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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 11 March 2013

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Before we turn to today's business, I want to raise an issue that, I must say, has been concerning and troubling me for some time. Standing Order 1(2) states that the Speaker's ruling will be final on all questions of procedure and order. That is absolutely clear; there is certainly no ambiguity around that Standing Order. However, I must say that, in recent months, I have seen a growing trend of Members challenging decisions made by myself or even the Deputy Speakers in the House. In particular, we have had many Members frequently criticise decisions made on the selection of amendments to motions and Bills, matters of the day and even questions for urgent oral answer. For Members to refer to those decisions and an item of business not selected is a challenge to the authority and the final decision of the Speaker.

Until now, I have tried to be relaxed about the issue, but we have got to the point where certain Members table questions for urgent oral answer and matters of the day knowing full well and having received advice that they just cannot be selected for a number of reasons, be they legal reasons or procedural reasons around Standing Orders. Members are putting issues before the Business Office knowing — knowing — that they cannot be accepted. They then table them and raise bogus points of order in order to gain publicity and to play politics, run to the press and present themselves as victims and martyrs around all these issues. That almost says more about Members of the House than about anything else. I ask Members to consult their conscience around some of these issues and stop trying to play politics and trying to bring the Speaker's role into politics.

I know that it is easy for Members to think that these questions are clear-cut, on the basis of issues in their constituency or on what is at the top of the news agenda for that day. I say to the whole House that my decision is not based on my views of the case or policy in question. I have specific responsibilities, and I have to take

a good range of considerations into account. Members will know that. Some of the decisions are not easy. They include Standing Orders, rulings, legal issues and other mechanisms that are available to me to establish procedure, to ensure the smooth running and order of the House and to protect the integrity of the House and the business that goes through it. I want to be clear in saying to the whole House that my decisions are final. Members have to accept that they are made impartially and in good faith.

Members will know that I very much operate an open door policy in my office. Members will also know that I have a listening ear, irrespective of what subject they might bring to my office. I always try to treat Members in a very respectful way. I hope that they will treat my office in the same way. From today, the Deputy Speakers and I will enforce Standing Orders more rigidly to underline that. If Members persist in challenging the authority of the Chair, they will find that they will have to resume their seat and business will move on. In extreme cases, Members will find that they will not be called for some time, or, under Standing Order 65(1), a Member may be ordered to leave the Chamber for the rest of the day. Standing Orders specifically give me that sanction for Members who persistently or wilfully disregard the authority of the Speaker. That should, therefore, underline the fact that it is unacceptable for Members to challenge or question rulings of the Chair. I hope that I have made myself clear this afternoon to all concerned. I trust that I will not need to return to the matter.

Finally, I advise the House that I am still considering other serious issues arising from last week's debate. I will return to the House in the very near future. I will not take any points of order on this issue. I say to all Members that it is disappointing that I, as Speaker, have to come to the House to give such rulings. The only reason that I do so is that a number of Members have persistently misused the situation, especially in and around the business of the House. Let us move on.

Committee Membership: Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: The next item in the Order Paper is a motion on Committee membership. As with similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Leslie Cree replace Mr Robin Swann as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. — [Mr Swann.]

Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2013

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That, as set out in section 2(4) of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Act (Northern Ireland) 2000, this Assembly approves the revised scheme (NIA 101/11-15) laid before the Assembly on 22 February 2013 for payments to political parties for the purpose of assisting Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly who are connected with such parties to perform their Assembly duties.

I move the motion on behalf of the Assembly Commission. Members will be aware that the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Act (Northern Ireland) 2000 provides for payment to political parties for the purpose of assisting Members to perform their duties. It does not provide payment to individual Members. It is proposed that the revised scheme will be put in place to strengthen the existing governance arrangements in the administration of the scheme.

The background is that the Assembly Commission undertook a full review of the existing scheme in 2012, following recommendations highlighted by internal audit and raised by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. We consulted all parties when developing the revised scheme, which proposes six main changes that provide for a range of enhanced definition and administrative controls. I will take Members briefly through these changes.

The scheme has been revised to provide a clearer definition of Assembly duties, in line with

the Northern Ireland Assembly Members' salary, allowances, expenses and pensions determination of 2012. The scheme also adopted the 10 principles — consistent with the Nolan principles — that were agreed by the Assembly in 2010 and which would underpin the basis of assistance provided. In line with good governance and current best practice, the scheme provides that all parties that employ staff and fund those staff from the assistance provided by the FAPP scheme will utilise the Assembly's payroll processes in the administration of those payments. The scheme contains a condition that all payments will be made on receipt of supporting documentation, in the same way as office cost expenditure payments are made, and that all claims will be published in line with the current publication of Members' expenses. The Assembly Commission has also agreed that an independent audit of FAPP expenditure and claims will be undertaken at the end of each financial year. The Finance Office has developed guidance in line with the revised scheme. Following the scheme's approval, that will be issued to all party leaders.

The revised scheme will strengthen our existing governance and administrative arrangements and provide for greater guidance on the operation of financial assistance for political parties.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, as set out in section 2(4) of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Act (Northern Ireland) 2000, this Assembly approves the revised scheme (NIA 101/11-15) laid before the Assembly on 22 February 2013 for payments to political parties for the purpose of assisting Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly who are connected with such parties to perform their Assembly duties.

Executive Committee Business

Mental Health (Private Hospitals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That the Mental Health (Private Hospitals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

I seek the Assembly's affirmation of these regulations. Under current mental health legislation — the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 — a private hospital may be registered to treat mentally ill patients on a voluntary basis. Such a facility is required to register with the Department and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), to be subject to routine inspection by the RQIA and to treat patients to at least the same standard as statutory hospitals. However, for a private hospital to detain patients, my Department is required to apply the provisions of the Mental Health Order through regulations made under article 95 of the order. One of the key reasons for making these regulations is to avoid a situation in which a voluntary patient in a private hospital becomes so unwell as to require detention and has to be moved to a statutory hospital for continuing treatment. Clearly, moving a patient at a time of mental health crisis from one hospital to another and from one team of clinicians to another would not be in their best interests.

The proposal to make regulations permitting private hospitals to treat detained patients was the subject of a public consultation between 21 November 2011 and 23 January 2012. Over 500 organisations, professional bodies, public representatives and individuals were contacted and their views sought. There were 21 responses. In general, respondents supported the proposal. The main issue of concern was the safeguards that would be put in place to ensure that patients in a private hospital were not detained unnecessarily or for longer than necessary. The Mental Health Order already provides safeguards when patients are detained. They include prescribing those who may apply to have an individual detained; prescribing the medical officers who may detain the patient; prescribing the documentation to be used; a requirement for documentation to be copied to the RQIA; and referral to the Mental Health Review Tribunal to have the detention

reviewed by an independent, legally constituted body.

One of the respondents to the consultation was the Attorney General. He advised that an additional safeguard should be a mechanism for review by an appropriate doctor who is not employed by the private hospital in which a person is to be detained. My Department has accepted that advice, and officials have worked closely with their RQIA colleagues to develop a protocol to deliver the added safeguard.

The provision of specialist services locally can prevent the need to send patients outside Northern Ireland for such treatment. However, I stress that neither the Department nor the Health and Social Care Board has commissioned any private mental health facility to be established locally. The opening of such a facility is a commercial decision for private sector interests. Any decision to refer a patient to such a facility will be a clinical one based on patient need and will require the endorsement of the Health and Social Care Board. In line with the Bamford review, the emphasis remains on treating patients in the community so as to avoid the need for hospitalisation.

12.15 pm

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Mr McDevitt was like an Olympic runner there behind me so that he would not get caught out.

The Minister has explained the purpose of the rule, which requires Assembly support before coming into operation. The rule widens the provisions of the Mental Health Order 1986 to enable private hospitals to treat patients detained under the order. Legislating to permit a private facility to treat detained patients would avoid the circumstance, as outlined by the Minister, in which a voluntary patient receiving care would have to transfer to a statutory facility should the need for detention arise.

