



Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Programme for Government Return 2012-13:
DEL Briefing

19 June 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Employment and Learning

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)

Mr Sammy Douglas

Mr Chris Lyttle

Mr Fra McCann

Ms Bronwyn McGahan

Witnesses:

Mr Victor Dukelow

Department for Employment and Learning

Ms June Ingram

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Billy Lyttle

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Jim Russell

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Daryl Young

Department for Employment and Learning

The Chairperson: I welcome Ms June Ingram, Mr Billy Lyttle, Mr Victor Dukelow and Mr Daryl Young from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). Folks, you are very welcome. This briefing is about commitment 25. Do you want to make some initial comments?

Mr Victor Dukelow (Department for Employment and Learning): Thank you, Chair. I will introduce my colleagues. June Ingram is the director of skills and industry division, Daryl Young is the deputy director of the further education (FE) division, and Billy Lyttle is the head of finance in the Department's higher education (HE) division. You mentioned that on 1 May our finance director provided you with some briefing on the Programme for Government (PFG) targets and the progress that was being made against them. As I understand it, it was agreed that it would be helpful to have a further briefing session that brought together the policy officials who have responsibility for aiding delivery of the targets and those who help to collect the data and statistics that underpin them. We are concentrating initially on commitment 25, which is the target for delivery of over 200,000 qualifications. June and Billy will stay to give you some further briefing on commitment 20, and our colleague Jim Russell from the employment service, who is not at the Table just yet, will join the meeting to give you a briefing on commitments 27 and 36.

Commitment 25 cuts across quite a significant part of the Department's work. As I said, it requires the delivery of over 200,000 qualifications by 2015. Indeed, if you look at the detail of the Programme for Government and the profile over time, you will see that it requires 211,000 qualifications to be delivered and attained over that period. For measurement purposes, only full qualifications at level 2 and above are counted. They are counted across further education; higher education, including HE in FE; apprenticeships; Training for Success; and the Essential Skills programme. All those are at level 2 and above and are counted towards the attainment.

When the target was set, it was considered ambitious yet achievable. A requirement of the target-setting was that it was something that could be achieved. It had to be a SMART — specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound — target. It was set so that it could deliver more qualifications than had been attained in the four years leading up to the Programme for Government period. However, as it was being set, there was recognition that the young population, which is quite a key focus for the programmes that the Department delivers, was expected to fall by 4% in the four years of the Programme for Government period.

I think that John Smith mentioned the numbers to you, and almost 140,000 qualifications have been achieved towards the target to date. That is ahead of what we anticipated, so it can be regarded as a positive performance. It reflects the continued growing trend in enrolments, but it also reflects that those who participate are more likely to complete the course that they have enrolled in, with retention rates increasing, achievement rates increasing and drop-out rates falling. Again, that is quite positive. Ultimately, the expectation is that that kind of performance will help to deliver the Executive's efforts to upskill our people here, which, in turn, is recognised as critical to driving the future prospects of the local economy.

That is really all that I intended to say, and I know that you will have questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Victor. In regard to the targets, we have 140,000 qualifications achieved, but — I think that we asked this the last time — do we have the number of people relative to those?

Mr Dukelow: We provided some evidence as part of the response to the earlier query on that. It works out at around 120,000 individuals who make up those 140,000 qualifications. However, the answer needs to be caveated somewhat in that it is quite difficult to track specific individuals as part of the mix. That is because if an individual comes back and takes a further qualification at another institute at some later date, there is a risk that they could be counted twice. The qualification will be counted only once, but the individual could be counted twice. So, there is some caution to be added to the figure on an individual setting.

The Chairperson: I know that the qualifications that are counted are at level 2 and above. Do you have the breakdown of the figures, or are they mostly at level 2?

Mr Dukelow: There is a spread across the number of levels. I do not have a full breakdown with me, but it works out that the largest part of the delivery of all this is in our FE mainstream programmes, which cover level 2 and level 3. Higher education probably contributes about 30% to the overall target. That includes HE that is delivered through the universities and HE that is delivered through the FE colleges. So, that is clearly at level 4 or above. The Essential Skills programme contributes about 30% to the programme, and that is just at level 2. So, there is a mixture of levels, but when you look across the programme levels, you can see that it is not just one area that is growing. All the areas are growing, although some more so than others, admittedly.

Mr Daryl Young (Department for Employment and Learning): We could certainly provide you with detailed information on that breakdown. I know that previous PFG targets were specifically around level 2 and level 3, and we actually undershot the level 2 target but overshot the level 3 target, which has been good news. So, there is strong performance at level 3 as well as at level 2, but we can get detailed figures for you.

