they decide to send their child to a Welsh-medium school, the evidence shows that, provided children are introduced to a new language at a very early age, they soak it up. The Welsh Language Board has a marketing campaign call 'kids soak it up', which encourages parents to send their children to Welsh-medium schools. I am not aware of any problems that arise from any child going through the Welsh-medium education field, especially if they start at nursery-school level and move on to primary school.

It is important to remember that the situation in many parts of the UK is unusual compared to many other parts of the world. Being able to speak only one language is pretty unusual when compared to many people living in other parts of the world who are naturally bilingual or trilingual. Evidence suggests that if people have two languages in their head, it is easier to assimilate a third language.

Welsh is part of the national curriculum and it is taught as a second language at English-medium schools. That has raised some issues, because the delivery of Welsh as a second language has not been done very successfully. I should have mentioned in my presentation that the Welsh Assembly Government have just finished a consultation on their Welsh-medium education strategy, and that is the first time that such a strategy has been prepared by the

Government. However, that recognises that there are some failings in teaching Welsh as a second language in English-medium schools, and that work needs to be done to improve the courses, the materials and the experience for the children.

Mr K Robinson:

Are there regional differences in the Welsh language?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

There are a few differences, but people often make more of those differences than is necessary. When people in north Wales want milk in their tea they ask for llefrith, and those in south Wales ask for llaeth. When my father, who came from the Swansea valley, first met my mother, who came from north Wales, he had never heard those words before and did not know, sometimes, what he was being offered to eat and drink. These days, with S4C and Radio Cymru, people have experience of the differences — the world has shrunk.

Mr K Robinson:

Is the Welsh language now more standardised than it was in the past?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

When people watch and listen to the news on S4C, they hear a Welsh that is fairly standardised.

Mr K Robinson:

Would that be Cardiff Welsh as opposed to a different dialect of the Welsh language?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

No, it is a fair reflection of society. A lot of work is being done to standardise terminology, because it is important that the terminology of the Welsh language that is used in legal forms and documents by public bodies is consistent.

The Chairperson:

Ken, at an Irish-medium nursery school in Dungannon, I asked Sophie, aged two years and 10 months, "ba mhaith liom cupán tae", and the said "make it yourself". *[Laughter.]*

Mr K Robinson:

Did she? Will you pass me the bainne, because mine has ran out.

Mr P J Bradley:

You are very welcome. I enjoyed your presentation; it was very informative. You mentioned that you were coming out of a 500-year period of suppression. I do not know whether this part of Ireland is in the middle of such a period or whether it is going deeper into one.

Most of the questions that I was going to ask have been answered. Are you completely satisfied with the support that the BBC and independent media outlets give to the language?

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

We are extremely lucky in Wales to have S4C. That television station, like any other station, faces immense challenges. More and more competition is coming from digital broadcasting, and it has to compete with many channels. S4C has responded well to those challenges, and it is one station that people can switch to and they know that they will see programmes about Wales. People can see Wales reflected back at them and they can learn about their country. English-language stations in Wales are finding it more difficult to that. ITV has reduced its number of hours of Welsh-language broadcasting, so S4C is a valuable resource. In recent years, S4C has responded well to ensure that its production values improve and that the content of its programmes improves. Over the summer, it did well with its viewing figures.

Radio Cymru is also responding well to the challenges that it faces, particularly in ensuring that it appeals more to young people. We are well blessed by Radio Cymru and S4C.

Mr D Bradley:

Go raibh maith agat. Grma, a Chathaoirligh agus gabhaim mo leithscéal as a bheith mall inniu: bhí mé an cuairt ag lárionad Gaeilge in lún Cinn Trá.

Chairperson, I apologise for being late. I also apologise to Huw. I was visiting the Irish-language centre in Newry, and, under those circumstances, I will probably be forgiven for being late.

Language issues can often become politicised for one reason or another, and sometimes they are perceived to be politicised. Was it your experience in Wales that the various Acts led to a lessening or an end to the politicisation of the language?

Quite often, people who do not understand a language or who have not had the opportunity to learn it, for example English speakers in Wales, might see the onset of legislation for that language as being threatening to them and that it may lead to their being alienated, perhaps even further, from that language. Did that potential difficulty arise in Wales, and, if so, how was it dealt with?

Kieran asked about the financial costs of legislation on the Welsh language. What are its financial benefits? For example, have there been any spin-offs in the form of financial benefits in the creative industries, such as film, television and drama. The creative industries is a subject of particular interest to this Committee.

The Chairperson:

Dominic, with your indulgence, I will ask Wallace to group his questions with yours.

Lord Browne:

I do not have the expertise in languages of other members. I concentrated mainly on science in school and in university. However, I appreciate that the learning of a language that is not widely used can be of great benefit, and I understand that reading literature from a society increases the broader knowledge of the culture of that society.

However, I am interested in the employment aspects. For instance, knowledge of Welsh is needed for certain jobs. If I were to apply to Aberystwyth University for a job as a computer scientist, would I be required to have Welsh?

The Chairperson:

In other words, can it be a barrier to employment?

Lord Browne:

My point is that the European Union has free movement of people from one member state to another. I might see the language requirement as an impediment or a form of discrimination.

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

I am also a scientist by background.

Dominic talked about the politicisation of language. He was right: the introduction of the Welsh Language Act 1993 took the sting out of the issue and it became more of an administrative and a bureaucratic issue rather than a political issue, because those political objectives had been achieved by campaigners who regarded Welsh as a big political issue. It does remain a political issue; lobby and protest groups such as the Welsh Language Society still exist. However, they have less to campaign for now. In recent years, they have focused more on companies in the private sector, such as the mobile phone company Orange. Therefore, the Act has succeeded. I mentioned earlier that when the board was established, it wanted to take as many people as it could in Wales with it. The other term that was used a lot was that the language must not be a political football, so people have kept their eye on that.

