



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

SummitSkills — The Sector Skills Council for
Building Services Engineering

22 May 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Mr Bob Blake	SummitSkills
Mr Morris Cairns	SummitSkills
Mr Richard O'Lone	SummitSkills
Mr Duncan Wilson	SummitSkills

The Chairperson: Gentlemen, you are very welcome. I introduce Mr Richard O'Lone, director of ROL Testing and chair of the SummitSkills mechanical and electrical (M&E) sector skills council for Northern Ireland; Mr Morris Cairns, managing director of Blackbourne Integrated M&E; Mr Duncan Wilson, deputy chief executive and head of training of the Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation; and Mr Bob Blake, head of employer engagement for SummitSkills. We have received your presentation and correspondence, so we will take any additional information that you may have.

Mr Bob Blake (SummitSkills): Thank you, Chairman and Committee. SummitSkills is the sector skills council for building services engineering, known as mechanical and electrical in Northern Ireland. SummitSkills represents some 4,000 employers across a very diverse sector with a workforce of about 15,000.

We acknowledge that the downturn and the economic changes that have affected the whole UK have made times difficult for our employers, as well as for the skills agenda that we are trying to address. However, we set the standards against which our employers ask for qualifications and competences to be delivered. We have concerns — we will attempt to present them today — about how such things as programme-led apprenticeships (PLAs) are perhaps detrimental, in some respects, to actual formal apprenticeships, which is where the majority of our workforce starts. Our workforce also starts at higher levels, but apprenticeships dominate our sector and are the tradition that we have always followed in the construction, energy and facilities-management sector. We are conscious that, from today, we are trying to build a dialogue that starts the process of contributing to changing the future of

our workforce as well as the way in which skills are delivered. We also want to support those changes, wherever they come from, and to be an active part of that review, going forward.

So, with no further ado, I will hand over to Morris to continue.

Mr Morris Cairns (SummitSkills): Thank you. Although we recognise that the PLA scheme is successful in many areas across many other sectors, we feel that it is totally inappropriate for the mechanical and, particularly, the electrical sectors. The PLA is designed for delivery and achievement of only NVQ level 2, and it should not be used in a sector where a nationally agreed level 3 framework is already in place. There is no level 2 requirement for electrical installation in the UK. All qualified electricians must meet a level 3 qualification. Indeed, where the Joint Industry Board (JIB) handbook lays down the criteria for different grades, it specifically says that an NVQ level 3 qualification is required. We believe that the imposition of the PLA on the sector was never appropriate. The implementation of the PLA has confused many participants, including parents and employers. A lot of the young boys and girls who are at the end of their two-year NVQ level 2 qualification are under the misapprehension that they are going to be qualified electricians. They are never going to be qualified electricians with that qualification. They need to go on, and the only way that they will achieve that is through an employer-led apprenticeship — the ELA scheme — or the modern apprenticeship scheme.

It is very disappointing to see that the PLA has been implemented. It has confused people and has led to the dismantling of the local industry's established control and ownership over the previously very successful apprenticeship. As an employer, I would be looking for young guys coming in who meet the criteria of a GCSE at grade C in English and maths. I would prefer it if they had a grade C in one of the sciences as well. Unfortunately, there are no entry criteria for the PLA scheme at all. For us to turn out a young man who is qualified and can undertake fairly technical assessments of electrical installations to be able to meet the relevant regulations and to continue with ongoing retraining during his whole career, he needs to have an NVQ level 3 qualification at the end of his apprenticeship.

Mr Richard O'Lone (SummitSkills): I will follow on from what Morris has said. I am also an employer in the electrical sector, but I am more on the specialised side of things, and I am based in Dungannon. When this bad policy was introduced by the Department in 2009, we informed the Department in writing on many occasions that it was not going to work, it was going to be detrimental to our industry, and it was bad for the young person, bad for industry and bad for the employers. We have seen free labour being substituted on tendered public contracts where it becomes difficult to compete with properly trained apprentices on properly invested-in placements, and it has displaced traditional apprenticeships.