The Committee originally considered the SL1 on 7 September 2011 and had concerns over the protection of patients. Therefore, we decided to take further evidence. The Committee received a briefing from departmental officials on 21 September 2011. We also engaged with the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Children's Law Centre on 5 October and 12 October 2011, and they raised concerns and gave views on the legislation. At that stage, the Committee still had concerns with the proposed legislation, so

it asked the Department to carry out a public consultation, which it did.

Following a further departmental briefing on 14 March 2012, the Committee considered the responses to the public consultation. As the Minister said, given that the majority of respondents were in agreement that the legislation should be extended to include private hospitals, we agreed that we were content for the Department to continue making the rule. The Committee considered the draft rule at its meeting on 12 December 2012 and recommended that it be affirmed by the Assembly. At that point, the Examiner of Statutory Rules indicated that there were minor errors in the numbering structure of the regulations and recommended that the rule be revoked and re-enacted, amending the numbering. That has been completed, and the Committee has agreed the updated statutory rule. I therefore support the motion on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Wells: This has been discussed at length in Committee and has come back and forwards to it on numerous occasions. It was discussed while I was Chair and, more recently, when Ms Ramsey was Chair. It was given a much higher level of scrutiny than this form of legislation would normally enjoy, and we have teased out many complex points.

I must emphasise that this does not establish the principle of private sector involvement in this section of the health service. That was established long ago under direct rule. We are dealing here with regulations governing the control of such a facility. That has not been an issue until now, because there was no private provision before. However, a planning application has been lodged and has been successful, and, accordingly, we have to have the regulations. I concur with the Chair's views and support the legislation as something that is extremely necessary, given developments.

Mr McDevitt: I echo what has been said by the Chair and the Deputy Chair. We may or may not fundamentally support this development at policy level, but it has now happened and therefore requires regulation. I commend the Minister for addressing that immediately. We could learn a lesson from that in the regulation of other aspects outside the health service, but that is a subject for another day and time. I am happy to support the regulation, although that does not mean that I am entirely happy with the direction of travel in having a clinic established outside the NHS.

Mr Beggs: I, too, support the regulation. It is important that all aspects of healthcare be regulated, and I am content that there is a need for regulation in this area.

Mr Poots: I thank the Members who spoke, including the Chair and Deputy Chair, and for the general support that the motion received.

I will just clarify that the proposed development in the private sector would, if it happens, provide a service that is not currently available in Northern Ireland. We currently acquire those services from the private sector outside Northern Ireland. Quite a number of years ago, I personally dealt with families with young people with eating disorders, and the calamity that that brings upon them is absolutely huge. If a service is established here in Northern Ireland, as opposed to us having to send young people away from their family to England and support their family to visit them every other weekend, that would be a fairly significant step forward. This legislation is wider than one facility, and I appreciate Members' support for it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Mental Health (Private Hospitals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Committee Business

Ovarian Cancer Awareness

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has allowed up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the results of the Target Ovarian Cancer pathfinder study 2012, which revealed low levels of awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer among women in Northern Ireland and delays in diagnosis and treatment; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider a public awareness campaign on this issue.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I am delighted to move the motion. I would like to provide some background information on ovarian cancer for other Members and other Committees. It is the fourth most common cause of cancer death among women and accounts for 6.5% of female cancer deaths each year. Here, the average number of deaths per year from ovarian cancer is around 120. The cause of ovarian cancer is not fully understood, but there is an increased risk for women who have a strong family history of the disease. Age is another factor, with 80% of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer being over 50. However, it does affect women as young as 20.

Currently, unlike cervical cancer, there is no reliable screening test for ovarian cancer. Although ovarian cancer can be a deadly disease — as I said, it kills around 120 per year — if it is diagnosed at the earliest stage it can be treated effectively with surgery and chemotherapy, leading to survival rates of up to 90%. Our five-year survival rate is just 36%, which is one of the worst in Europe. That is a sobering thought.

I know that we are all aware of family members or constituents who have suffered and died from ovarian cancer. We are also aware of a woman called Una Crudden, who has ovarian cancer and who went through treatment and support with four other women. She is the only

one still alive. I want to take the opportunity during the debate to thank Una and others and commend her for the work that she has done over the past weeks and months to bring this to our attention. People such as Una are fighting their own battle and have decided to take the battle one step further, so they need to be commended.

If we are improve on poor outcomes for our women, ovarian cancer needs to be detected earlier. That means that women and GPs need to be on the lookout for early signs and symptoms. The recent Target Ovarian Cancer pathfinder study found that women here were among the least aware when it came to symptoms of ovarian cancer. The survey showed that only 3% of women would be very confident in identifying a symptom.

The three main symptoms are persistent pelvic and abdominal pain; persistent bloating of the abdomen; and difficulty eating and feeling full quickly. This is not a criticism of the Chamber being very male-dominated, but I would appreciate it if Members relayed those symptoms to everyone they know. We need to play our part as well in tackling and targeting ovarian cancer. Not only are the majority of women not aware of the fact that these symptoms can be caused by ovarian cancer, but some GPs are not fully up to speed either.

The Target Ovarian Cancer pathfinder study found that almost a third of women with the disease have to wait six months or more after visiting their GPs to receive a positive diagnosis. Misdiagnosis of the disease is common, with doctors mistakenly diagnosing irritable bowel syndrome, ovarian cysts or infections. It is also worrying that only one in 20 GPs is concerned when a woman reports difficulty with eating, even though that is one of the eight key symptoms of ovarian cancer. That shows that there is still a job of work to do before all GPs are aware of all the symptoms of the disease.

Knowledge of the symptoms of the disease would allow women to seek appropriate help and let GPs access diagnostic tests as swiftly as possible to save lives. There is evidence to suggest that 500 lives a year could be saved across these islands through early diagnosis. As I said, it is recognised that early diagnosis is key to survival. However, 32% of sufferers are diagnosed for the first time when they present at A&E. That is a shocking statistic. By that stage, it is unfortunately too late for many. For three quarters of those women, the cancer has already spread to other organs.

The future direction of the health service is set out in Transforming Your Care, and we hear day and daily about Transforming Your Care. The direction of that is all about prevention and early intervention. It is about keeping people out of hospitals and providing treatment in the primary care sector when appropriate. A situation where people are being diagnosed with a serious cancer for the first time at A&E is totally at odds with the sort of health service that Transforming Your Care wants to develop. It is totally at odds with what the health service should be in the future, and it is a worry.

The Health Committee encourages the Minister to take a proactive approach. We need to make people aware of the symptoms of the disease, encourage them to have those symptoms investigated early and provide doctors, especially our GPs, with the tools to provide early treatment. We need to empower individuals and medical professionals to deal with conditions early. It is all about early intervention and, in some cases, prevention.

The Committee asks the Minister to launch a public awareness campaign highlighting the key symptoms of ovarian cancer. The general public are just not aware. A lot of Members in the Chamber are probably not aware, and I would go as far as to say that a sizeable percentage of women are not aware. So, a campaign would be useful. As is mentioned in a lot of debates here in both a negative and positive sense, we live in an age where social media is part of our daily life. The health service and the Department need to make best use of that technology as a way to reach people and educate them about this disease.

I note that the Minister has included a specific action on raising awareness of ovarian cancer in the draft commissioning plan for 2013-14. That is to be welcomed, and I commend the Minister and his Department for doing that. The Committee is to hold an evidence session on the plan at its meeting next week. We will use that opportunity to explore further what specific actions will be taken.

I also note that the Health and Social Care Board will consider whether women should be given information about the symptoms of ovarian cancer when they go for cervical cancer and breast screening appointments. That seems like a common sense approach, and I cannot understand why it is not happening. However, I welcome that approach if it is going to happen.

I think that it would be even better that, when women were there for appointments for breast

cancer or cervical cancer, they were given a full health check. A number of weeks ago, the Committee advocated that in a motion on what were termed yearly MOT checks, but that is a debate for another day.