The member's second question was about the sensitive issue of how to ensure that the language requirement was not threatening to non-Welsh speakers. Employment principles must be handled carefully. Any employer who designates Welsh as essential to being successful in a job application should be aware that they can be challenged in court or at an industrial tribunal. A good case must be made to justify making Welsh essential for a job.

Lord Browne gave an example about a position in Aberystwyth University. The specific job in question would have to be considered. If the university declared Welsh to be essential, the question of why that was the case could be posed. If the answer was that the course was attended by 100 Welsh-speaking students who want to learn in the medium of Welsh, the criterion could probably be justified. On the other hand, if it were just an ordinary course attended by students from all over the world, the language requirement could be justifiably challenged. It is a case of judging each job on its merits. An organisation cannot have a blanket requirement to employ only Welsh speakers, because that would quickly cause it trouble.

More parents choosing to send their children to Welsh-medium schools creates an emotional and family investment in the language, so its ownership has spread through the community in Wales as more young people attend those schools. In that sense, the language requirement can become less of an issue. It is all delicate and finely balanced, but our experience is that the issue has not raised much controversy. Newspapers stories do not appear stating that it is disgraceful that knowledge of Welsh is desirable for a particular job. Nor do we receive letters to that effect. It is seen as part and parcel of life in modern Wales.

The Chairperson:

Huw, we have still to receive two more presentations. Therefore, please make a concluding comment.

Dr Onllwyn Jones:

OK. The creative industries are good examples of financial benefits. A lot of S4C's children's programmes, such as SuperTed, have been exported around the world. Private-sector companies that brand products bilingually find that doing so adds value to the product.

To be fair, there is not a huge bank of data on the financial benefits of the language, but there are some.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for your contribution. We will all be able to read the Hansard record of the dialogue. Go raibh maith agat.

We will now move to the next witness session. I want members to work with me on more ruthless time management. Maidin mhaith. I welcome Joe Hamill and Deaglán Ó Briain from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs. I ask you to move straight to your presentation.

Mr Joe Hamill (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs):

Go raibh maith agat. I am an assistant secretary general of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. My brief includes the Irish language. My colleague is a senior principal officer in the Department and heads up its Irish language policy division.

The Chairperson:

We anticipate ending this evidence session in about 35 minutes, because we have still to receive another presentation.

Mr Hamill:

We have already circulated our brief, so I suggest that we do not go over it again.

The Chairperson:

We would be grateful for that.

Mr D Bradley:

Maidin mhaith. Why did the Government in the South choose to call the Act the Official Languages Act 2003, rather than the "Irish Language Act 2003"?

Mr Hamill:

The main reason was that the constitution specifies that Irish is the first official language and that English is the second. Therefore, the broad thinking behind the legislation was to meet constitutional requirements that came to the fore through a number of court cases. The legal advice was that we should deal with constitutional aspects in that way. My colleague is more familiar with the subject, so I will ask him to add to what I said.

Mr Deaglán Ó Briain (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs):

On a philosophical basis, part of the rationale was to put the customer first and to allow the citizen to choose which official language he or she uses when engaging with the state for public services. That applies to English as much as Irish, although Irish is obviously the weaker language and the one that needs protection. So, it is about putting the customer in a position in which he or she has a real choice and ensuring that public-sector organisations do not determine the language with which citizens engage with them when seeking services.

Mr D Bradley:

Prior to 2003, there was quite a bit of support for the Irish language from the state in the South through the education system and, as you said, in the constitution. What value did the Official Languages Act 2003 add to the support mechanisms for the language that existed at the time?

Mr Hamill:

The key point is that it provides a framework within which citizens can engage with civil and public services through the structures that have been created. As you are aware, a system of language schemes is in place, and various rights for citizens when dealing with public services are written in to the legislation. In addition, we have the Oifig Choimisinéir na d Teangacha Oifigiúla, the Language Commissioner's office. In short, the Act provides a structure. The policy position has not changed, neither has the policy commitment to the Irish language. The

main issue is to provide a structure and mechanisms to allow direct engagement.

Mr D Bradley:

Has that been successful?

Mr Hamill:

It has had some success. It is a process, and we have said from the start that it would have to develop. Part of the principle has been that there would be iterations of services that are provided for in language schemes every three years to allow for incremental change. We have always worked with a system of using existing resources, and I think that there has been success. There are different views on that, but we would say that there has been some success. It is, though, a long-term process.

Miss McIlveen:

Your presentation was essentially about the Irish language being your official language. Given that there is an Ulster-Scots community in the Irish Republic, and that Ulster Scots is significantly different from the official language, why has the Irish Republic not signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages?

Mr Hamill:

The main reason for the policy decision not to sign the charter was that the Government does not view the Irish language as a regional or minority language. That is broadly the reason.

Miss McIlveen:

I appreciate that, but I was referring to Ulster Scots.

Mr Hamill:

Members will be aware that we provide quite a bit of support for Ulster Scots through the Ulster-Scots Agency and through direct interventions in a number of counties where Ulster Scots is an important community language. There have been preliminary discussions about the idea, but they have not been progressed. We have signalled that we would be willing to consider that and to put proposals to Ministers, but, as of now, it has not taken any shape.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for attending.

Can you define the Irish language: is it the language that emerged in the de Valera era in the 1930s, which was basically an amalgam of what was happening in Kerry, Connaught and Donegal, or is it something totally different?

You said that it was a constitutional requirement. Was it a constitutional requirement of the Free State or of the Irish Republic? When did that constitutional requirement emerge?

Mr Hamill:

I am not a linguistic expert. The Irish language exists in a number of different dialects, but an official standard has been set down.

Mr K Robinson:

When was that standard set down?