The entry criteria that Morris mentioned for the programme-led apprenticeship, specifically on the electrical side, have been nothing. There are no entry criteria at all, not even a colour-blindness check, which is fundamental to what we do. That has raised safety concerns across the sector. Since 2009, young people have entered our industry and displaced a number of traditional apprentices. Through two freedom of information requests, we received information from the Department's figures on recruitment, achievement and progression to level 3. It must be reiterated that level 3 is the only acceptable level that our industry requires and needs and that is useful to our industry. Level 2 is of no use to our industry. Some 8% of the people recruited through programme-led apprenticeships have made it on to the level 3 programme. So, almost 900 people, between electrical and mechanical apprenticeships, come out the other side, with very few being able to meet the needs of the level 3 programme. We predicted that at the time. That is down to the entry criteria being diluted away from the sector. I will pass back to Morris on that point.

Mr Cairns: As Richard said, our ApprenticeshipsNI flagship programme, which we operate as an industry through the Electrical Training Trust, has been eclipsed by the PLA. Our scheme is recognised across the UK as being an exemplar system for training young people to become qualified electricians. As Richard said, free labour is very hard to beat.

Mr O'Lone: I support what Morris is saying. Our sector has always had a culture of employed people, but we have seen that change since 2009 and it has become the main event for young people. It disadvantages young people in particular, and it creates a lack of opportunity and, in some cases, abuse of that opportunity.

Mr Cairns: On our employer-led scheme, the young person is employed from day one and has a proper, regulated training contract. I would say that 90% or more of the young people who come through our company decide to stay with us after they finish their apprenticeship. That is because of

the commitment that we make to them during their training. We do not see that coming through the PLA scheme at all. PLA providers are probably compelled and financially motivated to find placements for their classroom participants. I can think of no other reason why it is being promoted so heavily. It is just to get the classrooms filled up. It has also contributed to a refocusing of the Department's resources in some areas in favour of the PLA options. Our employer-led scheme has suffered as a result of that. Quite a few of the 26 management areas across Northern Ireland do not have any employer-led schemes at all at the moment. It is sad, because, hopefully, industry will come into those areas in future and there will be the potential for work, but a lot of the young people will not be properly qualified to fill the positions that will be required.

Mr O'Lone: It is important to note that we are not here to knock or criticise further education (FE). We are here to point out the issues that affect my business and Morris's business and the employability skills that are currently lacking. As I said, I am based in Dungannon. Although the catchment area of my local college extends to Omagh and the north-west, it currently has no ApprenticeshipsNI framework in operation. If your son or daughter lived in Dungannon and wanted to become an electrician in Dungannon through a proper framework apprenticeship scheme, he or she would have to travel to Portadown, Ballymena, Belfast or Newry.

In the pack that we have provided, you will find maps that show the historical breakdown of the provision in the 26 contract management areas that Morris referred to. They are currently owned by the Electrical Training Trust in Ballymena, which has been very successful in delivering this programme since 2006. The contract areas that are not coloured in are where the provision does not currently exist, or where an alternative may exist that the industry does not recognise. That has left businesses such as mine struggling to recruit people with the required skills.

The pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQs) that come from Departments, from Stormont and from the centres of procurement expertise (COPEs) are now asking businesses such as mine to qualify the business and the person who is going to be working on the contract. If I employ local people in Dungannon, Omagh, Strabane or Derry/Londonderry, their qualifications will not meet the needs of the COPEs that are asking for that work to be done. That is complete nonsense.

Mr Cairns: I would emphasise that, too. A lot of the PQQs that we receive through the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) network ask for the training records of all our employees. When you look at those, it is evident how much we have invested in training over the years as well as continuous retraining.

Mr O'Lone: The contributors from Momentum who gave evidence to the Committee appear to have a great working relationship with FE. In our situation, it seems that FE colleges are competing for placements — I hate to use the word "placements"; we talk about "employed status" — and proactively marketing them. You can see evidence of that in the bundle as well: alternative pathways and FE routes are being promoted at the expense of the apprenticeship framework that we require.

(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr Buchanan] in the Chair)

Mr Cairns: We, as a company, also work across the UK. The level 2 qualification, unfortunately, has no standing at all anywhere in the UK. At times, we take some of our employees over there to work, but, given that we work on some very complex jobs, we cannot take those who are not properly qualified.

The 2010 tender process for the apprenticeship scheme has certainly reduced the value of the contract for ApprenticeshipsNI. Our training organisation is required to bid for its own apprenticeships against the resources and assets of the state. We believe that the conditions in and the scope of the tender are not conducive to partnership and co-operation. In the past, we have had very good co-operation with the colleges as regards the more technical training that the guys required. Part of the JIB apprenticeship requirement is that the guys receive quite a substantial bit of on-site training. That on-site training is not available through the PLA scheme. Through our scheme, the guys are continually on site. It can vary from area to area depending on the FE college; it can be two days a week or a three-week block and then back on site for three weeks. We believe, therefore, that the system we operate with on-site training is by far the best and will turn out the most suitable candidates.

