



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Language Strategy: Ministerial Briefing

1 July 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Billy Leonard
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr David McClarty
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Nelson McCausland)	Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Donal Moran)	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

I invite the Minister and his departmental colleague, Mr Donal Moran, to join us. Good morning, Minister and Donal, you are welcome. Thank you for coming along. Fáilte romhaibh.

I invite the Minister to brief the Committee on the language strategy. Thereafter, there will be questions to the Minister. Minister, you have indicated that you would like to be away by around 10.30 am.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McCausland):

Yes, please.

The Chairperson:

We will work to that agenda.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the progress of the regional or minority languages strategy for Northern Ireland. Section 28D of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a duty on the Executive to adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and develop the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture and to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

I intend to meet those commitments through the introduction of a regional or minority languages strategy. That strategy will recognise Ulster Scots and Irish as valuable parts of our shared cultural heritage. The strategy will seek to promote wider understanding of the background to the languages, through increasing understanding and awareness between sections of the community who feel a sense of belonging to the Ulster-Scots heritage and culture and those who identify with Irish heritage and culture.

I am keen that the language strategy be grounded in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2008-2011, which gives effect to the cross-cutting theme of a shared and better future for all, equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations. I will include a number of proposals and projects designed to promote that aspiration within the context of culture and language. Each Department will be required to set out its own particular plans to achieve the objectives of the strategy.

The draft strategy is underpinned by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The charter is an international convention, designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages, and it contains detailed undertakings to support such languages. In addition to the charter, the strategy will take account of the Council of Europe's framework for the protection of national minorities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

My Department chairs and provides a secretariat for the interdepartmental charter implementation group, to co-ordinate implementation of the charter. That group is made up of representatives of all Northern Ireland Departments and representatives from the UK Departments that operate in Northern Ireland. The interdepartmental group has previously engaged with the Ulster-Scots Agency, Foras na Gaeilge and Pobal, regarding some aspects relevant to the development of the strategy.

The interdepartmental group will continue to be a useful resource to draw upon during the strategy development and implementation process. However, I would envisage that the group would need to be reconfigured to include more senior representatives from Departments, to ensure its effectiveness. The strategy will be based on several high-level guiding principles and should be overarching, non-prescriptive, needs-based and deliverable within existing resources.

The development of a single strategy for regional or minority languages is designed to highlight our shared heritage and the desire to strive towards parity between the languages. Ulster Scots and Irish are essential parts of our cultural wealth and should be equally cherished as part of the cultural fabric of our society.

It is my vision that Ulster Scots and Irish will be treated with equal recognition and respect, and the strategy will reflect that. The proposed strategy aims are as follows: to create a framework where our regional or minority languages can flourish and be shared by all who wish to use them; to protect and support the development and learning of these languages; to promote wider understanding of the background to the languages through recognition and respect for the

relevant culture, heritage and tradition underpinning each; and to contribute to the promotion of a shared and better future for all.

In order to progress those aims, the strategy sets out a series of shared strategic objectives for Ulster Scots and Irish and a set of detailed actions for each. That structure simultaneously demonstrates that Ulster Scots and Irish are linked as a facet of our shared cultural heritage, while recognising that the languages must be protected and promoted according to their specific needs.

In considering their overall strategy, the Executive will also need to consider resource issues and whether additional funding can be made available. However, if additional resource is not forthcoming, Departments may have to consider the reallocation of current funding in order to resource work on languages in line with the priority that they give to the language agenda, among other pressures.

Since taking up the post of Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I have reviewed the existing draft strategy paper and undertaken some investigation and research into language issues. That included a visit to our nearest UK neighbour, Scotland, to discuss the position there in relation to Scots and Gaelic, the sister languages to Ulster Scots and Irish. I have also had further discussions with the Welsh and Scottish Ministers on language issues and those meetings were both positive and constructive.