Mr Ó Briain:

The written standard was originally developed in the 1920s, and underwent a substantial change in the 1950s. It tries to bring together three "dialects" — to use the English word — that are mutually intelligible. People can understand speakers from each of the three regions.

Mr K Robinson:

Were they separate languages, or were they regional variations of a common language?

Mr Ó Briain:

Linguists will tell you that there is no absolute answer to that question. We say that they are regional speech patterns of a common language. There is no objective definition of dialect, or of when a dialect becomes a language. In a sense, the only objective definition is that speakers regard themselves as members of one language group with, in the case of Irish, three separate patterns.

If memory serves me correctly, the 1922 Constitution of the Free State had substantially the same provision about the Irish language — it being the national language and therefore the first

official language — as the 1937 Constitution.

Mr Brolly:

Go raibh míle maith agat.

How important is the Irish Language Commissioner? Is he kept busy?

Mr Hamill:

He is important. Deaglán deals with him more than I do on a daily basis. We provide funding for the relatively small office, which has about eight staff. The commissioner is independent and is nominated by parliamentary process and is appointed by the President. In the past year, he has handled approximately 600 complaints and enquiries and formally investigated 17 or 18 complaints.

My Department regards him as a good resource, because he hosts a site that provides a lot of information about all the language schemes and so on. He is a good source of information for the public, and he advises public bodies on compliance issues and so on. Therefore, the Department considers the office to be very important.

Mr T Clarke:

In answer to a question, it was stated that Irish is the first official language. What percentage of people in your Parliament use the first official language on a daily basis?

Mr Ó Briain:

The percentage is very small. I do not have the figure for people who use it, but it is estimated that about 3% of debates are conducted in Irish.

Mr T Clarke:

If Irish is the first official language, why is the uptake so small?

Mr Ó Briain:

It could be for political purposes in that politicians may choose to speak in English because that is the language that is used by most of the media. There is a fear that their contributions will not be covered if they speak in Irish.

The number of native Irish speakers in our Parliament is also quite small, and many people feel more comfortable using English. They have the right to use either language. Irish may be used in circumstances in which an issue is particularly relevant to the Irish language; whereas, English might be spoken in other instances.

Mr Hamill:

It would not be unusual for a Member to speak partly in Irish and in English. A system in the Parliament provides for simultaneous translation. The politicians decide which language they want to use.

Mr McCartney:

Go raibh maith agat. The Committee has heard that, from the Welsh perspective, one of the key elements in protecting and enhancing the language was the Welsh Language Act 1993. What role did the Official Languages Act 2003 play in enhancing Irish?

Mr Ó Briain:

When we drafted our legislation, we considered the experiences in Wales and Canada, which is where an Coimisinéir Teanga — the concept of an ombudsman-type official — comes from.

Public bodies are influenced by, and respond to, legislation. In negotiations with public-sector organisations that we deal with, we found that there was quite an amount of commitment to, and good will toward, the Irish language that had not been brought together in the past. The schemes provide a mechanism by which we can agree a realistic, achievable plan to provide better organisation of services through the Irish language. Legislation is only one element of what must be done to support the language, but it is important.

Mr McCartney:

The submission outlines some of the enhancements for statutory bodies and for third-level education in Irish. Has there been an increase in the number of children being taught through the medium of Irish at bunscoil and manscoil levels?

Mr Ó Briain:

There has been a substantial grassroots movement that is driven by parents who want to provide

Irish-medium education for their children, particularly at primary level. That leads to a demand for provision at secondary level and a follow-on demand for third-level provision and a need for us to service the needs of the language as a recognised official, working language at EU level.

Mr McCartney:

Is there a correlation between the grassroots movement, the enactment of the 2003 Act and that growth? In what way are those factors related?

Mr Ó Briain:

It is difficult to judge that relationship. The legislation has not been in place for long, and it is a long-term project. Therefore, we will better appreciate the long-term success and impact retrospectively. The legislation was a product of a particular decision by the Supreme Court. That decision created the context in which legislation was required. Irish language voluntary organisations also ran a sustained campaign over quite a number of years.

Mr McCartney:

What was the nature of the judgement by the Supreme Court?

Mr Ó Briain:

It was a particular judgement on the translation into Irish of primary legislation. The name of the case was Ó Beoláin, and the judgement that was delivered in 2001 found that there was a constitutional obligation to publish primary legislation in Irish, as referenced in the Constitution. It went on to state that that should ideally be done simultaneously. The judgement further commented on the state's obligation to promote the Irish language. That was one of the streams that fed into the drafting of the Official Languages Act 2003.

The Chairperson:

What is the status of the 2028 plan? What are the Department's views on the benefits of bilingualism to society in general?

Mr Hamill:

There was a commitment in a Government policy statement to produce a plan, and a consultation has taken place. A Cabinet Committee chaired by the Taoiseach is overseeing that process, which is at an advanced stage. It is difficult to be definitive, but we remain hopeful that the

Government will agree a plan in the next month or two.

Mr Ó Briain:

Some international research has been carried out on the benefits of bilingualism to society and individuals. Members may have heard about some of that research from our Welsh colleague. From our perspective, there is also the issue of the cultural heritage of the Irish language. We have some documentation that members can pick up after the meeting. Among that is a policy statement on the Irish language that the Government published in December 2006. The statement is brief, but it makes a number of important points, one of which is that English is a language that is of enormous value to our society. As the major language of international commerce, and so forth, it is extremely important.

The statement also makes the point that the Irish language is a shared element of our indigenous heritage and culture. Even if people in the Republic do not speak Irish today, their ancestors did, and it is, therefore, a link back through the generations. It is the oldest literary language north of the Alps, and it comes with a cultural heritage that benefits our society. The Irish language offers a sense of identity, contact with previous generations and shared heritage.