Mr O'Lone: Morris makes an important point there in reiterating that those on a programme-led apprenticeship, on both the electrical and the mechanical sides, spend time in an FE college — we are

not criticising that — but will have no experience on site — none whatsoever. If they are on a placement, that effectively displaces an ApprenticeshipsNI framework apprentice who would have been on the level 3 programme. The employer may have unknowingly taken on that person, and that seems to be what is happening. Some of the employers are not aware because the local FE college is the touch point, and that is where the information is coming from. There seems to be a dumbing down in respect of what qualifications are required by our industry. However, there is only one qualification required by our industry, and that is the one approved by the Department under the ApprenticeshipsNI framework. That is the qualification declared in the tender documents.

Other centres circumvent that by using other types of qualification that make no sense to our industry. For example, they use engineering qualifications to make up the electrical qualification. If I interview a person who does not have the proper qualification, I cannot offer them the job; it is a shame.

(The Chairperson [Mr Swann] in the Chair)

Mr Cairns: When our apprentices go through our training scheme, they first go to the Electrical Training Trust, where they receive very good health and safety training that equips them to go on to construction sites, which, as you can appreciate, can be quite dangerous places. However, we do not believe that that element has been introduced at all to the PLA schemes.

Mr O'Lone: I want to point members in the direction of quite a heavy piece of research by Tommy Allen, which is also in the pack. That research was commissioned by SummitSkills, which is Bob's employer, although this was probably before your time, Bob, and it was asked for by college tutors. The message is exactly the same in that document. It talks about low motivation, low skills and low ambition among programme-led apprentices and the direct opposite among those taking the modern apprenticeship route, who are motivated and feel that their work is valued and that they have a career path; the other one just seems to stop at level 2. In fact, quite a high percentage of people do not even make level 2 and drop out of the scheme. That is due to entry qualifications and their finding it too tough.

We, as a group, have made suggestions to the Department, and we would like to be consulted further on the solutions to these problems. We see a number of solutions. One is a pre-employment scheme through which young people could sample some of the IT that we talked about earlier, a little bit of mechanical work, a little bit of welding and all of that. If someone has poor GCSEs, for example, they could gain the qualifications required to enter the proper framework. They could gain employment from day one, not from year five. Morris and I, as employers, have traditionally employed those people.

We have also seen the education maintenance allowance (EMA) being used to support programme-led apprenticeships. We object to the use of the term "programme-led apprentice". They are not actually apprentices. They are people who are taking a mode of study within an FE college, which is fine. The EMA is being used to support those people while they are on that full-time training programme. However, if they were with us on a framework, they would be employed. Both Morris and I would be contributing to the employer's national insurance scheme. The person themselves, when they are earning enough, would also contribute to the public purse.

I will hand over to Duncan to take up the next point. I think that I have said enough.

Mr Duncan Wilson (SummitSkills): I am sure that the Committee is aware that electrical, plumbing, and heating and ventilation all have established apprenticeship schemes with recognised qualifications that have been built up over many years; that is the background. We have a concern that the way that the apprenticeship programme is being operated is impacting on normal recruitment into the industry. Some people start with a misunderstanding about what the programme is all about. They may think that they will become a plumber or that the programme is a route to that but then drop out. About 20% of people on PLAs achieve an NVQ level 2, which is not a qualification that is sufficient for the industry. So, there are problems.

Our thinking is, first, that it is important that young people entering programme-led apprenticeships know what is on offer, what it can lead to and how that fits with existing apprenticeship schemes that our industries have, which is perhaps the key issue. I would have thought that the Department would be keen to filter people through these programmes and into proper apprenticeships. Through SummitSkills, we, as an industry, have an access qualification that covers the sector. People could take that qualification. As Richard said, that would give them a flavour of the industry and enable

them to either build up their skills or make a choice at the end about whether they want to be a plumber or an electrician. That is perhaps the missing link here. We are not criticising the PLA as a programme so much as how it is being operated and the fact that it does not really fit with or complement the industry's existing structures, which are tried and tested over many years. That will be a key area. There should be a refocusing, if possible. We have made these points to the Department in recent times. Those have either been not understood or not acted upon; I do not know. However, I think that they are worthy of being looked at again.