12.30 pm

In the time left, and as I said at the start, we need to pay tribute to those fighting their own battles but who are taking on this battle for others. It is important to formally pay tribute, not only to those women individually but to the local charities that support women who have suffered with ovarian cancer and their families. Angels of Hope is based in Belfast and was founded in 2003. We have all probably heard of that organisation at some stage. It does a lot of good work in providing counselling and complementary therapies. As I said, recognition must also go to individuals like Una, who have come through the other end of this illness. They are still here to tell their stories and are encouraging others to get tested. Many of them are doing great work in raising public awareness through the media. I commend their courage and determination in doing that.

I do not think that anybody would divide the House on the motion. The Committee needs to be commended for bringing forward the motion. Sometimes, it is a matter only of giving people the right information and steering them in the right direction. That can actually go a long way towards people getting early intervention, and can ensure that they get the right diagnosis so that they can get the right treatment. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Health Committee, I support the motion. Cancer is not a subject that anyone thinks about with any great degree of comfort. It is a disease that comes in many forms, and almost every family in Northern Ireland has felt its presence in some form. We know a number of key facts about what can lead to positive outcomes for those who receive a cancer diagnosis. Foremost is the early detection of the signs and symptoms that indicate that something is not right within our bodies. We are forever hearing that we need to be aware of our bodies to be able to spot changes that should be brought to our GP's attention. We have discussed health inequalities many times in the Chamber and the need to empower people to take responsibility for their own health. We know that awareness-raising campaigns can make a real difference and provide the knowledge that people need to look after their own health.

Ovarian cancer is a silent disease. Often, the symptoms are unknown. In the pathfinder study, only 3% of the population stated that they felt very confident in spotting the symptoms. Other issues include doctors often misdiagnosing the symptoms as other, less serious conditions or, more worryingly, when GPs do order further tests, there have been times when those tests have been refused. The study showed a worrying level of confusion in the general population between ovarian cancer and cervical cancer.

At this point, Mr Speaker, I would like to join the Chair in her comments about Mrs Una Crudden. A couple of weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting her here at Stormont. I met a very determined and courageous lady. In our chat, we discussed diagnosis and signs and symptoms. It is unbelievable that, in this day and age, women still believe that a cervical smear can detect ovarian cancer. The message that we need to put out today is that that test does not detect ovarian cancer; it only detects cervical cancer. That point needs to be highlighted. We need to address those issues urgently to ensure that women have the best chance of long-term survival.

If there was any doubt about the benefit of early diagnosis, the statistics speak for themselves. Of ovarian cancers detected in its early stage, the five-year survival rate is 92%. However, in Northern Ireland, the rate is just 36%; one of the worst in Europe. Again, if there is any doubt whether an advertising campaign would help to save lives, look at the statistics. As the Chair of the Health Committee stated, one quarter of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer took over three months before visiting the GP with their problems; half took one month to do so. Those few weeks are precious when you have such a disease. They can make all the difference. Once women went to their GP, a high proportion of them had to wait six months before getting a diagnosis. That is just not acceptable.

We need to empower women so that they feel confident and able to say to their GP that something is not right. We have to work to ensure that women are not misdiagnosed with conditions such as IBS or urinary infections, and we have to ensure that they are not unduly frightened either. There are many strands that we need to address, but one of the most important is raising awareness. The Department has heightened awareness of bowel cancer with a sustained campaign to highlight not just the most common symptoms but the lesser known signs. That will have a dramatic effect on the survival rates.

We, in this Assembly, have a real chance to make a massive difference in the lives of women and their families across Northern Ireland. The experts calculate that early detection means that women's lives could be saved if we matched Europe's best rates. That means there are chairs that could have been filled at the family table on mother's day yesterday — daughters, sisters, cousins, nieces and best friends. I support the motion.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Chair of the Health Committee and colleagues, particularly Paula Bradley for her campaigning on this issue. I am very happy to lead the contributions on behalf of the SDLP.

Mrs Una Crudden has been referred to on several occasions by colleagues, and she is in the House today. This is a debate that, I think, is only happening because of her advocacy and courage. One of the things that I can do, as a man participating in this debate, is to put some of Una's words on the record. She gave an interview last month to the Belfast Media Group in which she talked about her story. If you will allow me to, Mr Speaker, I will read a little of what she said. She said:

"I was diagnosed in December 2009. I had been attending the doctor for the three months prior and I was told it was Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). A lot of the symptoms of ovarian cancer are very similar to IBS – your abdomen swells, you have a change in your bowel motions and you feel full very quickly after taking only a few mouthfuls of food. I had continuous sharp pains in my side, which started to get worse.

I started to suffer terrible pain in my pelvic area and then was fast-tracked to Lagan Valley where I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and was told I had a 13-inch tumour inside me.

I feel it was my persistence in that I wasn't getting or feeling any better and kept going back that enabled me to keep going. I've had three rounds of chemotherapy and I'm going back to the hospital this month for my cancer review.

At the time there were five of us diagnosed together and I'm the last one left – the others have died and every one of us was misdiagnosed with IBS.

It's really disturbing to read the statistics that so many women are misdiagnosed. Women have to remember that, if detected early, 92 per cent of them, with treatment, can

survive, compared to only 36 per cent, which is where the figure stands at the minute.

Women need to be more aware of their own bodies and symptoms – they should insist on being tested if they have any of them."

That kind of sums it up. Many of us will know women like Una who have had to face up to a diagnosis of a cancer that will be terminal. We will know many men in such a position as well. The thing that always strikes me is how women deal with this: they fight their condition, but they also fight their diagnosis. They ask the questions and show the resilience that got them through life, that made them mothers and that just means that women are who they are. Those of us who are not female stand, often, in stark contrast: we do not tend to show the same resilience when met with that type of news.

This House and our Executive need to reflect on how important it is to keep fighters with us and to give them the opportunity to continue to live, because if they are capable of this level of fight with a limited prospective of survival, imagine the contribution they could make if their illness was detected early and they were properly given the right to fulfil their potential as citizens.

That sums it up for me. It is about having a health service that is determined to do everything that it can to give those who are faced with a diagnosis every chance they deserve. We are not doing that for women who are victims of ovarian cancer, and we need to start doing so.

Mr Beggs: I also support the motion. Ovarian cancer is one of the commonest forms of cancer affecting women in Northern Ireland. In 2011, it accounted for 2.6% of female cancer cases, and one in 87 women is affected by it. Each of us will probably know someone who will be affected by it in her lifetime, and we should all think carefully about that. However, it also accounts for 6.6% of all cancer deaths. Why is there such a significant difference between the level of the occurrence and the resulting deaths? The evidence points to late diagnosis being a contributory factor.

It is widely known that the sooner a cancer is identified and treatment commences, the better the outcomes. One of the most concerning figures in the Target Ovarian Cancer pathfinder study is that almost one third of ovarian cancers are detected at an accident and emergency department. Either women have not presented to a GP — I understand that one in 10 women

does not present to a GP with some of the classic symptoms — or there has not been a speedy enough diagnosis via the GP services. That needs to improve. The study also shows that one third of women faced a delay of six months or more between first presenting to their GP and being correctly diagnosed with ovarian cancer. In Northern Ireland, as other Members said, we have 120 deaths a year; that could be 32 deaths a year in the Northern Trust, which covers my area. Delays contribute to that higher number of deaths, and it has been estimated that, if the UK matched the best treatment in other parts of Europe, 500 women's lives could be saved each year.

Given the risks associated with ovarian cancer, you would have thought that its symptoms would have been common knowledge. It is important to continue to highlight the symptoms so that more people are aware of them. They include persistent bloating; abdominal distension; pelvic/abdominal pain; difficulty eating; feeling full; and urinary frequency and urgency issues. Clearly, everyone should take great care with those issues. As I indicated, only four out of 10 women visit their GP within one month of experiencing symptoms of ovarian cancer. There must be greater public awareness. Almost 60% of symptoms were initially put down by GPs to, for example, irritable bowel syndrome, ovarian cysts or urinary infections. Greater awareness among GPs is also needed so that the issue is not masked by other diagnoses without the appropriate level of inspection. It is encouraging that there is greater use of CA125 blood tests, which are a clear marker, but further improvement is needed.