Mr K Robinson:

Briefly, you will know that I am an avid fan of TnaG, partly because I do not have to pay a licence fee for it, but also because it shows great films. You made little mention of the media in your submission, which was probably deliberate. Would you care to comment on the role of the media as a vehicle for taking forward the language, or as an obstruction to it?

Mr Hamill:

We did not comment on the media because we focused on the 2003 Act. Our Department does not have direct responsibility for the media, but we view it as an important part of the efforts of the media. TG4 has a small niche audience but has been highly successful. It has managed to portray a modern view of the Irish language to young people, and that has been valuable from our perspective. As you are probably aware, there is a full-time Irish language radio station, Raidió na Gaeltachta, which is available nationally, on the Internet, and so forth. We regard both as important.

Lord Browne:

You referred to TG4, which produces quality programmes. However, you said that its viewing figures are somewhat low. Have you heard, anecdotally, that more and more people in the Republic of Ireland are switching to Sky TV? Does it produce any programmes in Irish?

The Chairperson:

That is a good idea, Wallace.

Mr Hamill:

It does not, as far as I am aware.

Lord Browne:

I was pleased to hear you say that you regard English as being important for world trade and for getting your message out. China, Japan, Iran and Russia all now broadcast in English. English is now regarded as the world language.

Mr McNarry:

You are very welcome. I thank you for making your written presentation in English, and I can also understand what I have heard from you so far. When the other guys talk, they lose me.

Do all Government administration, legislation and paperwork normally appear in both languages?

Mr Hamill:

No, legislation is now published in both languages simultaneously after enactment, but not when it is published as a Bill. Most legislation goes through Parliament in the English language.

Mr McNarry:

Is that done for convenience because English is the main language that is used?

Mr Hamill:

English is the main language that is used. In the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, for example, business is transacted through Irish in some parts of the Department, but through English in other parts.

Mr McNarry:

Are any pressures put on immigrants who come to work to learn Irish?

Mr Ó Briain:

No. Facilities are made available to immigrants to learn Irish and, indeed, to learn English. Recently, we conducted a survey on attitudes to the Irish language. I can make that survey available to the Committee if you wish. That was a follow-up to a survey that was carried out in the 1990s. It showed that the overwhelming majority of people have positive attitudes towards the Irish language and that there was almost no difference in attitude between people who were born in the state and people who were born outside the state.

Many immigrants come not only as economic migrants but as people who see themselves as having a long-term home and who wish to settle down. Those people see the Irish language as part of what is required to become integrated in society, and they are interested in it. There is no compulsion, but we provide facilities for people who wish to learn Irish, whether they are domestically born or whether they are immigrants.

Mr McNarry:

I understand that people might wish to learn Irish. In his presentation, our colleague from the National Assembly for Wales gave a detailed analysis about the circumstances in which it is "desirable" and "essential" to learn the Welsh language for future employment. I understand that Irish is part of the curriculum down there. Do people who have learned Irish as part of the curriculum feel that their rights are taken away from them when someone comes in from another place and does not have to meet the same requirement when applying for a job? Or can immigrants not apply for certain jobs where Irish is a requirement?

Mr Ó Briain:

Certain jobs in organisations do business or provide services through Irish. Clearly, one cannot do those jobs without having an ability in the language. The Official Languages Act 2003 places an obligation on, for example, Monaghan County Council to provide services through Irish and to ensure that it has the staff to do so. It does not place an obligation on individual staff members. That organisation transacts the bulk of its business through the English language.

I cannot provide a definitive answer to the question of whether citizenship is required for employment in the public service. Most organisations do not have such a requirement, but that may not hold true in all cases.

Mr McNarry:

Can you follow that up and provide some evidence on that matter to the Committee Clerk?

Mr Ó Briain:

Yes.

Mr McNarry:

Our Welsh colleague also said that, in certain parts of Wales, a policeman is trained to level 1 competence in Welsh so that he can carry out his duties such as making arrests. Does a similar requirement apply in the Irish Republic, and, if someone from another place were to want to work as a policeman, would he be required to speak Irish? Is it the case that people cannot apply unless they know Irish?

Mr Ó Briain:

I know that, in the North Wales Police force, for example, there is a requirement to speak Welsh. Most of that population speak Welsh, so one could not function as a police officer if one did not have that ability. There are a number of areas in which Irish is the community language, and there is a requirement that police officers — members of the Garda Síochána — stationed there are able to do business through the Irish language, because that is the language of the community. Part of the training process includes Irish-language training.

The Garda Síochána has no citizenship requirement. There is a requirement to have the ability, on graduation, to speak Irish at a basic level. There is a stream in that training programme that seeks to bring people up to the standard that would be required to do business through Irish. In a small number of areas, Irish is the community language, and there is a specific requirement for the purpose of customer service. Quite a few people who are born outside the state, who are not Irish, are members of the police force.

Mr McNarry:

What is the percentage of parliamentary questions asked in Irish to the Prime Minister and

Ministers? Even if they are not asked in Irish, are they automatically answered in Irish and English?

Mr Ó Briain:

In our Department, the practice is to answer the question in the language in which it is asked. The overall percentage is very small. It is perhaps 50% in my area. Overall, though, it is very small.

Mr McCarthy:

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, your presentation mentions planning for the future, with a 20-year strategic plan. How realistic are the figures that you have included? Do you really expect that the target will be reached?

Secondly, this question may sound slightly off-tangent, but you are in a position of authority. As I understand it, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in the South is about to embark on a postcode campaign. When we implemented that here in the 1970s, we largely lost our townland names. Is there anything that you and your Department can do to avoid making the same mistake that we made? In other words, introduce postcodes by all means, but save the townland names at the same time.

Mr Hamill:

The targets are very ambitious, but they have been adopted as a matter of policy by the Government. The policy view is that it needs to be challenging, it needs to try to engage people.

Mr Ó Briain:

The targets are challenging, but realistic. If we take the number of passive speakers, there is a realistic chance of turning a sufficient number of those into active speakers.