The Ulster Scots and Irish languages are valuable parts of our shared cultural heritage. Northern Ireland can learn important lessons from the Scottish experience in depoliticising language issues and developing the community's perception of the languages. I have also engaged in correspondence and held several meetings with the Minister of Education to discuss the links between education and the regional or minority languages strategy. I am currently engaging with the Northern Ireland Office and the BBC regarding some broadcasting issues that will impact on the strategy. Once there is agreement on the issues around education and broadcasting, I intend to submit a paper and draft strategy to the Executive. That will be in the near future. The Executive Committee will be invited to agree the proposed approach and recommend that the draft strategy document is issued for public consultation.

Thank you, Chairman. I am happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.

The Chairperson:

Minister, this Committee has attempted for three years to ensure that the Department arrives at a strategy for the promotion and enhancement of the Irish language and Ulster Scots. For three years, there has been delay attributed to various reasons. Is the delay politically motivated? It is because of party politics?

At a recent Pobal-organised conference, the vice-chairperson of the European committee of experts (Comex) reminded us that the Irish language is protected by part 3 of the EU Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and Ulster Scots by part 2. Comex was critical of your approach, and said that your inappropriate claims for parity of treatment between Irish and Ulster Scots results in nothing being done for either language. How do you answer that accusation?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I am keen to see this matter brought to a resolution and a draft strategy put out to consultation. I am frustrated and disappointed that we have not yet been able to do that. I highlighted in my initial comments that the two outstanding issues preventing progress are education and broadcasting.

Members are aware that, no matter which minority language or culture you talk about anywhere in Europe, education and broadcasting are absolutely central. I heard that point reinforced in a number of conversations that I have had about minority languages with people working in that field elsewhere in the UK, particularly in Scotland. There is a clear understanding that education and broadcasting are central. I have had difficulty getting resolution in regard to both of those matters. As I have stated clearly, once those two outstanding items are resolved, we will be able to put the paper to the Executive.

The Chairperson:

The Comex report states that your approach is unacceptable, according to international language experts. It states that you are treating the two languages as being at an equal stage of development and that your approach is frustrating the development of both languages.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

There is some difficulty in that Northern Ireland was unable to make any written submission to the Comex group, because the submission was held up by the deputy First Minister. A paper was prepared. It was to go to Comex, but it got bogged down in the Executive and was blocked by the deputy First Minister, largely, I think, because of a misunderstanding regarding the nature of a Comex report. It is not supposed to be speculative; it is supposed to be detailed about what has happened and whether the required commitments are being met. It is supposed to be retrospective rather than speculative. That is where the difficulty arose; I think that there was a misunderstanding.

The result was that the submission from Northern Ireland did not go forward. That omission, therefore, means that anything that comes back from the committee of experts is somewhat limited in its value. Comex highlighted the fact that it had not received a submission. It is deeply disappointing that it did not receive one, but that is where the difficulty lay. We had one prepared, and it went to the deputy First Minister. There it stopped, and there it sits.

The Chairperson:

Comex states that the situations of Irish and Ulster Scots are quite different and that language measures specifically directed towards each language are needed, based on their specific needs. It emphasises that your approach is unacceptable and inappropriate and that it is holding up the development of both languages. Is that merely an interpretation? Do those people have no status?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

They are totally reliant on the information that is given to them. Unfortunately, they did not get all the information. I touched on the issue of parity earlier. For me, parity is an important concept, because I believe in equality. However, equality does not mean that B has to get three apples merely because A gets three apples. Since you are availing yourself of a banana, Chairperson, I will use the banana for my example. It might be that somebody gets three apples and somebody else gets two bananas and an orange. There has to be some sense of equity.

I think that there is inequity in minority language provision, particularly in relation to education and broadcasting. If one looks at how much Ulster-Scots language broadcasting there has been in the past number of years, particularly on television, one would be surprised and disappointed, because virtually nothing was produced in some years. The Committee might want to write to the BBC and ask for up-to-date figures on that. There is, however, provision for the Irish language, which Irish language activists would probably say is inadequate. Nevertheless,

there is a provision. There is a problem when nothing is happening. That is why we are engaged in conversation with the BBC.