The Chairperson: Those would be good to see. I appreciate that.

Mr F McCann: I have just a quick question. Thanks for the presentation. It is always good to get information when we hit targets, and the Department needs to be commended for that. I understand what you said about 140,000 or so qualifications, but one of the points that the Chair picked up is that there are people who may do four or five different courses. Surely that would lower the number of people with qualifications. How does that fit in with the number of people who actually apply and take up a position in the first place? Do you know what I am saying?

Secondly, I just heard the announcement this morning that there are hundreds of jobs going to Larne, which is obviously brilliant. Somebody said that they are high-quality jobs. I would think that they would need specific training to ensure that that is localised. How do we know, with those qualifications and announcements such as that, that people are being trained for the new types of employment that are coming in? What is being done to encourage people to take up, for example, science, technology,

engineering and mathematics — the STEM subjects? We had people in from digital computing a couple of weeks ago. They said that people look at IT, but their course is specifically different, and you could end up with high-quality jobs.

Mr Dukelow: I will take the people and qualifications point and colleagues will take up the point about the specific skills for growth areas. When we set the target, the extent to which we could measure people as opposed to qualifications was quite limited. Our ability to do that has improved quite significantly; hence, we are able to provide the Committee with some figures, albeit with a caveat, about the number of individuals who are involved in those 140,000 qualifications. That picture is likely to improve further as we progress, particularly through the introduction of the unique learner number to our data system. Regarding the points that you made, there is merit in looking at the number of individuals. The qualifications give you an indication of the activity that is going on. It may be that one individual would take, let us say, an essential skills qualification and another individual would take three essential skills qualifications all at level 2. This does not treat those two individuals on the same basis; it recognises that one person has done more learning activity than another. There is probably merit in looking at both, but our ability to look at the individual's piece is certainly improving.

Mr Young: It might be worthwhile giving one or two illustrations of how that comes about. For example, if someone is studying two or three A levels at college — most of this happens in colleges — that is one individual but three qualifications. We also have examples where individuals might be taking a level 2 or level 3 qualification in baking and something specific in pastry, or it could be a mix of the two. It could be somebody doing an academic qualification, such as an A level, and doing a vocational engineering qualification alongside that. There are all sorts of different mixes of one individual doing a number of related qualifications in the same year. There is also the point that Victor made: the unique learner number helps us to be more intelligent about individuals. There is probably value in counting both. I do not think that it is one or the other. You probably get a richer view if you count both things.

Regarding your point about Larne, all or most of the provision that colleges deliver will be under the qualifications and credit framework, which is specifically designed to try to have the content of those qualifications meet the needs of employers. That is quite general and generic. However, at that general level, the qualifications should be meeting the needs of employers in the various sectors, because the sector skills councils and employers would have been involved in that qualification development process.

You are right to point out that, as new technologies progress, particularly quick technologies such as IT, the qualifications system has to be fleet of foot to try to keep up. If a specific employer comes in with specific needs, that employer would work closely with the college, either to provide a mix of the units on the qualifications that would meet the needs or, if there is nothing on the framework that does that, the college could work with the employer and the awarding bodies to quickly put together a unit that would meet those specific needs. There are different ways of doing it depending on the needs of the individual employer. Sometimes something on the framework will meet the need and sometimes it will not. It is a dialogue between the parties involved at that stage.

Ms June Ingram (Department for Employment and Learning): I will add something about ICT more broadly. You talked about the needs of ICT as a growing sector. It is one of the Department's priority sectors, and the Minister chairs an ICT working group, which is meeting again next week. Through that group, we want to look at the broad skills pipeline and the specific issues. We have set up a software testers academy working with particular employers and colleges to look at the pipeline and the jobs that are coming through so that we can upskill or reskill people for those jobs. As Daryl said, it is important that we respond to new developments and new technologies, and we will be looking at that in the next week or two and as part of the working group next week.

Mr F McCann: There are a couple of things. We are sometimes asked about certain things when we meet people. Someone might say that they saw a report this morning that stated that there were 140,000 qualifications, and they will want to know what that means. It is difficult to explain that it means that people did one, two, three or four courses. It is difficult to explain when we are talking about, for example, 5,000 people taking courses. A breakdown of such figures would give an understanding of the direction that it is going. Certainly, from my time on this Committee, I have to say that I have learned quite a lot. A lot of it is about the importance of meeting new demands. I am sure that the announcement made this morning has been some months in the making. A company coming in like that would have certain needs. They talk about high-specification jobs; from what I can gather, some of them will be in and around the medical industry. Do DEL, Invest NI or other agencies meet

such companies to say, "This is what we can do for you. We can upskill the number of people you need."? Does that process happen?