I am always a bit wary of bringing Scotland into the equation. However, we operate in Scotland as well as Northern Ireland. There are no programme-led apprenticeships in Scotland, only modern apprenticeships. The funding that is available through Skills Development Scotland is used to fund those modern apprenticeships. If Committee members have not been on it already, you can go onto Skills Development Scotland's website and see a ton of information about achievement. You will see that the satisfaction rate of employers and learners is up at around 80% or 90%. That tells you that it is a programme that works. It is not only reflecting what the industry needs, but the people who enter it will achieve the qualification and become a tradesman, electrician or plumber. We hope that that might be possible in Northern Ireland if this programme were refocused to take account of what the industry can offer.

Mr O'Lone: I ask the Committee to have a look at appendix 10 of my submission. The figures there from the freedom of information request are astonishing. It is important to take a moment to run through those. There were 479 candidates for the electrical intake in 2009-2011. Of those 479, a staggering 97 achieved a level 2, which is a useless qualification to our industry. That figure reflects an achievement rate of about 20% when measured against intake. Of those 97, 41 progressed to level 3; that is about 9% of intake versus progression from the original figure. So, about 9% of those 479 people have wasted resources and time on their own career never mind anything else. Those qualifications are of absolutely no use to the industry. That is only people who started the programme. We are looking at the output from the programme and estimate that it falls to something like 50%, which is 4% of the overall intake and registrations on the scheme. That is an absolutely disgraceful waste of public funds.

The figures for plumbing mirror that, except that there is a problem in the level 3 contracts with the plumbing and mechanical services trust, which is the contract holder for the level 3 programme, in that the FE sector seems to retain students at level 3 to offer an alternative pathway of some sort. That is why the figures could not be broken down any further. However, we expect the figures for plumbing to pretty much mirror the electrical figures. That is as much as we can say.

The Chairperson: Thank you, gentlemen. Your presentation is timely, as we will be having a departmental briefing on the review of apprenticeships. What engagement has your body had with the Department on that review?

Mr Blake: We have had no direct involvement at all. As I understand it, we have no employers who are part of that. The sector skills council has certainly not been approached.

The Chairperson: But you have been in regular contact with the Department.

Mr Blake: As you can tell, I am not a local. However, I have been engaging in Northern Ireland since April 2012. I was made aware of the review only when it was announced by the Minister. Since then, I have had no communication whatsoever from the Department.

Mr D Wilson: We would certainly be keen to participate in that process if invited.

The Chairperson: We will have the Department in front of us next week, and we will certainly raise that on your behalf.

You are critical of the format of the PLAs for your sector. How do we move away from that scheme and towards employer-led apprenticeships? How big a step or challenge is that?

Mr O'Lone: It is a very small step. It needs to be learner-centric. It also needs to be employer-centric, with those two parties getting together. At the minute, the approach seems to be college-centric. Employers could be funded. I am speaking as an employer here, regardless of whether funding matters much to me or not. If the apprenticeship were funded through the employer, you

would have level 3 placements all of a sudden. Level 3 employed status would be available from day one. We would not be hoping for an employment place at the end of it or sampling a bit of work placement over a six- or eight-week period. If it is employer-centric and learner-centric, we will have real jobs from day one; that is what the learner wants. You will see that from Tommy Allen's report. The motivation comes when someone knows that they will have a paid job at the end of it.

The Chairperson: From the evidence that you have presented, gentlemen, you have obviously done your homework about where this goes and how it works.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. I have to say that I am extremely concerned by what you have outlined. I am an MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. There are obviously serious gaps. Fermanagh and Tyrone are two major rural areas, and we do not have that type of qualification. I do not know what more I can say. Obviously, questions will be asked of the Minister next week. Have you engaged with South West College on this issue?

Mr O'Lone: Part of SummitSkills' role is to engage with the Department. As an employer in the South West Regional College, I feel that there is little point when it is not offered. I know that the contract is not there and that there is no agreement between the contract provider and the FE college, so there is absolutely no point.

Ms McGahan: However, there are safety concerns.

Mr O'Lone: There sure are.

Mr Cairns: We get flyers from the South West College in particular on its training courses. There is no doubt that some great work is being done there, but, in this case, it is misleading a lot of people. Perhaps it is not doing so deliberately, but parents think that young people are going in to serve their time to be electricians or plumbers, and, to be honest, they are not. They are not getting an adequate qualification.