Parity is not just about A having to get exactly the same as B. They should be getting what is appropriate to them, but they should be treated fairly. Parity is an important concept. Some years ago, it was put down as the four Rs. I believe in parity of recognition, respect, resources and representation. Those are important. The existence of languages must be recognised, as well as the fact that there is a community that associates with them and uses them. There must also be respect for the languages. Representation is also important: people from those language communities should be given equal access to influencing decision-making. There is a range of measures to be taken, and I am keen that they are. Their view of what I meant, or what others mean by parity, may be somewhat different, but that is what we mean by parity.

Mr Leonard:

Go raibh maith agat. Fáilte romhaibh. I will ask a quick question before I address my main area of concern. The best target that you can come up is “the near future”. When is that? I want a framework of where you are going time-wise.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

If I receive a satisfactory response from the Department of Education and from the broadcasting authorities, the near future could be this afternoon or tomorrow. The problem is that I cannot get those responses.

Mr Leonard:

Let me pick up on your point about education. You are signposting, and it is not the first time you have signposted about the Department of Education. I believe that there are issues about Ulster-Scots ethos in schools and about a GCSE in Ulster Scots. You have written to the Department about that. I have anticipated what you will say this morning, based on your ministerial responses in the Chamber. I have looked into the matter, and my information is that those areas are the responsibility of boards of governors and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The Department of Education is not holding up anything.

I and, more importantly, an awful lot of people in the Irish language community believe that there is a smokescreen. You have come along this morning to give us an opportunity to question you. I must put it to you seriously that I and many others believe that you are putting up a smokescreen. There is no issue with the Department of Education. You are looking for an Ulster-Scots ethos in schools; how many boards of governors have come to you about it? You are looking for a GCSE in Ulster Scots; how much demonstrable evidence has CCEA given as to the need or demand for a GCSE in Ulster Scots? Even if there is a fantastic demand for it — good luck to you if that is the case — it is not the Department of Education that is holding things up, as you constantly imply.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I take your point about perceptions. You expressed your personal perception and the perception, you say, of some people in the Irish language community —

Mr Leonard:

Many people, Minister.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

That is something that I say is wrong. However, that is their perception.

Mr Leonard:

Sorry, Minister. It is a very, very strong perception. It is reality.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Just because a lot of people happen to perceive or believe something does not make it a reality.

Mr Leonard:

Their perceptions are real.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Their perceptions are there; it does not mean they are accurate in their perception.

Mr Leonard:

I could argue this out —

The Chairperson:

The bit about perception and reality is dealt with.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

It is indeed, Chairperson.

The second point is about what the Department should be doing. There are issues around the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. I contend that the convention's stipulations are not being met in relation to Ulster Scots. There are other commitments, particularly in regard to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Take the simple fact that, under part 2, it states that Governments should:

“take resolute action to promote regional or minority languages”.

I do not know what the Department of Education has done to promote Ulster Scots within the education system, other than a single grant being made one year in regard to some resources that had largely been funded from elsewhere. I would be interested to know what the Department has done. Is there a strategy?

We have had a review of Irish-medium education. Extensive work has been done in that regard: there are organisations, infrastructure and an Irish-medium sector. There is a whole range of things. How do we ensure that children who are largely in controlled schools are able to access in the school the culture and the language of the community from which they come?

A number of schools already provide opportunities for children to use the language of the home in the school. They do so purely on their own efforts, with their own resources and on the initiative of the teachers. Balnamore Primary School in north Antrim is one of the best examples of that. Some effort had been made there, and it is particularly important in those core Ulster Scots speaking areas.

Going back 30-odd years, the point was made that it is detrimental to the education of children if they are unable to bring into school the language of the home and community from which they come. It is difficult for children from the Ulster-Scots speaking community, which is largely in the coastal crescent that includes parts of Down, east Antrim, north Antrim and across. They are going to schools where the language almost does not exist.

I want to see a clear commitment from the Department of Education to look at that. It is the lead Department. Other Departments have a role to play and I do not dispute that for a moment. Aspects of teacher training may fall into the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning. There is work to be done there. However, the Department of Education is clearly the lead Department. The issue of a cross-departmental approach can be addressed through the interdepartmental charter implementation group.