Ms Ingram: Yes.

Mr F McCann: Are we in a position to be able to upskill people in and around the Larne area to meet those challenges?

Ms Ingram: In looking at foreign direct investment, we work very closely with Invest NI, and also in capacity-building within Northern Ireland companies. So, yes, this is on an ongoing basis and we have a specific programme called Assured Skills, in which we work with Invest NI to meet the specific needs of companies that are coming into Northern Ireland mainly as a result of foreign direct investment. That is ongoing and growing, which is good. That is where we want to go.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. Earlier this year, there was a motion on the agrifood industry. The Minister had identified that, within the food and drinks industry, which is one of the largest employers in the North, very few qualifications were held by the working-age population. Have any strategies been developed to address that category?

Ms Ingram: As part of the agrifood strategy, we have a food manufacturing and processing working group, which is up and running and has an action plan in place. That is our vehicle for looking at that and delivering upskilling or reskilling. So, yes, there are plans in place.

Ms McGahan: Is that still work in progress?

Ms Ingram: Yes.

Mr Douglas: Thank you for the presentation. The Steps to Work programme is about participants gaining recognised qualifications. How does that relate to the new programme, Steps 2 Success? The Minister told us in the Assembly yesterday that it is a new programme, tailored to suit the needs of Northern Ireland. Does that mean that we will have more ambitious targets? Some young people and others from disadvantaged areas have little or no qualifications and, very often, that type of programme gives them a taste and a hunger to go on to further or higher education. Will more ambitious targets be set? According to the Minister, and I believe him, this will be a far better programme because it is tailored to suit our needs.

Mr Jim Russell (Department for Employment and Learning): The Minister is keen for Steps 2 Success to be flexible and that it should meet the needs of individuals. That could mean a particular qualification for a particular job. However, even before Steps 2 Success and before people qualify for it, the employment service will provide the opportunity to undertake training courses specific to an individual's needs. We will have a support fund that will pay for that type of training. That could be anything from the short accredited training courses that people get through Steps to Work to longer, vocational-type programmes. Again, the whole direction of travel is about making this individualised. Whatever the individual needs to progress in a particular career or to do a particular job, we will try to source it for them and pay for it.

Mr Douglas: Is it the case that the supplier — whoever gets the contract — will be paid additional money when people get a recognised qualification and move on to further and higher education?

Mr Russell: They will be paid on outcomes and performance.

The Chairperson: That is us finished with commitment 25. Victor and Daryl, thank you very much. Before you disappear, let me say that I think this format is more useful to us as a Committee in order to ask shorter, sharper questions and get direct answers from the Department. I hope you appreciated it and that it worked as well for you as it did for us.

We will move on to commitment 20, which is about the increased uptake of economically relevant STEM places. We have touched on that, but we will now look directly at commitment 20. Billy and June, you are taking the lead on this.

Mr Billy Lyttle (Department for Employment and Learning): Commitment 20 is, as you know, a key commitment in the PFG. The targets over the three years were for 233 additional places in the 2012-13 academic year, 467 in 2013-14 and 700 by 2014-15. As part of the settlement on tuition fees, the Executive made available a total of £3 million by 2014 for the additional student places. The places were to be made available within the two universities and the further education colleges for their higher and further education provision. All additional places were to be in the economically relevant STEM areas. However, the funding that was made available, the £3 million by 2014-15, was sufficient only to fund 400 additional STEM places. To make more places available for Northern Ireland students, students from GB are no longer included in the universities' maximum student number — known as their MaSN count. At the time, there were over 500 GB students at the universities. It was proposed that, by 2014-15, 300 of those would be replaced by Northern Ireland students. The GB students remain at the universities and pay fees to them, but their removal from the MaSN meant that the two universities could offer 300 places to Northern Ireland students. Those are 300 places that were not available previously and that will increase the university student headcount by 300. When those are factored in, the University of Ulster received 322 additional places, Queen's University 308, and 70 additional places went to the further education colleges for their HE and FE provision. That is what brings the total additional places to 700, which is the PFG target.