The stage of the diagnosis is a huge factor in survival rates, with 100% of patients identified at stage 1 surviving more than one year, compared with only 30% of those identified at stage 4. It is imperative that GPs quickly investigate the symptoms of ovarian cancer and make swift referrals when necessary. One of the issues that has been highlighted to me is the need for greater and speedier access to ultrasound, which can be one of the diagnostic tools.

Marion Janner, who is recognised as a successful public campaigner on public awareness issues, wrote in 2002 that the most consistent message from all research on how people learn, including how they are motivated to engage with new information, is to make it interactive. I call on the Minister to ensure that we start an interactive information campaign in Northern Ireland so that the public and GPs are better informed.

12.45 pm

I thank Target Ovarian Cancer for its study, which brings this issue to the fore. Like other Members, I thank Una Crudden for her efforts to improve the health of others by bringing the issue into the public domain and making more people aware of it. I hope that, as a result of this debate, there will be more public awareness of ovarian cancer, —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Beggs: — that patients will, increasingly, present earlier to GPs and that professionals with greater knowledge and using the powerful diagnosis methods available will identify cancer and enable earlier intervention, with the associated improved outcomes.

Mr McCarthy: I thank Sue Ramsey, the Chair of our Health Committee, for bringing this important motion to the Chamber. As a member of the Health Committee and on behalf of the Alliance Party, I fully support the motion. It can be broken down into three vital issues: low awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer in Northern Ireland; delays in diagnosis and treatment; and the need for the Health Minister and Department to front a public awareness campaign as soon as possible — immediately, if possible.

I consider the motion to be extremely important. It is a case of life and death, and any action to prevent ovarian cancer or, indeed, any other cancers in women or men must be a priority for everyone in our National Health Service. If we can prevent cancer or identify the disease at a very early stage, we can prevent unnecessary suffering, unnecessary worry and, indeed, huge cost to the health service.

I appeal to Departments, including the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Education, to acknowledge the huge volume of cancer victims who live along the east coast of Northern Ireland. People in the constituencies of Strangford, North Down, South Down and perhaps even further north or south suffer inordinately from cancer, and it is said that residue from the Sellafield nuclear plant across the Irish Sea could be a major contributor. I appeal for investigations of this serious issue.

The findings of the ovarian cancer pathfinder study on delays in diagnosis make grim reading. Experts say — it has been said in the

debate — that 500 lives a year could be saved if the disease were caught at a very early stage. Surely, we must make this a priority. The pathfinder study surveyed health professionals, and 55% of clinicians said that tackling early diagnosis was the most urgent issue to ensure that our womenfolk have as good a chance of survival as women in any other country. I was extremely disappointed to read that our GPs did not have direct, urgent access to diagnostic scans. The study also showed that many women — about a third — faced a delay of six months or more between first seeing their GP and getting a correct diagnosis.

Given what I have just said, I fully support Target Ovarian Cancer when it asks the Assembly to help to raise GPs' awareness of symptoms and, last but not least, to ensure that all GPs have direct access to diagnostic tests. I understand that all GPs have access to CA125 blood test equipment. I sympathise with our GPs, who are coming under excessive pressure in all sorts of ways. It is up to our Health Department to ensure that local surgeries have the tools, equipment and time to diagnose early and, of course, that treatments are immediately available. It is disappointing that, as other Members have said, local women are not confident of spotting a symptom of ovarian cancer and that only 23% of Northern Irish women know that persistent bloating could be a symptom.

In conclusion, I thank the Research and Information Service for its excellent information and everyone involved in the pathfinder study in 2012. It is all there for everyone to see, and I wish to pay tribute to all our local women who suffer from ovarian cancer.

Like others, I met Una Crudden — a truly remarkable local person — this morning, along with Frances from the ovarian cancer group. It is our duty as Assembly Members to listen to Una and ensure that we do what we can to carry out her wishes on behalf of so many people in Northern Ireland. Let us get a publicity awareness campaign going now, as we have done for smoking and alcohol addiction and bowel cancer. All sorts of campaigns are already going. Our womenfolk deserve and indeed are entitled to exactly the same treatment.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion.

Ms Brown: I speak to the motion as a member of the Health Committee.

Like others, I am concerned about the results of the study. Survival rates from ovarian cancer, as for so many other forms of cancer, are much higher if the condition is identified early. It is therefore imperative that women who have concerns attend their GP or nurse as soon as possible. Of course, for a woman to be concerned, one of the first problems that she faces is exactly what she should know about the illness or be aware of. I am in no doubt whatsoever that we need to raise awareness of ovarian cancer and stress the importance of identifying symptoms sooner rather than later and of seeking medical assistance immediately. Awareness has been raised of breast cancer, testicular cancer and, more recently, bowel cancer, but we must not forget about ovarian cancer, which, if not identified early, has such a poor survival rate.

I will reiterate the main symptoms of ovarian cancer, which I had to look up. I am sure that most of us would not know what we are looking for. The symptoms are persistent pelvic or abdominal pain; increased abdominal size or persistent bloating; and difficulty eating and feeling full quickly.

I do not apologise for repeating the statistics that follow. Many Members have already done so, but it is vital that the seriousness of the condition be realised. Research has found that 92% of women diagnosed at an early stage have a five-year survival rate. Regrettably and appallingly, that percentage is much lower in the UK, where we have a five-year survival rate of just 36%. That is the worst rate in Europe. However, one in four women does not seek medical advice until she has experienced symptoms or had concerns for at least three months. We can all identify with that. We know the pain that worries us and does not seem right, but we carry on regardless owing to the pressures of everyday life. In the case of ovarian cancer, I urge women to familiarise themselves with the symptoms and act immediately if they suspect that something is not quite right. Women have become well versed in identifying symptoms that affect their children, such as those for meningitis, for example; it is now time that they looked out for themselves as well.

Another concern is that, regardless of the low rate in early diagnosis due to failure to seek medical help sooner, misdiagnosis is far too common. There is therefore an onus on GPs to ensure that they rule out ovarian cancer in the first instance and do not take any risks.

However, there is also evidence that diagnostic testing has been refused in one in 10 cases.

I appreciate that the system is under severe pressure at this time, especially when it comes to resources, but that is not a sufficient excuse to permit the situation to continue. There is sufficient evidence to highlight the fact that 75% of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer are diagnosed after the cancer has spread, which limits options and reduces the survival rate. That statistic alone is an indictment of our healthcare system, and it must be addressed. Screening programmes have been rolled out for breast cancer, cervical cancer and bowel cancer in recent years. A reliable method of screening for ovarian cancer has yet to be identified. It is imperative that the Health and Social Care Board and the Department look into identifying a screening programme in order to improve rates of diagnosis and life expectancy.

I know that the Minister of Health will take the issue on board and take note of the debate. I support the motion.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also speak as a member of the Health Committee and in support of the motion. I welcome the opportunity to speak on an extremely important subject.

It is important that anything that society can do to target information and to detect and prevent the awful disease that is cancer be done. The motion focuses on ovarian cancer and the pathfinder study, which revealed low levels of awareness of symptoms and delays in diagnosis and treatment. There are approximately 160 cases diagnosed in the North of Ireland each year and 120 deaths. Ovarian cancer kills over four times as many women as cervical cancer. The pathfinder study highlighted that one in 10 women — 10% — living with ovarian cancer in the North died within a month of diagnosis compared with 1% of women with breast cancer.

Late diagnosis and, possibly, treatment are deemed to be the root cause of the poor survival rate when compared with other countries. As Mr Beggs pointed out, 30% of women are diagnosed following an admission to A&E, and those are stark figures. Just over 42% of GPs in the North have access to urgent ultrasound to assess women for ovarian cancer. That means that the majority of GPs will have to refer women to hospital for a non-urgent appointment for them to have an assessment.