Mr Leonard:

Do you have any facts or figures on the demand for Ulster Scots in schools across the North and for a GCSE in Ulster Scots? Those are the two central points that you made. However, the Department of Education cannot override boards of governors or CCEA on some issues, so we are not hitting the nail on the head. Where is the demonstrable demand?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Part 2 of the charter makes it clear that there is a requirement to take resolute action. It does not state anywhere that that resolute action is dependent on demand, simply that it must be taken. If no action is taken, it is not a question of whether it is resolute enough; no action is being taken.

Mr Leonard:

Have you gone to boards of governors to ask them to find out —

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I have received correspondence from teachers and I have met teachers.

Mr Leonard:

That is the point that I am trying to get to. What is the current situation? If a blockage exists, why is the Committee not hearing about it? The Chairperson has referred to the fact that the Committee has been trying for three years to get a strategy. Obviously, I have not been here for all that time, but I know that we are not hearing the reason for that at Committee level; we are only hearing the occasional answer. I have gone to the Department of Education and it has said that it does not have any issue, so I do not see any blockages to your strategy.

The Chairperson:

The Committee must move on move quickly, to allow the Deputy Chairperson to ask a question.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

It must be remembered that the strategy for Ulster Scots includes both culture and language aspects. The Ulster-Scots Agency provides peripatetic tuition programmes for schools, and the uptake of those is excellent. Those tutors are also well received in schools across the Province.

Mr Leonard:

How many?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

There are four tutors.

Mr Leonard:

How many schools?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I do not have that figure, but I can provide that to the Committee, it is not a problem.

Mr Leonard:

That is grand.

Mr O’Loan:

It is unfortunate that our time is so limited when the Minister is here to discuss such an important topic. Minister, you have known me for a long time. I have a genuine respect for all traditions here. There is a genuine and important value in Ulster-Scots history, tradition and culture in this community. You also know that I represent North Antrim, and if any area has a distinct Ulster-Scots tradition, it is that constituency.

Nonetheless, your departmental policy on language is fundamentally and seriously misconceived. I have serious concerns with your presenting a joint paper on the Irish and Ulster-Scots traditions that is based on parity between the languages, as you said in your introductory statement. There was some value in your reference to having three apples on one side and two oranges and a banana on the other, meaning that parity does not necessarily mean doing for one side what you do for another. However, in much of what you said afterwards in relation to broadcasting and so on, you were thinking and acting in precisely those terms.

What you and your Department are doing is not conferring value on the Ulster-Scots tradition in the long run, and it is certainly not serving the needs of the Irish language. You should take very seriously the opinion of Comex that was endorsed in a letter to this Committee from the Human Right Commission, which I imagine your Department will have had sight of. Comex stated that parity:

“in a number of instances led to the result that no measures were taken for either language, since it was not practically possible to apply the measures to Ulster Scots.”

The Irish language is not being well served. Nor is the Ulster-Scots tradition being well served, and, in many instances, it is being turned into a laughing stock. I am sorry to have spoken so strongly on the matter, but I put it to you that that is the case.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Much of what you said was a statement of perception, rather than a question. However, you correctly picked up my point that what the Department means when it talks about parity is not identical treatment.

Ulster Scots has part 2 status, which, in respect of the charter, is never seen as an end in itself. Part 2 is always to be seen as a stepping stone to part 3. I think that it was in 2002 that the Department commissioned a piece of work from a European expert who was advising it on minority languages. The expert was an Irish language speaker from Dublin. He set out for Ulster Scots what could be described as a road map from part 2 to part 3. That sat around for about five years, and nothing happened. In fact, it is an indictment of what happened under direct rule, because there was a point when nobody even knew that the road map existed. They had forgotten about it. Nothing ever happened to it. It was put in a pigeonhole somewhere, and it sat there for five years. If we had started in 2002, we would be well on our way to having part 3 implemented for Ulster Scots. There are non-discriminatory clauses relating to languages, although some people try to ignore them. They require non-discrimination not only with regard to minority languages, but between minority languages.

The situation is not as simple as people sometimes make out. There is a huge amount of work to be done on awareness and respect for Ulster Scots. That is absolutely correct, I agree with Declan O’Loan in that regard. Ulster Scots has not been well served by the poor quality of some of the things that have been produced. That includes the media.