My understanding is that the Government has not yet made a final decision on postcodes, but there has been a public announcement about an intention to introduce them. My understanding is that the postcode will accompany the address. Certainly, in rural areas, most people use the townland as the key local unit in their address. That should not change.

Mr McCarthy:

Is there no legislative means whereby that will be retained? We brought postcodes in here in the 1970s, and we lost a lot of townland names. This Committee is trying to back-pedal and reintroduce those townland names for future generations and for our heritage.

Mr Ó Briain:

That is not our Department's area of responsibility, and it has not formally come before the Government yet. My understanding is that it is about introducing a postcode, which will make a range of postal and courier services more efficient, rather than prohibiting the use of the existing address. That is not part of what is being considered.

The Chairperson:

A lot of young people from my constituency go to the Gaeltacht, particularly in the summer months. Is there any financial threat hanging over scéim na bhfoghlaimnroiri? The bean an tí would typically get financial assistance from your Department. Is that under threat at present?

Mr Hamill:

To give the broad context, from our perspective, the scheme is very successful; each year, about 27,000 young people go to Gaeltacht areas. I am not sure whether members are familiar with how the scheme operates, but the young people spend three weeks in households where Irish is the normal language of communication. Each year, we spend about €5 million to subsidise the householders.

The idea that the scheme is under threat may have come from a recommendation that a review group that examined public expenditure recently made to terminate it. No decision has been made yet, but our perspective is that the scheme is very important, because it gives a lot of people a chance to hear Irish spoken daily as a community language. Indeed, a lot of people would attest to its positive effects. Having considered the range of recommendations, the Government will take a decision in due course.

The Chairperson:

I thank you both for your presentation.

Mr D Bradley:

Yesterday, a statement from Conradh na Gaeilge — the Gaelic League — said that if the proposals on the Irish language that were made in the McCarthy report, which is also known as "An Bord Snip Nua", were implemented, a lot of good work that the state has done through the years may be undone. Obviously, Irish-language organisations see the proposals as a huge threat.

Mr Hamill:

We have had quite a few submissions from Irish-language groups, advocating strongly that those recommendations should not be accepted. Ultimately, however, it will be a matter for the Government, probably in a budgetary context.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for your presentation, and gabhaim buíochas don bheirt agaibh for your written submission, which will form part of our deliberations.

We will learn next about the Scottish experience. We must bear in mind our intention to conclude proceedings in half an hour. We will welcome Douglas Ansdell and Michael Napier. Douglas is the head of the Scottish Government's Gaelic and Scots unit, and Michael is the policy officer in the Directorate for Culture, External Affairs and Tourism.

I welcome Douglas Ansdell and Michael Napier. I believe that you have arrived in Belfast only in the past hour or so.

Mr Douglas Ansdell (Scottish Government):

Yes, we did.

The Chairperson:

Fair play to you; yous are good-uns. Fáilte romhaibh — you are very welcome.

We have received your written submission. We anticipate the session lasting 30 to 35 minutes, so, given the fact that we have your submission, perhaps you will begin with a brief opening statement, after which members will ask questions. Thank you for making the effort to be here.

Mr Ansdell:

We will share our delivery of our opening statement. It is a pleasure to be with you, and I am glad that the sun is shining. It is good to meet the members of the Committee. As officials who deal with small languages, there is a fair bit of co-operation with, and we have good working relationships, with officials in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, so we are glad to extend that co-operation by meeting you.

Gàidhlig and Scots both have an important role to play in the history, heritage, literature and cultural life of Scotland. We feel that that is recognised and supported, but the measures that have been put in place to deal with them are different and varied. For Gàidhlig matters, the fragile condition of the language has been a central concern, and that forces our Ministers to answer a question. Given that fragile state of the language, what do they want to do with it? The response is that we want to secure the future for Gàidhlig. Therefore, what steps do they want to take to secure that future?

The actions that were taken to promote the language increased in the mid-1980s. The three important areas for promoting the Gàidhlig language were education, the arts and the media. In 2000, interest increased in language legislation, and the phrase "secure status" for the language was used to create greater stability for the language in Scottish public life.

In 2002, a Member's Bill was introduced in the Scottish Parliament, but it fell. In 2003, an Executive Bill was introduced, and that became law in 2005. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 established Bòrd na Gàidhlig and implemented a language-planning mechanism for a national plan and guidance on Gàidhlig.

Our priorities at that time were the learning of the language, the usage of the language, and concerns with the status of the language. We have put a number of good structures in place that we must not ignore, but perhaps now is the time to use them to strengthen the language and increase the number of people who speak it. Michael Napier will comment on the measures that we have put in place for the Scots language.

Mr Michael Napier (Scottish Government):

Unlike Gàidhlig, there is no supporting legislation in Scotland for the Scots language. It is fair to say that although previous Administrations did not have any anti-Scots sentiments per se, they

were keen to promote and sustain the status quo. Since May 2007, the new Administration have made significant manifesto commitments, and we are seeing a new appetite for measures to support and promote the use of the language.

Since the new Administration came to power, we have conducted an audit of provision, which is a mapping exercise to see who is doing what and where they are doing it in order to promote use of the language. Earlier this year, a national conference was held, and that was the first of its kind held by the Government, and most of the leading proponents of the Scots language were invited.

Since then, we have gathered a fair amount of useful data, and our Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution, Michael Russell, is establishing a ministerial working group. That group will take forward some of the key messages that came from the research and the conference. We hope to get that working group together in the next few weeks. Part of that group's remit would include the pre-election manifesto commitments that the Government have given, the obligations in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and, as I said, any of the recommendations or ideas that emanated from the research and conference that the group feels are particularly important or relevant.