The places were allocated to the universities and colleges on the basis of their existing MaSN totals at the time. Seven hundred was the total number that was considered affordable and achievable. The baseline against which achievement is to be measured is the number of first-year undergraduate students enrolled on STEM courses in the 2011-12 academic year. Figures produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for 2010-11 show that there were 3,465 first-year undergraduates enrolled on STEM courses. That means that the target for the current academic year, 2012-13, is that 3,465 plus the additional 233. That is a target of 3,698.

Funding for the additional places was allocated to the universities and colleges in advance of the 2012-13 year. It is anticipated that the target will be achieved. However, the actual number of enrolments will not be known until January 2014. The reason for that is that the annual student census return to HESA is not due to be made until 1 December this year. That is the date that applies in all years to all higher education institutions across the UK.

The Chairperson: Thanks, Billy. There are a lot of numbers there.

You mentioned targets of 322, 308 and 70 places across the two universities and further education colleges. I am conscious of the devolution of the Open University (OU). Is it taken into consideration in those numbers? I know that funding is going to be put into the same mix for all the universities. Would it not, therefore, be relevant that it be included in that count?

Mr B Lyttle: The decision was taken before the devolution of OU funding to Northern Ireland. The funding for the Open University only kicks in on 1 August this year. To this point in time, we did not have a funding responsibility; that will be only at the beginning of the next academic year. At the time the funding was transferred, it was agreed that we would give the Open University a period of stability

The Chairperson: Sorry, I am not talking about the funding exactly. I am talking about the increase in STEM places and the funding for those. Should that not have been included?

Mr B Lyttle: The Open University did not feature in those decisions at all.

The Chairperson: Even in forward programmes?

Mr B Lyttle: No. That came out of existing money that was there for the sector as it was at the time. Going forward, and particularly from the beginning of the next Budget period, which is 2015-16, the Open University will be involved in everything that happens across the sector in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson: The Minister made a recent statement about increasing the number of women who enter STEM courses and careers. Is any account taken of that in these numbers — I am not saying that women are positively discriminated against, but Bronwyn is smiling at me and nodding, so she knows what I mean. Is anything being done with these courses to encourage a greater uptake by women?

Mr B Lyttle: To my knowledge, there is not. Gender is not an issue for entry into higher education, and the statistics that we have — the ones that I have today anyway — are not broken down by male and female. I cannot comment on that, but we can take that away and try to get more information.

Ms Ingram: You referred to the Minister's statement, and I think that this sits within the broader work that we are doing on the uptake of STEM places, with a particular focus, where appropriate, on encouraging girls to come into STEM subjects. That will be part of what we are doing through the ICT working group, the engineering working group and the review of apprenticeships and youth training. We will look at the uptake, particularly in the priority or more economically important sectors.

Mr Douglas: Thank you for your presentation. Billy, I think that you mentioned that, in 2014, there will be some form of evaluation of the STEM places. Will that indicate where those people came from? Will it show what areas they came from and whether they came from areas of disadvantage? Obviously, we have been encouraging universities and others to try to reach out to some of those hard-to-reach communities in particular.

Mr B Lyttle: I would need to check it again, but, as far as I know, the statistics that we get for the universities can be broken down, particularly within Northern Ireland, across all district council areas. So, we will have a fair idea where they came from. I am not sure whether that would go further and use a postcode analysis to look at whether they came from areas of deprivation, but we can check that. I think that if we have a student record on the system and that is reported to the statistics agency in England, that information should be there.

Mr Douglas: You would imagine that that should be reasonably easy to do; you are not talking about huge numbers of people.

Mr B Lyttle: No.

Mr Douglas: That would be very helpful.

Mr F McCann: My question just came to me as I was reading through the briefing. You mentioned 233 additional places. What would happen if there were 500 applicants? How would you decide who will get the places?

Mr B Lyttle: That would be a matter for the universities.

Mr F McCann: Would it be based on earlier qualifications they have taken, like A levels?

Mr B Lyttle: It would be based on the universities' entry requirements whatever they might be, whether they are A levels or A-level equivalent. It is an open competition between all students.

Mr F McCann: We will work on that one.

The Chairperson: June and Billy, thank you very much for your time.

And then there was one, Jim. We will move on. Jim Russell is the deputy director of the employment service in the Department.

Commitment 27 is to:

"Develop and implement a strategy to reduce economic inactivity through skills, training, incentives and job creation."

Jim, do you want to make some opening remarks on this commitment?

Mr Russell: I will just update the Committee on where we have got to on that commitment. The last time that I was here in April, I think that I indicated that we were hopeful of having a draft with the Executive before the recess. That is looking increasingly unlikely.