Mr O’Loan:

Your briefing paper opens with reference to the St Andrews Agreement. It omits the reference in the St Andrews Agreement to the fact that the UK Government will introduce an Irish language Act. Why is that omitted from your briefing paper?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The Irish language Act?

Mr O’Loan:

Your briefing paper opens with remarks based on the St Andrews Agreement, but it omits the key point from the St Andrews Agreement that the Government will introduce an Irish language Act.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

There is the St Andrews Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement Act. The St Andrews Agreement Act does not refer to an Act. My view is that an Act is not the best way forward. I have heard it often said that an Act is essential to promote the Irish language. I do not take that view. Look at the example of the Irish Republic. There has been legislation there for many years, but it has not stopped the decline in the number of Irish speakers. I do not think that the argument that an Act is necessary to advance a language or culture is valid. The nearest experience that we can look at is the Irish language in the Irish Republic, and an Act has certainly not helped there.

Mr O’Loan:

I know that you want to move quickly, Chairperson, but I want to refer to page 2 of the Comex summation. It states that:

“There is also an unfortunate attribute of Irish in Northern Ireland — some people connect the language to political turmoil and historical struggles.”

That can happen on both sides; let me be clear about that. There is a polemic here that is not helpful. There are those who will attempt to use the Irish language for political reasons and may damage the cause of the Irish language, which, I think, is very valuable and precious. There are those who will attack the Irish language for the same sorts of reasons. What do you do, Minister, to break that dynamic? You have a key role in relation to that.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

There are two points there. First, that comment did not come from the Comex report. Those comments were made by the vice-chairperson of the committee of experts, but a footnote to the report states that the views expressed are those of the author. They are not the views of Comex. It is not a Comex opinion; it is a personal opinion by one individual in a personal capacity.

Mr O’Loan:

I am content with your correction.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

As regards your point about how we deal with language in a shared future, one of the key areas to look at is ways in which cross-cultural, cross-linguistic projects and initiatives can be taken forward. That will feature in the strategy. I do not want to go into that in detail this morning because we do not have the time, but I have in mind a number of specific projects of an educational nature, based on the experience in Scotland.

Scotland is a convenient parallel in that you have two minority languages there: Scots and

Gaelic. Therefore, things are more easily replicated. There are some good examples of good practice over there that could be replicated here. For example, a very large percentage of place names are derived from the Irish language. Some are from Scots, some are from English and some are from Viking, so there is a whole range of sources, but they are predominately from the Irish language. However, the biggest influence on Ulster dialect is Ulster Scots.

We can show how things that everybody uses every day are examples of that shared tradition. I often comment on the Chairman's excellent Ulster Scots use of the word "till" for "to", which is commonly spoken in Ulster dialect in Tyrone but is taken from Ulster Scots. The quote has often been made of prominent republicans who used the word "sleekit", which is a good Ulster Scots word that has passed across into Ulster dialect. If we can show how our place names and our dialect are influenced by both languages, we can show that they have had an impact on us all.

The Chairperson:

Michelle McIlveen is next to ask a question; this might be the final one.

Miss McIlveen:

I will be very brief. I find it incredible that Minister Ruane is relying on Mr Leonard to respond for her. I am also amazed to learn of the very limited powers of the Department in respect of all this.

To develop your previous response, Minister, will you outline the lessons that have been learned from your meetings in Scotland?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

We had meetings with individuals, which I would like to follow up on. We also met representatives of a number of institutions over there, including the Gaelic College on the Isle of Skye and the University of Glasgow, as well as people from the Scots language dictionary project in Edinburgh.

One thing that we have learnt about is the need to have good quality work. Secondly, and this is particularly relevant to Ulster Scots, we can learn a lot from Scots because many of the issues that are arising here arose in Scotland years ago and have already been resolved. Questions that are debated here were resolved and settled there a long time ago, so we can learn quite a lot from that, and I want to encourage that.

There are good examples of opportunities for linguistic cross-cultural work. We can also learn lessons with regard to the economic potential of minority languages and cultures. Those have been highlighted, particularly with regard to the college in Skye. During conversations with individuals at the college, they outlined what they thought was most important for developing their language, what they saw as essential and what was unnecessary.