Yesterday, we commenced a public-attitudes survey on the use of the Scots language. We have gathered a lot of useful information from people who identify themselves as users of the language, and the survey will give us a bit more of an insight into the background of the people who are not necessarily users of the language.

Our Minister is keen to position Scots alongside Gàidhlig. It remains to be seen whether we need the same kind of institutional measures or legislation that Douglas mentioned. In due course, it may be that attention is given to other languages that are used in Scotland; however, our main attention now is on Gàidhlig and Scots.

Mr K Robinson:

I thank the witnesses for dashing in to the Committee. The George Best Belfast City Airport is spot on — what other city has one like it?

It has been helpful to read the précis of evidence. On visits to Edinburgh, I have spoken to

some Scots speakers and, in fact, to some Doric speakers, who feel rather neglected, if I may throw in a punch for them. It is great that material such as the tickety-boo stuff is going into schools, but I could not help but see that there is a push on for Gàidhlig.

When I am not watching TG4, I avidly watch BBC Alba, which is very good too, particularly with the straps in English along the bottom that tell me what is happening in Glasgow, Aberdeen and other places. That new departure is bringing a breath of fresh air to the Gàidhlig language, but those of us who support Ulster Scots, Lallans, Ullans — whatever title is chosen — are rediscovering our roots.

We look to Scotland for help in that project. Yet, when we look to the development of the Scots language, we see all that is being done for Gàidhlig and how the profile of the Scots language will be raised to encourage its use in a variety of settings. When it comes to Gàidhlig, it is to be promoted in education; the media, including broadcasting; further and higher education; Gàidhlig arts; publishing; Gàidhlig community activities. Bòrd na Gàidhlig also has a role to play.

Then we come to Scots. We are going to have Scots-language centre, a Scots-language dictionary, and Scots in education, arts and literature will be promoted. That is out of balance. What will be done to address that?

Mr Napier:

No one would dispute that there is an imbalance. As I said earlier, it is only in the past couple of years that we have seen any change of heart and a desire to redress that balance. There is a general acceptance at ministerial level that more ought to be done to promote and develop the use of Scots.

Mr K Robinson:

The Scottish Government experience reflects what we have found here in the Ulster-Scots community. We are not treated seriously; we do not exist. If we do exist, they try to change us and mould us in a way that is acceptable to the powers that be. Is that barrier found in Scotland as well?

Mr Napier:

That would have been the case until fairly recently. However, in February this year, a Scottish Minister hosted a national conference for the Scots language, and that made big inroads into that perception. The event was well received and attracted good media coverage, both TV and press. I think that we are turning a corner.

Mr Ansdell:

It is fair to say that in Scottish public life, in local authorities and in the public bodies with which we work, there is a fair acceptance that Gàidhlig and Scots must be supported and promoted in their different ways. We still get occasional comments and unhelpful letters in newspapers, but as Michael said, in public bodies that perform functions for education, the arts or local authorities, there is a fair acceptance that things must be done for both languages. The corner has been turned, if you like

Mr K Robinson:

Will my Doric friends be catered for as well?

Mr Napier:

Absolutely. The ministerial working group that we are establishing will ensure a fair coverage across the country, so we will have speakers from the Shetland Islands to Dumfries and Galloway in the south-west.

Mr Brolly:

I am interested in this subject, because I also watch BBC Alba. Ciamar a tha sibh? Fáilte romhaibh. How important is BBC Alba in the promotion of the language and in efforts to regenerate interest in it? How many people watch the channel?

The Chairperson:

I ask you answer Mr Brolly's question along with Mr McCartney's.

Mr McCartney:

The previous two presentations to the Committee on the Welsh language and the Irish language pointed to the crucial role that legislation played in ensuring the promotion, enhancement and protection of the respective languages. Your presentation made it clear that Gàidhlig is now

protected under the Act, and one can see the enhancement. What pre-election manifesto commitments were made about the Scots language? Do the witnesses regard legislation as the best way to ensure that Scots is promoted and enhanced in the same way as the Gàidhlig language?

Mr Ansdell:

There was a long and hard campaign to get Gàidhlig TV, and when it came, it brought many benefits. It put the language straight into the home, which is where young people would hear it. The home element of language learning, the creation of employment opportunities and the retention of skills all brought many benefits.

Television is very expensive. Research has not been done to cost it and to list the number of speakers who have benefited from having the language broadcast straight into their homes, but a fair bit of anecdotal evidence, if there is such a thing, suggests that a feeling is developing that Gàidhlig television has brought benefits. It is very welcome to the Gàidhlig community and to Gàidhlig supporters, and it is a good step forward. It is one of the structures, along with the Bòrd, the Act and education, that we are glad is in place. Hopefully, we can use the structures to try to increase the number of Gàidhlig speakers.

Mr Napier:

You asked what commitments were given on the Scots language before the election. They were to raise awareness of the Scots language and to encourage its use in broadcasting, the arts and education.

European obligations were referred to. As you probably know, Scots is recognised under part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Reference was also made to ensuring that a question on Scots will appear on the 2011 census.

The question of the prestige that a piece of legislation brings is perhaps offset by the question of why one should have legislation and what utility it has. The case of Scots is quite bizarre, because our best hunch is that many people speak and use Scots regularly. In the mid-1990s, the General Register Office for Scotland, which manages the census, estimated that as many as one in three of the population were using Scots. We do not have any hard-and-fast data to show how many people are speaking it and where they are. It could be that, as the Government are setting

out to do now, giving a bit more of a push or more gentle coaxing will give a better handle on who those people are and where they are.

The Minister is open to the idea of legislation, but once he gets a better idea of where those people are and how they are using the language, he will be better placed to decide whether legislation and the institutional approach that Gàidhlig has been given is required for Scots.

Mr McCartney:

Did the push towards the parties' election manifesto commitments come from enthusiasts, language bodies or users?