As we indicated we would do at the last meeting, we expanded the steering group, and the Health Department and the Department for Social Development (DSD) have joined DEL and the Department

of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) on that steering group to take the strategy forward and develop it. Although we have a draft strategy that we think is at a reasonably advanced stage of development, DETI has not got to the stage of being content that the full strategy should go to the Executive. Its proposal was that we would put a framework document, which was basically a direction of travel, to the Executive subcommittee on the economy next Tuesday. That is still the subject of some debate between Ministers, and we have not yet got any agreement on whether they will proceed with that. It looks like we will not have a full strategy for discussion until September.

In the meantime, we are continuing to work on the drafting to consult with interested parties on the issues. This week, we have consultation events organised for Cookstown and Belfast. Tomorrow, we are in the Glenavon House Hotel, and, on Friday, we are at NICVA. We have invited over 119 community and voluntary bodies to those events, and we expect to have around half of those in attendance. We also intend to consult the business community in early July to bring its views to the table, and DETI will take the lead on that. As I said, we will continue to draft based on that through July and August. Hopefully, we will have a document agreed between all the Ministers that can go to the Executive in September. It is unfortunate, but DETI could not move on it because it was so tied up with the economic package that was announced last Friday, the G8, etc. It really has not had time to get its head round the degree of detail that it would like.

That is the position today. We might have a framework document with the Executive subcommittee on the economy next week. We certainly are unlikely to have a full draft strategy until September. That is unfortunate, but it is up to Ministers to agree what they want to do.

The Chairperson: Thanks for that, Jim. I am aware that is not your fault or the Department's fault. I will not say whose fault it is. I could ask you that question, but I am sure that you would not answer.

If the framework document does not go in front of the economic subcommittee next Tuesday and is not accepted then, can it go straight to the Executive? Does it have to go to the economic subcommittee?

Mr Russell: No, the suggestion to take it to the economic subcommittee came from DETI. It thought that that would be a way to move things forward in agreeing a general direction of travel and would show the areas that we would like to concentrate on and the way that we would like to approach it. That would have given us confidence that the work that we would continue to do through July and August would make it easier to get agreement come September on a final document. If it does not go next week and we do not get that steer, we will work on the assumption that the direction of travel is acceptable. If something holes it in the water come September, we will have to think again, but we think that the direction that we decided to take is reasonable.

The Chairperson: DEL is determined to go on with the work?

Mr Russell: DEL, DETI, DSD and the Health Department will continue to liaise with each other on drafting over July and August, so, at an official level, we will continue to debate the issues and try to come to some sort of agreement among officials that we think is sensible. We will take that to our respective Ministers as soon as we have got to that position. Hopefully, that will be sooner rather than later.

The Chairperson: Hopefully, of course. The importance of where we are at the minute is that this is a strategy to reduce economic inactivity through skills and training, which is the core remit of the Assembly at the minute and something that we are all determined to get on with. To play devil's advocate: if you get a fair wind and the draft strategy goes to the Executive in September and the Executive do not accept it, where are we?

Mr Russell: That would depend on the issues that Executive members had with it. We would take it back, consider their views and put another iteration to them to see whether we could close the gap and reach an agreement.

The Chairperson: So, we could be into 2014 before the strategy is accepted.

Mr Russell: I do not think that will happen. I think that it will be reasonably clear and that the proposal will be reasonably well received and accepted. I do not think that there will be a delay into 2014. I would like to think that, by 2014, we would have some projects up and running.

Mr C Lyttle: Thank you for your update. For the purposes of people who may be watching the Committee or following our work, could you, as concisely as possible, give us an idea of what economic inactivity looks like, its scale in Northern Ireland and what you think the key actions are that need to happen to address it?

Mr Russell: We said before that 27% of the working-age population is economically inactive. It has been in and around 27% since records began, and it is usually about 5% higher than the UK average. Based on the latest data that we have, that is still the case. It is 27% here compared with 22·4% in the UK overall.

If you are economically inactive, you are not seeking work nor are you able to start work now. If you are unemployed, however, you are actively seeking work and, if a job became available, you could start tomorrow. That is the difference between the two.

When you expand the economically inactive group, you have people who are out of work because of ill health or disability, people with caring responsibilities, students, people who are of working age but have retired early and some people who, for whatever reason, do not work or do not think that they need to work, though they represent a very small proportion of the total.

As we said before, the work that we have done indicates that the target groups that we need to work with are those who are inactive because of ill health or disability and some of those with caring responsibilities. They need to address particular barriers before they are in a position to be able to actively seek work and start right away if a job is available. That is the breakdown of those who are economically inactive and those who are active.