Positively, as has been pointed out, all GPs in the North now have access to the CA125 blood

test, which is the first test recommended by the recent NICE guidance. If the cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, women have a 92% chance of surviving for five years.

As I said, anything that we can do as a society and as an Assembly to assist awareness, detection and prevention must be actioned. Therefore, I refer to the concept of Connected Health in the field of research and innovation. While developments on the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin are welcome — some disappointment has been expressed about the lapse in timescale — it is important that we advance proposals around Connected Health. The north-west continues to be the only region that has the facility to advance research and innovation in digital science. Project Kelvin, with its fastest digital link between Europe and the US, the Clinical Translational Research and Innovation Centre and Magee university campus, which houses the intelligence system's research centre, must be marketed and supported. I call on the Minister to develop a health innovation corridor for the region, which would greatly assist the science that is required in the detection and prevention of ovarian cancer and other forms of this killer disease.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, as it is a very important matter that affects so many people across Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately, ovarian cancer continues to be a growing problem. It is now the fourth biggest cancer killer in women, with approximately 160 cases diagnosed each year and, more worryingly, 120 deaths. I pay tribute to the valuable work of the charity Target Ovarian Cancer and the Angels of Hope group, both of which have done an excellent job raising awareness of this terrible disease among women and GPs and supporting those with the condition. I also recognise the work that they do in funding research into new treatments.

As with many diseases, early diagnosis is vital to improving survival rates. Unfortunately, misdiagnosis of ovarian cancer is a major challenge, as some symptoms are hard to distinguish and can overlap with others. Regrettably, late diagnosis can significantly reduce the chances of survival, especially among older women, and that is something that we must continually seek to improve. Every constituency is affected: there is an average of six deaths as a result of ovarian cancer every year in my constituency of North Down, and 23 deaths a year in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area.

1.00 pm

It is of concern that survival rates for ovarian cancer across the UK fall behind most other European countries. I welcome the positive action proposed in a letter from the Minister to the Chair of the Health Committee in February, in which he confirmed that the Health and Social Care Board has advised that discussions are ongoing regarding improved referral pathways from GPs to diagnostics and specialties. I am also pleased that the Health and Social Care Board is looking at ways to reduce waiting times following diagnostic tests, as well as targeted education and training for GPs and a review of patient information leaflets.

As with many areas in improving the health and well-being of our population, public awareness campaigns can be a very productive means of raising awareness of the dangers of the disease and encouraging early detection of any possible symptoms. We are all well aware of the dangers of smoking, alcohol, obesity and other diseases, such as breast cancer, largely through public awareness campaigns on television, radio, newspapers, ads and billboards. I feel that that could be done to help raise awareness of the seriousness and dangers of ovarian cancer to try and improve the survival rates for women who may have the disease.

The statistic that, if it is detected early, 92% of women suffering from ovarian cancer can survive, is very significant. However, the fact that, unfortunately, only 36% currently survive shows that there is room for improvement in ensuring that those at risk are detected early and given every opportunity to improve their chances of survival. I support the motion.

Mrs McKeivitt: I am pleased to contribute to today's debate. More than 7,000 women a year are diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and it is an unfortunate truth that it is the biggest killer, largely because it is not diagnosed early enough. The reasons for late diagnosis are that few women know the symptoms. It is often misdiagnosed as irritable bowel syndrome, ovarian cysts or a urinary infection, and women wrongly think that a smear test will detect ovarian cancer.

I find it extremely worrying that, according to the Target Ovarian Cancer pathfinder study, one in 10 GPs has had diagnostic tests refused in the past year. The sooner ovarian cancer is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat. Survival can be 70% for women diagnosed with early-stage ovarian cancer. That means that seven out of 10 women will survive for five or more years,

which is why we need women to learn to recognise the symptoms and go and see their doctor as soon as possible. We need to improve GP knowledge to prevent misdiagnosis, and we need to make sure that GPs have access to prompt diagnostic tests.

Recently, thanks to my party colleague Nicola Mallon, I had the pleasure of meeting a truly inspirational woman by the name of Una Crudden. Una, who has ovarian cancer and is fighting the disease with style — as only a woman can do — has put her shoulder to the wheel by producing a CD called 'Angel of Hope' — at the cost of £10, if anybody wishes to purchase it. I have to say that I did purchase it, and it is one of the most inspirational pieces of music that I have ever heard, particularly from a woman who is terminally ill with the disease. She made that CD and is doing great work to help to raise awareness. I flippantly asked her how much she had raised, and she flippantly answered "over £33,000".

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs McKeivitt: I will.

Mr Humphrey: I know that Mrs Crudden is in the Public Gallery today. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council. Recently — in fact, at the last meeting of Belfast City Council — Mrs Crudden came before the council. Obviously, the council has been deeply divided in recent times, but she managed to do something that has not often been done in the last number of months, which is to unite all the council behind her cause. It is a hugely just cause, and it is the reason why we are sitting here today, so I pay tribute to her for that.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to her time.

Mrs McKeivitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am not here to embarrass Una but to strengthen her message to raise awareness of help and to save the lives of more women.

A few weeks ago, before meeting Una, I sent a letter to the Health Minister requesting a meeting to discuss that topic. I look forward to his response in the near future and, hopefully, that meeting so that we can strengthen the message.

Given that March is ovarian cancer month, today's debate is timely. It is imperative that we do what we can to raise awareness. I ask the Health Minister to carry out a public awareness

campaign and to explore new ways of helping with early diagnosis. I am happy to support the motion and commend the Health Committee for bringing it forward.

I ask women to educate themselves about the symptoms of ovarian cancer. It is known as the silent killer, and no woman should be silenced by ovarian cancer. At the end of the day, prevention is much better than a cure.

Mr Gardiner: I thank Ms Ramsey, Chairperson of the Health Committee, for bringing the motion before the House.

I would like to take a slightly different approach to this ovarian cancer awareness debate. Most Members will focus on the statistics of the disease, including the fact that one in four women waits three months or more before visiting her GP, and that one in three women waits six months or more from first visiting her GP before getting a correct diagnosis.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)

I would like to focus on what factors make an effective public awareness campaign. The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation says that the three elements of a successful public awareness campaign are creating a broad support system, setting up a wide range of activities and sending out an accurate and simple message. I commend those elements to the Minister for mounting an effective public awareness campaign for ovarian cancer.

First, there is a need to establish a broad support system of individuals and interested groups, including researchers, medical practitioners, lawmakers such as ourselves, non-government organisations, medical businesses, the media, health professionals and the public to mobilise community support for a campaign. The more individuals working on an awareness campaign, the greater the likelihood of its success.

Secondly, the campaign must be made up of many individual activities. A campaign's message would be relayed to the public in a wide range of ways so that it reaches more people. Examples include educational events, posters, postcards, other media campaigns, awareness events, lobbying, fundraising, educational speeches, information leaflets, concerts, street drama, publication of research studies, personal testimonials and other efforts that put the case before the public.

Thirdly, the campaign must have an accurate, concise and powerful message to get people to act. Messages need to be tested on focus groups and through questionnaires to see whether they are effective. I hope that my emphasis on how we can deliver an effective public awareness campaign helps to focus the Minister on his checklist of things to do to help to combat this dangerous disease. I support the motion.

Mr Anderson: I welcome this debate on what is an important subject. I commend the Health Committee for bringing the motion.

Ovarian cancer is the fifth most common cancer in women. In the United Kingdom each year, 7,000 people are diagnosed with the disease, and about 4,300 die. In Northern Ireland last year, almost 180 cases were diagnosed and 119 lives lost. Most are aged 50 or over but the disease can affect women as young as 20. Those are the statistics, and, as with all statistics, they mask the reality of the dreadful impact of ovarian cancer on individuals and their loved ones.

For me, this debate is not only important but emotive. I wanted to speak not because I have any professional expertise in the area of ovarian cancer but because I have personal experience of the tragic effect that it can have on the lives of individuals and their families.