Mr Napier:

Some Scottish National Party (SNP) Members of the Scottish Parliament identify themselves as Scots-language speakers. There is cross-party support for Gàidhlig and for Scots, and there is certainly support in the SNP. Therefore, it is quite an easy sell for that party. Without overstating the point too much, that is a marked change in the status quo, because the previous Administration were keen to do much for Gàidhlig but less for Scots.

Mr McCartney:

How did the issue end up being the responsibility of the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and the Constitution, rather than that of another Minister? Is it a particular interest of his, or is it because the languages are recognised under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages?

Mr Ansdell:

The Minister has an interest in things Gàidhlig and Scots; he has been a long-term supporter of both. The first part of his portfolio in the title is Minister for Culture, and Gàidhlig has traditionally sat in the Culture portfolio.

Mr McCartney:

Is he also the Minister for Culture?

Mr Ansdell:

Yes.

Mr McCartney:

He is not listed in our papers as such.

Mr Ansdell:

I apologise for that.

Mr McNarry:

You are welcome, gentlemen. I support what my colleague Ken Robinson said about linkage; I hope that you will bear that in mind. I am sure that Hansard will love me for this, but will you give me an example sentence in Gàidhlig and in Scots? Would you also translate what you said?

Mr Napier:

I can give you a sentence in Gàidhlig — tha mi toilichte a bhith an seo an diugh. That means, "I am pleased to be here today". In Scots, the same sentence is "I'm richt gled to be wi' yous the day."

Mr McNarry:

That is excellent. Now I can understand a bit more.

The Chairperson:

The Gàidhlig is similar to the Irish — tá mé an-sásta bheith anseo inniu.

Mr McNarry:

I did not understand any of that. I apologise to Hansard staff for that.

Given that we are talking about the Scots language and the Gàidhlig language, do you consider Ulster Scots to be a language?

Mr Ansdell:

Yes, certainly.

Mr McNarry:

I found what you said about the Scots Language Centre particularly interesting. Previously, the

Scottish Arts Council funded Scots-language dictionaries. Why did the Government decide to cut out the Arts Council and fund those two bodies directly?

Mr Napier:

What happened was, in fact, the reverse of how you describe it. The Scottish Arts Council is a non-departmental public body that is at arm's length from the Government. It has control of its budget, and it decided to stop funding those two bodies.

Mr McNarry:

Does the Scottish Arts Council not receive any Government funding?

Mr Napier:

It does, but the responsibility for managing its budget is devolved to the council itself. It had its reasons for deciding to withdraw money from those two bodies. Ministers decided to intervene, with the result that our team now funds those two bodies directly.

Mr McNarry:

In the light of some of the Committee's work on the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, perhaps we could find out why the Scottish Arts Council made that decision.

Is there a presentational difference in your country between the promotion of languages and the promotion of culture? You demonstrated the Gàidhlig and Scots languages to the Committee. Is the approach to promoting the languages similar in practice to that that is taken to promoting music and drama as art forms? Do they mix?

Mr Ansdell:

Yes, Scots and Gàidhlig certainly do mix. At several festivals throughout the country, singers and poets express their art in Scots and Gàidhlig. In that way, both languages are well represented in the cultural life of Scotland and in its festival life, whether that is at small or large festivals. Both languages punch above their weight culturally. They are well represented on the cultural stage, and they are well appreciated. Even those who still debate and argue about the written language, road signs, and so forth, welcome the cultural expression of both languages. They sit well together, and they have much in common.

Mr McNarry:

Do you think that there is a lesson to be learned from that? How do you think the Irish-Gaelic culture and the Ulster-Scots culture can get involved in your festivals, or vice versa? Is there a lesson to be learned in that there could be a broader cultural reception of festivals? Is there perhaps a wider appeal? This might sound snobbish, but there may be a distance between them, so bringing them together in a wider cultural forum may work. People can tap their feet together, rather than understand —

Mr Ansdell:

Yes, indeed. The evidence does not exist for here, but I imagine that if we started looking, we could find that there is a fair bit of exchange between Scotland and Northern Ireland. For example, musicians and poets could get together to speak Scots and Ulster Scots.

Mr McNarry:

Could something be gained from the divisiveness between the Irish expression here — and how it is expressed — and the Ulster Scots? Could they gain from the lessons that you have learned where, it appears to me, neither of those two languages threaten each other?

Mr Ansdell:

I expect that that would be possible. We see plenty of examples where that works. It works in Scotland.

Miss McIlveen:

What are the cost implications for the Scottish Government since the Act was implemented?

Mr Ansdell:

We have set up a body, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and we have given a significant amount of Government funding to that body. It gets £5·4 million a year, which covers its running costs and is used to distribute grants. One element of that grant is the small amount — £1·4 million — that is given to support the Gàidhlig Act or any Gàidhlig plans that are developed. If Bòrd na Gàidhlig approaches a public body and asks them to develop a Gàidhlig plan that has certain commitments, that body has an annual amount of £1·4 million to support the preparation and implementation of those plans. The £5·4 million for Bòrd na Gàidhlig is the only amount that leads from the Act. If a public body, be it Highlands and Islands Enterprise or Argyll and Bute Council were to develop

a Gàidhlig plan, they may carry costs from their own expenses.

Miss McIlveen:

What about the costs for Government expenditure, for example, through the Parliament and various Departments? Are there additional costs for translations and so forth?

Mr Ansdell:

There will be a cost for that, but it will be lost in general divisional running costs; we do not have a central cost for translation budgets. If our Department were considering translating a document or a press release, as we do from time to time, it would be funded from our running costs. It is the same for many other divisions in the Scottish Government. There is a cost, but I do not think that it would be possible to disentangle it from other, wider running costs.

Miss McIlveen:

This is probably an unfair question, bearing in mind that you were not here for the presentation, but are there differences between the Scottish model and how you implemented your Act in comparison with the Welsh model and how they implemented their official language Act?