Ms McGahan: Is there a skills gap that results in job vacancies?

Mr O'Lone: Did you see the 'Tyrone Courier' yesterday?

Ms McGahan: It is sitting in my house. I have not read it yet.

Mr O'Lone: I counted about 15 electrical jobs through three employers who cannot get employment in that area. The employers are TES Northern Ireland, J J Loughran and us. It is a massive problem, and that is only one town. The skills are simply not being promoted. The qualifications are wrong, and those qualifications are being promoted.

Ms McGahan: As a parent, I would not send my child to a course like that.

Mr O'Lone: No; and you would not want someone with a level 2 qualification installing a cooker or a shower in your home. As an employer, I was sent a letter from the South West College, which has devised its own FE programme. We wonder where the funding is coming from because there is only one show in town. All of a sudden, another show has appeared. We do not know whether it is being funded from the Department of Education or DEL. We just do not know.

Mr Blake: Our engagement as a sector with any of the colleges is fine. We do not have an issue with that, and my predecessors will have had ongoing engagement. Funnily enough, our next employer forum will be hosted at the South West Regional College. It is not an issue about the college but about what is being rolled out through that process on behalf of young people. They are the important issue because we accept that there is a recession and that times are tough across the UK. It is about whether their time is well spent, is beneficial and will prepare them for a job, or will it prepare them for something that does not exist? That is the danger.

Northern Ireland is recognised as having a high-quality workforce. Take my word for that; it is true. We do not want that to be downgraded in any way, shape or form. We want only a high-quality workforce because it is transferable. That is important because our companies not only work across the UK but work internationally, and we must retain that standard. That is what we were put in place

to do. At this stage, we want to ensure that we are party to that discussion and debate. We may not come up with a 100% answer, but we reckon that we will come pretty near, and the shortfall will be the experience of others contributing to that outcome.

Mr O'Lone: The industry has been a victim of the one-size-fits-all approach that was applied in 2009 for hairdressing, catering and health. Those sectors probably embraced programme-led apprenticeships because of the need for people on the ground, but it simply does not work for our sector. We said that at the start. We have said it all along, and we are still saying it. The evidence is in the bundle to prove what we are saying. It is a waste of resources. I appeal to the Committee to engage with SummitSkills and the employers and to ask us what works.

The Chairperson: We are doing that, Richard. That is why you are here. *[Laughter.]*

Mr D Wilson: Also, people are entering programme-led apprenticeships, not really knowing what the destination is. Perhaps they reach level 2. They gain quite a lot of knowledge and skills, which might enable them to practise as plumbers or electricians, but we really do not want that to happen because they are not at the right level. That results in dissatisfied customers, a bad name for the industry and so on, so we need to try to guard against that. That points to more vetting at the start and ensuring that people get a proper introduction and make an informed choice before going on to become electricians or plumbers or heating and ventilation fitters. That is a key message.

Mr Buchanan: Having been in the construction industry for many years before coming to the Assembly, I know exactly the value of someone training on site rather than in the way that it is happening now. If I cast my mind back to 2009 when this changed — I was not in agreement with it at the time — there was a downturn, and employers were not taking on any new recruits. The system was changed because there was a fear that those people would be left with nowhere to go. It was brought forward as another mechanism, although concerns were raised at the time that it was disjointed, it was taking a person away from an employer, which would create problems. That is why we are in this situation. However, I believe that we need to move back to the way it was done previously because programme-led apprenticeships are not working and will not work. Do you agree that it is not value for money?

Mr Cairns: From our point view, I do agree: it is definitely not value for money for us. We started five apprentices last year, and we will probably do something similar in September. We go down the employer-led route. I would not entertain the PLA scheme at all.

Mr Buchanan: From your perspective, you folk would not take on anyone who has come through a programme-led apprenticeship scheme?

Mr Cairns: No. I want them from day one. I want them in employed status in our scheme because I know that that is the best grounding that they will get.

Mr O'Lone: Tried and tested.

Mr Cairns: They have learned all the bad habits by the time they come to me from the PLA scheme.

Mr O'Lone: How can you invest in someone who turns up free of charge and does not get a wage? How can you manage and motivate them, which is what you get from being employed? Young people disengage from the process very quickly, rather than the opposite of what the modern apprenticeship scheme would do.