The latest data shows that, of those who are economically inactive, 9%, or 52,000 people, would like to work. There are 52,000 people who, if we could help them to address the issues that are keeping them from work, would be ready to start. Those are the people we need to help: the 52,000 people in this category who want to work but who need help to address a particular barrier that prevents them from being available now and being able to start if a job came up.

Mr C Lyttle: In the absence of the agreed strategy, can you give us a short insight into some of the key actions that are being taken to help those people into work?

Mr Russell: At the moment, the main programme for people who have health conditions or disabilities is Pathways to Work, which I am sure the Committee is familiar with. The disability employment service (DES) has a range of programmes to help people, such as Access to Work and the job introduction scheme. Pathways to Work has been in place since 2008 and the DES programmes have been around for a long time.

Quite an amount of money was spent on all that activity, but we still have not managed to crack that 27% or to see it beginning to decline. We have not been able to help those 52,000 people who want to work to find work. It is not always the same 52,000 people, but whatever it is that we are doing is not reducing that number. We need to find new ways and new answers. We talked earlier about Steps 2 Success. People in the employment and support allowance work-related activity group will get early access to Steps 2 Success. Again, the theory is that the personalised support that they will get might help to move them closer to work and into work. The Minister announced yesterday that they could be engaged on the programme for up to 18 months to help them do that. So, that is a change that we will try out and test to see whether it has any impact. However, we think that we need to do other things. This is not necessarily an issue of employability and employment; there are other social factors and health issues at play that need to be addressed.

The other side of the coin, as somebody mentioned earlier, is where these jobs are coming from. Where are we going to get the work for the 52,000 people in this category who want jobs, let alone for the 64,000 who are looking for work anyway? There are huge challenges here, and we need to think carefully about what we do.

Mr C Lyttle: I have one last question, Chair, and I thank you for your indulgence. Do we know how many of those 52,000 are young people?

Mr Russell: Not on the data that I have here. Since the largest group of the economically inactive is students, I do not think that they will be in the 52,000. I think the 52,000 will be older workers who

have a health condition or disability and some who have caring responsibilities who would really like a job but cannot see how they can balance all their responsibilities and do that.

The Chairperson: Chris, I think we have that. That breakdown is there from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency the last time; it went into great detail.

Mr C Lyttle: OK. Thank you, Chair.

Ms McGahan: I do not really have a question, but the delay in the strategy is a concern and a disappointment. I appreciate that it is important that we get things right. We should write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and perhaps the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, flagging up our concerns on this and seeking reassurances that we will have no further delays in this strategy beyond September.

The Chairperson: Are members happy enough with Bronwyn's proposal?

Mr C Lyttle: Just a point of clarification, Chair. Is there a paper with the Executive? Is it possible to be more specific about the hold-up?

The Chairperson: No, I think that it is still — sorry, Jim, is this the baseline paper?

Mr Russell: The Executive cleared the baseline paper in March. The baseline paper was published in April. It was suggested and agreed that we work on a strategy that was to target people with health issues, disabilities or caring responsibilities, and that is what we are working on.

Mr C Lyttle: OK.

Mr Russell: So we know that that is the problem, but what do we do about it? Without giving too much away, and as I have said to the Committee previously, we are suggesting that instead of the Pathways to Work approach, which was solutions being presented from the top down, saying, "here is the answer". We do this, we put it everywhere and we see what happens. It really did not have much impact at all. Part of what we propose to do is to ask the community, society and wherever to bring forward ideas that we can test, and to ask them to bid for funds to try it, to see whether local people can find solutions in their community for this.

That is one idea that we have. We have some other ideas that are different. We know that one issue that we have is that Departments, whether DEL, DSD, DETI, Health or even the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, pour millions of pounds into projects to try to address different aspects of the same problem. We are suggesting that we do an audit of all that to see exactly what is out there and what it is trying to do. Does it overlap? Are there underlaps? Would there be a better way of using that resource more effectively? On the same theme, we also think that people interact with many different agencies, expecting different types of support and interventions. We are thinking about some sort of a passport or a personal profile document that allows any agencies to see what the person has been engaged in and who they have been engaging with. There is no point in me doing something that has already been done; I should do something different for them. It is to try to make things more joined up and a lot more cohesive, so that we do not duplicate, waste resources or miss things that are important. Those are some of the ideas, but, as I say, it is subject to the Ministers agreeing all this.