Some six years ago, ovarian cancer claimed the life of my sister. Ever since, I have taken a personal interest in the disease. When I was mayor of Craigavon in 2008-09, I nominated Angels of Hope as my chosen charity for the year. For those who might not be aware of what Angels of Hope is, it is a charity that was established by a Craigavon woman Mrs Maureen Clarke after she lost her 27-year-old daughter Julie to the disease in 2007. Julie passed away just eight months after being diagnosed. Julie had intended to make people aware of the disease and of the need for early diagnosis, and when it became clear that she would not survive, she asked her mum, Maureen, to do it for her. I have come to know Maureen well, and I hold her in the highest esteem. I was delighted when she received the MBE in the New Year's honours list for her work in the area; it was an award that was richly deserved.

Angels of Hope is a growing organisation, which provides much-needed help and support to sufferers and their families. Maureen is encouraged that, in the past two years, more women are being diagnosed at an early stage in the disease. I think that there is greater

awareness of the disease now and that more women are pushing for a proper investigation of their symptoms. That is to be welcomed.

I support the call for a public awareness campaign. I believe that such a campaign should draw on the work and experience of such groups as Angels of Hope and the national charity Target Ovarian Cancer, which is named in today's motion.

In the public survey carried out by Target Ovarian Cancer, not one of the women questioned in Northern Ireland was aware of the symptoms. I know that surveys and polls can throw up a wide variety of results, but I find that to be a very worrying statistic. If detected early enough, up to 92% will survive for more than five years. Indeed, some might survive for a lot longer, but late detection means that survival rates are low, with only 36% surviving for more than five years.

The disease is sometimes known as the silent killer, because it can be symptomless until the growth puts pressure on other internal organs. In many cases, however, there are early symptoms, which can include back pain, stomach pain and discomfort, changes in bowel pattern and ongoing excessive fatigue.

Not only do the public need to be better informed, but the medical profession must do everything possible to rise to the challenge, and, perhaps, more could be done to provide guidance to GPs, consultants and other key personnel. Where there is a family history of the disease, it would be a tremendous help to have a specific screening programme. I know that research is being done into that, and, perhaps, the Minister will be able to cast some light on that aspect.

As the symptoms of ovarian cancer can be similar to those of other illnesses, such as urinary infections, ovarian cysts or irritable bowel syndrome, GPs have the difficult task of identifying precisely what is wrong, but I urge them to make every effort to ensure that a proper diagnosis is made at a very early stage.

I referred to Angels of Hope, and we must all have hope that deaths from ovarian cancer will very soon be reduced, as far as is humanly possible. I support the motion.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): First, I thank all the Members who have contributed, thus far, for the very powerful speeches that have been made on the issue. I also welcome the publication of the recent Target Ovarian Cancer

pathfinder study and, arising from that, the opportunity to have this debate about ovarian cancer.

I have often spoken in the House about the significant challenges that patients and our health service face from cancer, and I am grateful for the opportunity to provide key messages and to focus on the particular challenges that come with ovarian cancer. Losing the battle to cancer is never an easy one, because, generally, you slowly lose a loved one. Sitting with them day after day and seeing them go down is something that is very traumatic. I, too, have met Maureen Clarke from Angels of Hope. She is a tremendous wee woman, doing terrific work for that organisation to highlight it and ovarian cancer. I have a lot of respect for her. I look forward to meeting Una Crudden as well. She is also doing great work in highlighting ovarian cancer.

For a moment, let us consider the scale of this disease. The Northern Ireland Cancer Registry tells us that, every year, around 160 women here are diagnosed with ovarian cancer and that, very sadly, there are 120 deaths. It is the primary cause of mortality among gynaecological malignancies. It accounts for 4% of all new cancers in Northern Ireland. Although ovarian cancer is the sixth most common female cancer, it is the fourth most common cause of death from cancer in females. It is a serious disease that has a greater impact because it is usually diagnosed late.

1.15 pm

In common with all cancers, early diagnosis is extremely important. In fact, when ovarian cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, the outcome can be good. There is general agreement among experts that early symptom identification with a high index of suspicion of ovarian cancer has the potential to improve prognosis. Unfortunately, one of the particular challenges of ovarian cancer is that it is particularly difficult to diagnose. Patients often present with vague, non-specific abdominal symptoms that can be common to other illnesses. Often, therefore, women are diagnosed with advanced disease, which is associated with poor survival rates. It is not helped by the fact that GPs probably see only one person with ovarian cancer every five years. However, recent studies show that the majority of women with ovarian cancer, even those with early disease, have symptoms prior to the diagnosis. There is increasing evidence that symptoms may be present for around 12 months.

Many Members have stated the symptoms. I believe that they cannot be overstated. Therefore, I am happy to state them again. Any of the following three symptoms, if they occur on most days, may suggest ovarian cancer: persistent pelvic and abdominal pain; increased abdominal size or persistent bloating; or difficulty eating and feeling full quickly. I urge any woman who experiences any of those symptoms to discuss them with her GP as soon as possible. The Target Ovarian Cancer study is one of the main reasons for today's debate. Although the report makes a very useful contribution to increasing awareness of the disease, it is based on the experiences of 382 women throughout the UK and is not focused specifically on Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Cancer Network, has also produced a report, 'Care of Ovarian and Cervical Cancer Patients Diagnosed in Northern Ireland 2010'. That report describes the care of patients with ovarian and cervical cancer and compares the care for women in 2010 with that received in 1996 and 2001. I am glad that there has been a reduction in ovarian cancer rates during that period for women who are over 50 years of age by around 20% and for younger women by around 14%. However, that creates no room for complacency. The study also identified findings of late presentation of ovarian cancers and recommends a public awareness campaign that highlights the key symptoms of ovarian cancers. I take this opportunity to thank the NICR and NICaN for their informative and thorough report.

The NICR also plays an important role in managing Northern Ireland's involvement in the International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership (ICBP), which studies survival differences for breast, lung, ovarian and colorectal cancers. The partnership includes New South Wales and Victoria in Australia; Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario in Canada; Sweden; Denmark; Norway; England; Wales; and Northern Ireland. There are important international differences in cancer survival, the explanation for which is unknown. The ICBP was formed to explore and enhance our understanding of those differences. It is an innovative international partnership of clinicians, academics and policymakers — the first of its kind — that seeks to determine how cancer survival varies across a range of countries and regions and to explore reasons that could explain any differences.

The ICBP conducted the first robust international comparison of population

awareness and beliefs on cancer. The results found that people with low cancer awareness and negative beliefs about cancer outcomes may be less likely to seek help for suspicious symptoms, which may in turn lead to a more advanced stage at diagnosis and poor survival. Many people indicated that they would be put off seeking prompt clinical advice for reasons of embarrassment; fear of wasting a physician's time; fear of the outcome; or because they did not want to know whether they had cancer.

So there is a clear consensus among professionals, across a range of national and international organisations, that a lack of awareness of the signs and symptoms, coupled with negative beliefs about outcomes, can lead to late presentation, which, in turn, is reflected in late diagnosis and further poor outcomes for patients. Therefore, it is vital that we break this negative cycle, first, by taking the steps necessary to improve awareness of the early signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer and, secondly, by tackling attitudes to seeing a doctor.

We must also spread the positive message about the many modern treatments that are now available and which enable us to control symptoms and improve cure rates. There is a lot to be positive about. The NICR report found many improvements when comparing treatments for patients in more recent times with those diagnosed in 1996 and 2001. The report found that patients with ovarian cancer in Northern Ireland are managed by a well-functioning regional specialist multidisciplinary team, which records cancer stage and treatment plans and communicates very well with patients. The report also found evidence of the centralisation of treatment, shorter delay between referral and first being seen, increased surgical specialisation and an improved survival rate for stage 3 patients. All those measures indicate improvement in quality, and I wish to record my sincere thanks and, indeed, admiration for all those who work with commitment and skill in our health service in Northern Ireland to combat cancer in all its forms.