Mr Ansdell:

Yes. The Act in Wales is wider in scope, in that it gives the Welsh Language Board more powers. It also gives the Welsh Language Board the power to ask UK Government bodies to create Welsh-language schemes, as they refer to them. That Act sets up the Welsh Language Board.

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 is similar to the Welsh Language Act 1993 in that the Welsh Act creates schemes, whereas our Act creates plans, and the commitments for the public bodies are in those plans. Therefore, the model is similar, but the Welsh Act is wider and has more powers.

Miss McIlveen:

Is what you have sufficient for your needs?

Mr Ansdell:

What we have is a good start. The Act has created a change in Scottish public life, it has given

status to Gàidhlig, and it has raised awareness of Gàidhlig things in Scottish public bodies.

The Act was passed in 2005, and the provisions were commenced in 2006; therefore, we are still in the early days of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's developing Gàidhlig plans. Other voices would welcome stronger legislation for Gàidhlig education, but that is for another day.

Mr McCarthy:
Is it fair to say that without the Act, Scotland would have not progressed as far as it has?

Mr Ansdell:
I feel that that is the case. The Act has given Gàidhlig status, it has created a Gàidhlig body and it has raised awareness of Gàidhlig in Scottish public life. That has been good for us, but it might be possible to achieve those things by other means. However, the Act has certainly brought benefits to Scotland.

Mr K Robinson:
My question is addressed to Michael specifically. The Committee has received representations from groups that are based in my constituency in East Antrim, which faces the Ayrshire coast. Those groups have made links across the channel, but they cannot find funding for the different events that they are participating in, or staging, in Scotland. Have you encountered similar problems in taking groups from Scotland to events here?

Mr Napier:
I do not know, is my honest answer, but we are probably not as close to those groups as may be the case in Northern Ireland. Most of the funding that goes to community groups tends to be disbursed at arm's length by either a set body or a Government agency.

I would imagine that many people make the journey across —

The Chairperson:
Useful contacts are being made here today, Ken, between members of the Committee and officials.

Mr D Bradley:

Go raibh maith agat, a Cathaoirligh. Céad míle fáilte, a Dhubhghlais, agus fair fa ye Michael. Douglas, you said that the Gàidhlig Act was a weaker instrument than the Act in Wales but that it was still a good start. What additional powers would you like to see flowing from future Gàidhlig-language legislation in Scotland?

Mr Ansdell:

The Act asks Bòrd na Gàidhlig to draw up guidance for Gàidhlig-language plans. That is related to the Act, rather than being one of its provisions. That means that when a public body is asked to prepare a Gàidhlig plan, it will receive guidance on what it should be doing. Therefore, there will be potential to examine and strengthen that guidance. For example, if a local authority or public body is asked to develop a Gàidhlig plan, the guidance could suggest that that body do more for and tighten up pre-school or adult education. The first area for potential movement would be strengthening the guidance that flows from the Act. If Ministers were minded to consider fresh legislation for Gàidhlig, it should be for education, with a strengthening of the local authority provision for Gàidhlig education at pre-school and primary levels. However, that would be tricky.

Mr D Bradley:

How strong is the pre-school and primary Gàidhlig-medium movement at the moment?

Mr Ansdell:

Throughout the country, there are about 61 schools in which young people are given their full primary education in Gàidhlig. Those are twin-stream schools in which English and Gàidhlig are used in the same primary schools. There are two full Gàidhlig primary schools, in Glasgow and Inverness, and full Gàidhlig schools are being considered in a few areas in the Highlands, such as Portree and Fortwilliam.

Therefore, there are 60-odd primary schools in which young people can receive their full education in Gàidhlig, and a few projects are close to completion. That means that in a year or a year and a half, we could find ourselves with five or six full Gàidhlig schools instead of two or three.

Mr D Bradley:

Does that mean that there is a growing movement?

Mr Ansdell:

Yes.

Mr D Bradley:

Ulster Scots and the Irish language are perceived by some here to be in opposition. In contrast, the impression that I get from you two gentlemen is that the Scottish people view Scots and Gàidhlig as part of a common tradition or heritage. Is that something that comes naturally to the Scottish people, or have you encouraged or cultivated that deliberately?

The Chairperson:

We visited the Ullans Speakers Association in Ballymoney, Carntogher Community Association and Pobal an Chaistil in Ballycastle, and the people in those places were saying that their language was part of a shared cultural heritage.

Mr Ansdell:

We see a bit of both. There is a bit of a them-and-us situation, and, understandably, some in the Scots community look at the provisions for Gàidhlig and say that similar provisions would strengthen Scots. However, Professor McClure from Aberdeen University, who is a known and recognised supporter of the Scots language, wrote a letter that was published in Scottish newspapers two weeks ago in support of the Gàidhlig language in Scotland.

Mr D Bradley:

Does your Culture Department take any specific measures to encourage greater co-operation between the two language sectors?

Mr Ansdell:

There are a number of examples in music and culture where Scots and Gàidhlig sit together, work together and are expressed together. We are very pleased with a large digitisation project that is happening in the Isle of Skye. Many collectors went to the island in the 1950s and 1960s and asked people for their stories and poems and recorded the oral traditions of the Gàidhlig community and the Scots community. Those recordings are on old reel-to-reel wax cylinders,

and they are being digitised. That is a Heritage Lottery Fund project that combines Scots and Gàidhlig resources. The results will all be available online, and we are pleased that both language communities are co-operating on that.

The Chairperson:

I thank Douglas and Michael for their written submissions and answers, which have been very helpful.

Mr K Robinson:

Chairperson, I think you should say "haste ye back."

The Chairperson:

OK — haste ye back. Slán abhaile.

Mr Ansdell:

It has been a pleasure. We are delighted to have come across to see the sunshine, yourselves and this beautiful building.