The Chairperson: Thanks, Jim. Going back to Bronwyn's point, I think the remit of this Committee, and one that we should be mindful of, is to support the Minister and Department when necessary. If that helps to gee the thing up, I am happy enough that we write. Members?

Members indicated assent.

Mr Douglas: I do not know whether you take into consideration, or factor in, emigration figures. Certainly, emigration is a major problem in the Republic of Ireland, and there is anecdotal evidence that it is a problem here. First, do you factor that in? Secondly, what is the situation in terms of people emigrating from these islands?

Mr Russell: We have not looked at migration outwards, specifically, yet. We are aware of, and we know about, migration inwards and foreign nationals in the workforce. We have data around that as

well. I will ask Michael to have a look at migration to see whether there is an issue there. Regularly, we run job fairs, and so forth. We get international interest. We have people coming from places such as Canada and New Zealand, offering people work and training schemes in those countries, usually in and around agriculture and things like that. So we know that other countries are trying to recruit from here, and do so regularly. I will make that an issue that we will look at, address and do some research around.

Mr Douglas: Certainly, places such as Christchurch, where they had the earthquake a couple of years ago, are recruiting people from across the world for construction jobs.

I have a final question. You mentioned migrant workers. Again, anecdotally, it seems to me that that is slowing down a bit because of the economic downturn, not just here but in the rest of the United Kingdom. Is that still the case?

Mr Russell: Yes. I think it is steady; it has not grown any further. If you are an EU migrant worker here and you are unemployed, if you have been here for a particular number of years — I think it is one or two — you are entitled to all the benefits and support that we have, and you are regarded as part of the workforce. I am not sure how many migrant workers are counted in the unemployed within the data here, or whether they are economically inactive, but they are certainly part of the picture.

Mr F McCann: Sammy touched on the initial stage, and I think it would be interesting. Emigration is one of the common threads that run through a lot of these meetings. Having talked to some of our rural representatives, I know that emigration is having a big impact on rural communities. Many young people say that they will go out to Canada, America or Australia for a year, but most of them do not come back. Obviously, it is up to us to try to create the economic conditions in which they can stay.

It is interesting, Jim. If DEL is going down the road of listening to the community and voluntary sector, it is a big step forward. In the past, there was a lot of innovation, good thought and good ideas coming from the community and voluntary sector, but it was not able to get in here, because DEL looked towards the traditional providers, which see the voluntary and community sector as a threat to their existence. You said that 119 people had been invited to the Friday session and that you expected half of them to turn up. If many of them are DEL providers, I would expect 119 of them to come along. If they do not turn up, you should ask them why they did not turn up. I would value their input. I have raised it at this Committee in the question of the whole NEETs thing. One of the benefits of voluntary and community schemes is that they have their fingers on the pulse and are able to get at that section of NEETs that no one else can. They have good and refreshing ideas. Along with that, there must be other forms of good practice in other jurisdictions that we need to tap into. If we remain just confined to the same old, same old, we are not moving forward.

Mr Russell: We also did some research. We commissioned a literature review from Edinburgh Napier University. We asked them to go out around the world to find anything that might work here. We asked them to look for examples of good practice. They have come up with some good stuff. We wanted to put it into the document and show it to people. That was one of the issues on which Departments disagreed. However, it is published anyway on the DEL website, and we can direct the Committee to it if you want to have a look at it. If you wanted, and if it would be helpful, we can give you a detailed, blow-by-blow account of what that review told us.

Mr F McCann: It is like a revolving circle. You try something that does not work, and then you move on to some other things that had not worked 10 years before. I raised it here a couple of weeks ago that, as part of a thing in west Belfast, we met 16 providers about NEETs, Steps to Work and Steps 2 Success. That is a small geographical area, and it shocked me that most of the people in the room did not know and had never talked to each other. The question was, how many jobs have you provided? Therein lies the problem.

Mr Russell: That is absolutely it.

The Chairperson: I am keen to take up the offer of the research. Let us move on to commitment 36:

"Support people (with an emphasis on young people) into employment by providing skills and training"

We have been touching on it in our other topic, but you have an introduction.