The motion calls on me to consider a public awareness campaign, and that is what I have done. I am pleased to say that the Public Health Agency (PHA) is well advanced in planning a cancer awareness campaign for this year. This is, undoubtedly, the right thing to do. As I have noted already, there is a wealth of evidence, internationally and from elsewhere in the UK, that awareness campaigns can have a significantly positive impact on the number of people who visit their doctor with symptoms,

and we all know how crucial that can be in improving the outcome for cancer patients.

It is proposed that the new campaign will focus on improving knowledge and awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer and encouraging those with specific symptoms to seek medical advice. The key messages cover the recognition of signs and symptoms of most types of cancer; seeing a doctor early is not wasting a doctor's time; early diagnosis is up to you — seek clinical advice quickly; and cancer treatments have improved, so a cancer diagnosis is not a death sentence.

Although the key messages of the campaign are aimed at cancer, it is expected that the campaign will also include a subset of tumour-specific messages. These messages will focus on diseases such as ovarian cancer, for which early referral significantly impacts on survival rates. These tumour-specific messages will be delivered sequentially over a period of one to three years. The detailed content of the campaign has not yet been finalised, but I am confident that the PHA will ensure that the key messages will be tailored to target audiences identified according to the peak incidence of each cancer, including ovarian.

Ms S Ramsey: I thank the Minister for giving way. It is important to acknowledge what he has just told the Assembly and his announcement of a public awareness campaign. Will the Minister go into more detail for the Health Committee so that it can track the PHA campaign and feed information to other Members? I know that, in the limited time today, you cannot do that, but I ask you to give us that detail.

Mr Poots: I am very happy to facilitate the Committee in assisting us to get the message out because it is important that, when it comes to these issues, we are all messengers. We anticipate the main target audience being individuals over the age of 50 and individuals living in areas of deprivation.

Although public awareness is essential to break the negative cycle that I spoke of earlier, there are other things that we can do to ensure that, when needed, the service makes the right response at the right time. There is, for example, increasing professional awareness of ovarian cancer, and my Department has endorsed the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines — CG122 — on the recognition and initial management of ovarian cancer. The guidelines offer medical professionals evidence-based advice on the care and early treatment of women with

suspected or confirmed ovarian cancer. Since November 2012, GP practices in Northern Ireland have been issued with replacement laminates of the guidance and advised about an electronic copy located on the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) primary care website.

On the issue of CA-125 diagnostic tests and ultrasound scanning, I am told that GPs have access to testing for the indication of cancers, including CA-125. The HSCB is committed to ensuring that there is adequate capacity for such testing, and the same applies for ultrasound scanning. I trust that that will allay some of the concerns raised by Members during the debate.

I understand that the Health and Social Care Board is considering the introduction of an action plan for ovarian cancer. The HSCB is also working to ensure improved referral pathways from GPs to diagnostic services and specialties for suspected ovarian cancer. It is anticipated that significant improvement will be delivered once that work has had time to develop.

The HSCB is looking to improve survival rates through earlier diagnosis by ensuring greater clarity on appropriate available diagnostic tests for investigating patients with symptoms consistent with possible ovarian cancer; looking at family history and testing for BRCA, a breast cancer gene, as appropriate; ensuring prompt treatment following positive diagnostic tests; providing targeted education and training for GPs on the agreed pathway; and providing information on the symptoms of ovarian cancer to women attending cervical and breast screening.

I should also mention that pilots are under way for ovarian cancer screening, but we are not yet in a position to identify whether screening is the way forward. It will take until around 2016 for the pilot to be completed, but we are certainly taking it very seriously.

In summary, I support the motion, and I once again want to emphasise the importance of increasing awareness of the early symptoms of the disease and the need for early investigation. To meet the challenge of ovarian cancer effectively, we need to proceed on two fronts. First, we need to empower women by giving them the information that they need to spot early symptoms and come forward to their doctor with confidence. Secondly, we need to ensure that Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland continues to build on the improvements that we have seen over the years in enhancing

professional awareness and improving the care pathway for patients.

I am determined that we should work continuously to raise our standards to ensure that our ovarian cancer services are up to the standard of the best. Once again, I thank Members for raising the issues today.

Mr Wells (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank all who took part in what, I think, has been a very constructive debate. In previous debates in the Assembly, I have lamented the fact that, when health issues are discussed or debated, the only people who contribute are members of the Health Committee. I am glad to say that that was not the case this afternoon. The two Members who are not on the Health Committee made particularly positive contributions.

I would like to thank Mrs McKeivitt, my colleague and, I suppose, rival from south Down, who added a very human touch to the debate with her recollection of the outstanding work of Una Crudden, and she paid tribute to her remarkable work in that field.

I was very touched by Sydney Anderson's very direct and poignant contribution based on the fact that he lost a very close relative to the condition. I was very pleased with the success of his fundraising during his term as Mayor of Craigavon. He quite rightly paid tribute to Julie Clarke and her mother Maureen and to the Angels of Hope charity, which along with Target Ovarian Cancer has done so much to raise the profile and importance of early diagnosis and treatment of the condition.

Most Members drew heavily on the pathway study, but I want to make a few initial comments on the contributions that did not solely deal with that study, some of which were quite interesting. Conall McDevitt made a very useful contribution in quoting directly from an interview with Mrs Crudden. That brought it very much home to us that we are dealing with real people here who have had a pretty traumatic diagnosis, and we heard how they have dealt with that. Conall's contribution was very timely.

1.30 pm

Sam Gardiner brought up the totally different angle of how to increase awareness. He mentioned a study in Chicago that had been implemented successfully. His was a novel and interesting contribution. Kieran McCarthy raised concerns about the situation on the east

coast of Northern Ireland. There seems to be a cluster of cancers in constituencies such as Strangford, South Down and East Antrim. Despite many studies, we do not yet know what is causing that, but it is an issue of concern to all our constituents. I am not certain whether it is directly linked to ovarian cancer, but it is certainly an issue that should have been raised.

Maeve McLaughlin raised an issue that concerned me. She said that there could be slippage in the timing of the new cancer facility at Altnagelvin. This is the first time that I have heard that. As a representative for the area, she would be in much better contact with the situation on the ground than I would be. I would be very interested in the Minister following up Ms McLaughlin's comments in order to tie down whether there has been a slippage. Given all the controversy surrounding this two years ago, it would be a pity if there were any delay whatsoever with that much-needed facility which I know that the people of the north-west will welcome with open arms.

Perhaps the most poignant comment was made by Paula Bradley. Many of us celebrated Mother's Day yesterday. Many of us are very fortunate that we still have our mothers with us, and many of our children are fortunate that their mother is still very much alive. I had a wonderful day yesterday with my children. Paula made the point that many of the 120 women who pass away with the condition every year in Northern Ireland are mothers. There would have been an empty chair at the table yesterday for many of those families. That brings home the trauma of the condition. Remember that Julie Clarke was only 27 when she passed away with ovarian cancer. It can strike young women, but it often strikes those who are in the prime of their life and have families, children and even grandchildren. That was an interesting contribution.

The vast majority of the contributions followed the lead of the Chairman and dealt with the pathfinder study. The statistics are worrying. We do not want to beat ourselves up too much about our role in Northern Ireland, because there are some examples of extremely good news in this field. When I was young, which, as you know, was a very long time ago, a diagnosis of leukemia among young people was, effectively, a death sentence. Now, as a result of outstanding work by the clinicians and people such as Professor Paddy Johnston in the cancer unit in the City Hospital, 82% of those who are diagnosed with leukemia are alive five years after diagnosis. That is a remarkable turnaround; there has been great success.

Sadly, for cancers such as pancreatic cancer and lung cancer, the diagnosis is, unfortunately, still extremely poor. There are then groups of cancers in which we know, because of delay in diagnosis, that people are needlessly dying. Unfortunately, ovarian cancer falls into that category. As the Chairman quite rightly pointed out, 90% of those who receive an early diagnosis are alive after five years. Unfortunately, the rate in Northern Ireland is 36% alive after five years. That clearly indicates that many women are dying absolutely needlessly in Northern Ireland. That is something that we need to concentrate on.