Mr Blake: It is worth mentioning that the sector skills councils, at the very outset, also raised similar concerns, particularly from the engineering construction basis, because, traditionally, that is how people start and how they learn and gain experience. As a result of the downturn, there may be a place for something that helps those young people — it is happening across the UK — and prepares them with information and choices on skills, which means that they can make an informed choice about where they go. The proposal from virtually all the sector skills councils was more about the cross-sectoral industry option that prepares young people and brings their academic ability, if it is a little lacking, up to where it needs to be operationally with regard to going into employment. Those schemes have operated, and we have learned from them. There are opportunities to take the good elements of those and utilise them in a cross-sectoral way, rather than leading people down the path of believing that they will get employment when employment is currently at a very low level. However,

as the situation starts to recover, it prepares people to be able to hitch themselves to that wagon and move on. We will have a plethora of older people coming in for training, but that is not a bad thing. It is part of the economy. They are maturing and gaining life experiences. However, there is a place to do that because we recognise that the current level of employment is not where we would like it to be, but we are always hopeful that there are green shoots out there because we are about preparing that workforce for the next three to four years when we expect people to be able to compete, and skills will again become critical.

Mr O'Lone: Our industries have been quite resilient. As I said to Morris over a cup of coffee earlier, a few of the companies that were trading in 2009 have gone, but, in general, those companies have been quite resilient, found themselves new markets and traded their way through their problems. Those opportunities are still there. It is unfortunate for those who enter the level 2 programme and programme-led apprenticeships, inadvertently thinking that they will become electricians, have five and a half or six years ahead of them before they can even achieve that. They do two years on a programme-led apprenticeship and if they are successful at level 2, they will transfer to level 3 and start right at the beginning. That is an important point. They will start at the beginning of a three-and-a-half- to four-year programme, which is a heck of a long time to be in an apprenticeship. People would be 22 or 23 years of age before they could call themselves competently qualified electricians that I could put into my PQQ. To be honest, it is a travesty. Those people should be on employer-led apprenticeships from day one, and, three and a half to four years later, having been employed the whole way through, achieve their qualifications and be on my PQQ as a trusted, valued, invested, managed, complete person. That is what we have always done.

Mr Cairns: I defend the ELA and the training that we offer through our companies. In the electrical and mechanical contracting industry in Northern Ireland, virtually everyone in a senior position, even in our own company, has come through apprenticeships. That is true of contract managers, directors and our team of eight M&E estimators. We have invested time and money in them, and they are continually being retrained. I do not believe that that route will be offered by the PLA scheme.

Mr F McCann: I will be brief.

The Chairperson: Good man.

Mr F McCann: I raised the following point in the previous presentation. This top-down approach rather than a partnership or working relationship always amazes me. Obviously, you have many years of expertise. It would be far better if someone sat down with the Department and said, "Let us put together a scheme that we can work at".

There is an expression: "back in the day". I remember people who were in employer-led apprenticeships. They were sent to a specific place for their education. I have a friend who is an electrician. He is proud of his certificates and qualifications, which allow him to say to an employer, "This is my experience, and these are my qualifications". Do employers not recognise the two-year programme as a full qualification?

Mr O'Lone: No.

Mr F McCann: Next week, we have a meeting about apprenticeships. We know through presentations that there is a difficulty between Department-led apprenticeships and private sector partnerships. Obviously, there will probably be a straight defence of the Department's role and how apprenticeships are run. What key questions should we ask?

Mr O'Lone: There is a social agenda at play. We respect and understand that, but not everyone is a winner. When people are on site making electrical installations, they have to be able to make power calculations in their head or on a piece of paper and be able to transpose a formula. Those are basic daily functions for an electrician. Morris and I are growing our businesses and are looking to the skills agenda as opposed to the social agenda. The social agenda is important and, in our presentations, we have come up with solutions to tackle it. They may extract those who have a flair for electrical or mechanical installation into the level 3 programme. We have discussed that all morning. Those solutions are there, but we need to be heard.

Mr Hilditch: I do not wish to ask any questions because I have been asking the Minister questions for years. I have personal experience of the situation, involving my sons. I have seen people and their ambitions destroyed. I welcome the report and your presentation.

The Chairperson: Gentlemen, thank you very much. We will let the Department have sight of the evidence in the Hansard report.

Mr O'Lone: Thank you.