Mr Russell: Here is the overall raw information. The Programme for Government target is 114,000 over the four years to 2015; that is, in 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15. That target was set — I think maybe we have explained before how we set the target. It was based on previous performance in the 2008-2011 programme. Then, the target was 70,000, and we achieved somewhere closer to 90,000. So, in looking at the new programme, we thought that we were likely to be able to achieve something close to the 2008-2011 target, but, when the target was set, we thought that perhaps by now or next year, we would be beginning to see some sort of upturn in the economy, which unfortunately is not on the horizon as far as we can tell. So we have profiled our target of 114,000 as follows: 35,000 in 2011-12; 30,000 in 2012-13; 24,000 in 2013-14; and 25,000 in 2014-15. So, it was front-loaded. The volatility in the labour market and the way the economy was meant that we expected to perform better in the first half of the period than in the second. We thought that we would have seen an improvement in the economy, which is not occurring at all, so far as we can see.

In the first two years — that is 2011-12 and 2012-13 — we had a target of 65,000 for getting people into employment. We have achieved 76,841, which is 18.2% above the two-year target. In 2011-12, we exceeded the target by 8.5%, and in 2012-13, we exceeded it by 29.6%. Also, the target talks about putting an emphasis on young people. We know that, for 2012-13, 33.5% of the 38,871 people were aged 18 to 24. So, one third of those that we helped last year were young people. That means that a target of 24,000 for the current year and 25,000 for next year is looking a bit thin. So, we are suggesting that we would expect to repeat the performance that we had in the first two years in the second two years of the Programme for Government, based on the fact that we do not think, and all the independent commentators will suggest, that any real upturn in the economy will not come too soon. Hopefully it will, and people will start to find work and keep work and this volatility will settle down, but we are where we are, and we will continue to help as many people as we possibly can, this year and next, to move into work as quickly as possible.

The Chairperson: Thanks, Jim. One of the biggest problems that the Committee has had with the target is that when you take 35,000 in year 1 and 35,000 in year 2, the Department adds them together and gets nearly 70,000 people moving into employment. There is an assumption there, and Chris mentioned people looking in. If people were looking in on this and they heard that we have moved 70,000 people into employment, it makes everybody think that 70,000 people out there are in a job now. One of the concerns is what does that employment mean? Is it a six-week programme? Is it a two-month programme? We need clarification on that.

Mr Russell: No, no. This is full-time employment of more than 16 hours a week. We know that there are people who have moved into work and are working fewer than 16 hours a week, and they have ended a claim to jobseeker's allowance or any other benefit, but this is full-time employment. We have broken it down before by age and by geographical area, but we have difficulty in the length of the contract that an individual might have and which sector the work is in. The data that we report on this target comes from the DSD database. It keeps records on benefit claims, and if you close your claim, the reason why you have closed it is recorded. I have the data here, and it could be that the claimant has moved into work or claimed another benefit, their claim has been withdrawn or is defective, or they have moved into full-time education, gone abroad, claimed pension — that type of thing. If you look at the data for April, for example, 7,590 claims to jobseeker's allowance were terminated, and 2,731 of those were by reason of moving into a job or full-time work, 196 moved into work of fewer than 16 hours, but within the breakdown of the other reasons, 1,115 had another reason and 2,025 failed to sign. It is likely that a number of those people have actually found work, but it is just not recorded on the system. That is why they did not sign that they have moved into a job. So, to a degree, we are probably underreporting the performance.

Mr F McCann: Part of that figure could have emigrated.

Mr Russell: Correct. There is a gone abroad figure, and there could be more. You are right, Fra. The 1,115 and the 2,025 could be absolutely anything.

Mr F McCann: What about seasonal work?

Mr Russell: There can be seasonal work as well. The data is for April, but we get it every month and we can track the movement.

The Chairperson: Fra touched on seasonal work. Is there a possibility that there is a cohort there of seasonal workers who move from benefit into work every year, so you count them every year?

Mr Russell: Potentially, yes, but in this data, we have counted them. It is a bit like the qualifications and individuals argument. Among the 38,871 for 2012-13, say, there could be people whom we have moved into work two or three times. They may have taken a short-term contract for three months, worked that three-month contract and then signed on again, got another contract for three months and signed off. That is normal turnover in the labour market.

For us, this is an indicator of how effective and quick we are at moving people. We do not want to let people sit. The last labour market report showed that 59% of the unemployed have been unemployed for a year or more. A year or more is the definition of long-term unemployment, and 59% have been out for a year. We want to try to move people into work as quickly as we can so that they do not fall into the long-term unemployment trap and then drift into the economically inactive group that we have just talked about. Time is key. The quicker we get people engaged and keep them engaged with work, the better it is for them because it reduces their risk of becoming trapped in long-term unemployment.

The Chairperson: Jim, thank you very much for your time. Thanks for coming along and giving us that insight. It has been valuable.