Furthermore, language is not a political issue in Scotland in the way that it has been politicised here. That is not a new thing, it is —

The Chairperson:

Is that because it is rooted in legislation, Minister?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

No.

The Chairperson:

It is often said that legislation is the way to depoliticise a language; by dealing with it on a rights basis.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I have never yet heard any logical rationale for that assertion. The politicisation of language here started more than 100 years ago; it is not something new.

The Chairperson:

Perhaps it started a few hundred years ago, when people tried to kill the Irish language; for example, the British Government. Would that be fair to say?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I think that if this were the Committee on history, we could debate that and I would be more than happy to debate it, but we might be a long time about it.

The Chairperson:

OK. Raymond McCartney has a question.

Mr McCartney:

Picking up on the point about language being politicised, we can search back as to how long ago that happened, but it has certainly been politicised. Since October 2006, the Department has not delivered a strategy for minority languages. Three Ministers, as well as departmental officials, have come before the Committee. Each time, the last two paragraphs have remained the same. There has, possibly, been an addition this time, as I do not think that education and broadcasting featured in either of the other two Ministers' presentations. On one occasion, we were told that that was imminent. On the next occasion, we were told that it was more than imminent; it was about to go to the Executive.

The matter is being politicised. There is a pretence going on. I think that you have set your hand against the strategy but you are not saying that. I would have thought that if there was correspondence between you, the Department of Education and broadcasters, we, as a scrutiny Committee, would have been supplied with it, to help us to understand the situation. Part of our role is to advise and support the Department. We could have offered advice and support on how to, perhaps, circumvent those issues.

It strikes me that if you are keen, which is the word that you used, to get the strategy out, that might involve bringing other Departments and agencies on board, so that it is made part of their strategies. That is why I make the point. I actually find it difficult to ask a question. In fairness — I must say this — it is like the scene from 'The Wizard of Oz' when there is a big, booming, clear voice, then someone pulls back the curtain and there is nothing behind it. That is how I feel about this situation. A dead hand is being put on the strategy. It is being politicised. Therefore, in these circumstances, I find it difficult to ask you a question because, in doing so, I would be lending myself to the pretence.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I assure the member and the Committee that I am very keen to get the strategy out. I have particular interest in minority languages. The strategy will benefit both Irish and Ulster Scots. I do not want it to be held back any longer than is necessary. The sooner that resolution is achieved on the remaining matters, the better. Then, we can get the strategy out.

The Chairperson:

OK; we have to move on to a question from Kieran McCarthy.

Mr McCartney:

After three and a half years —

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I can speak only for the past year.

Mr McCartney:

Yes. However, we have been here. We are the scrutiny Committee. We have been at that piece of work for three and half years. I know that each member has their own view on the language, and they are entitled to it. However, to say that, three and a half years into a project, we cannot, between us, come up with a strategy for minority languages is a damning indictment. We can all point the finger of blame at each other and at other people, but it is a damning indictment.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The BBC and the Department of Education have had three and a half years to get it right and they still have not managed to do so.

The Chairperson:

OK; we will move on to Kieran McCarthy.

Mr McCarthy:

You mentioned resources for the strategy, and you said that you will have to go back to the Executive. We all know what the current economic situation is worldwide and, certainly, in this place. Are you confident that you will get sufficient funding to implement the strategy?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The point that I was making, which, perhaps, you missed, Kieran, was that anything that will be done will be done within existing resources. Clearly, no other resources will appear suddenly. Therefore, people will have to do it within the resources that they already have.

Mr McCarthy:

You said that if the Executive will not cough up, you will have to seek funding from other Departments. That is not a good pointer towards getting on with it.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Perhaps you could tell me where we could get money from? That is my answer to that question.

Miss McIlveen:

Chairman, I want to make a point that is directed at you. I was disappointed by the comment that you made to the Minister about the British Government. It was a political point and brought your impartiality into question.

The Chairperson:

Point noted.

I thank the Minister and Mr Donal Moran from the Department for coming along. The slot overrun by 15 minutes. Thank you.