We need to have this debate, and the issue needs to be dealt with. We need to encourage women to come in early with the very slightest hint of symptoms, which have been well and truly explained to Members this morning. We also have to ensure that GPs can spot those symptoms and launch further investigation immediately. I was encouraged to hear that there is a blood test — I understand that it is CA125 — that can be used as a very important test for ovarian cancer. If a woman is in the risk group, which is often when she has a family history of ovarian cancer, and is perhaps showing some of those symptoms, I would have thought that that test would have been automatic in every case, so that there would not be a six-month delay between a woman first presenting herself with the condition and getting confirmation, because, obviously, her health will deteriorate dramatically during that period. I would like to think that, now we have that test, it will be unveiled in every surgery and be available to all women.

A problem that was raised by many Members was that, not only are GPs unaware of ovarian cancer but the first time that a third of women are diagnosed at all is when they present at A&E in severe pain. I think that it was Roy Beggs who made the comment. Sadly, we all know that, by that stage, it is far too late. There is something wrong with the system if one third of our women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer at a point when nothing can be done. That was an interesting contribution by Mr Beggs.

The Chair outlined the pathfinder report very fairly. Paula Bradley made another interesting comment when she called ovarian cancer the "silent disease", and one for which the symptoms are often unknown. Of course, people are often unsure whether it is ovarian cancer or cancer of the cervix. There is that difficulty. It is also confused with irritable bowel syndrome.

Conall McDevitt made his usual very positive contribution.

Mr Roy Beggs is rapidly establishing himself as a very important member of our Committee. He often makes very useful contributions, and he certainly did that today. He outlined the fact that ovarian cancer leads to 6.6% of all cancer deaths in Northern Ireland and that 500 lives could be saved in the United Kingdom if we matched European levels of diagnosis and treatment. Although we may be at the top of league in many forms of cancer treatment, we certainly lag behind on ovarian cancer, and we really need to try to bring ourselves up to the European average. He also called on the Minister to take forward an interactive campaign on the issue, which very much underscored the points made by Mr Gardiner.

In addition to raising his concerns about Sellafield, Mr McCarthy also felt that there was a lack of awareness, a delay in diagnosis and that actions needed to be taken immediately.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for giving way. Just to clarify, there is no evidence that there is a higher prevalence of cancers in South Down, North Down or Strangford than in any other part of the world. You are safe to live in those areas. I also want to clarify that the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital is on target. There has been no slippage.

Mr Wells: I am absolutely delighted, particularly with the latter assurance. When Ms McLaughlin raised that issue, I was concerned. I welcome the Minister's assurance. I know that the people of the north-west are crying out for that facility, and he knows the great controversy there was when an attempt was made to ditch that new unit. We are all very relieved to hear that.

On the other issue that he raised, there is still a perception, rightly or wrongly, among those who live along the east coast of Northern Ireland that Sellafield has some impact on the health of the people of Northern Ireland. I suppose that we are a long way from establishing that one way or the other.

Ms McLaughlin also raised the point that only 42% of GPs have access to the ultrasound technique to deal with this.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Wells: Oh gosh. This has been a useful debate. If we achieve one thing and raise

public awareness of this condition and prompt more women to go for early diagnosis, it will have been a useful exercise.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the results of the Target Ovarian Cancer pathfinder study 2012, which revealed low levels of awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer among women in Northern Ireland and delays in diagnosis and treatment; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider a public awareness campaign on this issue.

Committee Business

Creative Industries: Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure Report

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 15 minutes in which to propose and 15 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on its inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries (NIA 98/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

I am delighted to move the motion on the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee's inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries in Northern Ireland. I would like to thank Committee members for their input into the inquiry, and I would particularly like to thank Committee staff, past and present, for the work they have put into this significant inquiry. Additionally, I thank all the witnesses and stakeholders for their contributions. We can all be very proud of this excellent piece of work. I appreciate the Minister being here today to respond, and I am sure that she and her officials will find the report extremely useful. The Committee is looking forward to taking the recommendations forward in co-operation with the Minister.

The Committee began the inquiry in September 2011. However, the issue of supporting and developing the creative industries here had been considered on a number of previous occasions. The inquiry's objective was:

"To investigate the policies, strategies and frameworks which oversee the development and growth of the creative industries; and examine whether these are fit for purpose and are effective delivery support mechanisms, which maximise and harness the economic benefits of the Creative Industries within Northern Ireland".

In meeting that objective, the Committee sought to identify the economic benefits of the creative

industries and the challenges that the sector faces. To meet those challenges, the Committee identified gaps in current policies, strategies and delivery mechanisms in a variety of areas, such as financial and business support; tax credits; education; training and skills development; and access to international markets.

At the core of the inquiry, the Committee asked two key questions. The first was: why are the creative industries in Northern Ireland not fulfilling their potential? The second was: what can be done to facilitate the development of, and capitalisation on, this potential? The answers to those questions are at the heart of the recommendations that the Committee has made as part of its report.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) states that, by enhancing the creative industries, Northern Ireland can:

"develop skills that can be utilised across all key industries to build an innovative, knowledge-led economy. The sector also makes an important contribution to physical, social and cultural regeneration".

So, what exactly are the creative industries? It is generally accepted that the creative industries consist of the following subsectors: advertising; architecture; art; crafts; design; designer fashion; film and video; interactive leisure software; music; performing arts; publishing; software and computer services; and TV and radio. The sector is eclectic and fast-paced, with many of its component parts found at the cutting edge of technological innovation.

Recent documents produced by the Executive acknowledge the important contribution that creative industries can make to the Northern Ireland economy. For example, the economic strategy highlights an investment of £4 million for the creative industries innovation fund and wider sectoral initiatives to stimulate innovation, R&D and creativity. The Programme for Government 2011-15 pledges to support 200 projects through that fund, prioritising digital content, export-focused activity, cross-sectoral collaboration and the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of Northern Ireland's culture, arts and leisure base.

So, no one, least of all the Minister, Executive and the Committee is in any doubt about how important this sector is. However, there are issues around how visible it is. Our creative industries must be better mapped and measured. We must seek and learn lessons

from the experiences of other regions. There is considerable potential for the creative industries to contribute not only to the economy of Northern Ireland but to the development of all our people, schools, colleges and universities. However, that can happen only if we ensure that the right conditions, infrastructure, policy interventions and support are in place.

Although creative industries here have many positive aspects, the challenges that the sector faces should not be underestimated. The Creative and Cultural Skills 'Sector Skills Assessment' in 2011 identified the following priority areas that need to be addressed to meet these challenges and remove barriers to the further development of the sector: qualification development; careers information, advice and guidance; aligning higher and further education with industry requirements; and continuing professional development. Our creative industries are highly fragmented with insufficient scale and limited engagement with international markets. The lack of collaboration between subsectors and between the creative industries and other business sectors create further barriers to developing and fulfilling potential.

The diversity of the creative industries in Northern Ireland means that no single Department, local council, agency or representative or development body can fully realise the sector's potential in isolation. That has resulted in a range of diverse government interventions, which sometimes lack co-ordination.

1.45 pm

The potential of the creative industries is not sufficiently recognised or appreciated in either policy or business circles, so the sector lacks visibility. A direct consequence of that is that the creative industries have difficulty marketing their products without a recognisable local brand. Many witnesses highlighted that there is no unified voice for the creative industries in Northern Ireland. The Committee concurred with that view, and questioned whether the Department's leadership role was understood within and outside government. Given the fractured nature of government support, it is not surprising that the Department's leadership role is not always clearly articulated in policy and delivery terms.

The sector's lack of visibility has made it difficult for creative enterprises here to link into international markets. The consensus is that few creative businesses here have the critical mass of in-house skills and market knowledge

to fully exploit opportunities. The skills gap in the creative industries is also a key challenge. Creative and Cultural Skills reported that approximately one third of businesses experience problems recruiting staff due to a lack of specialist skills and experience. Some 68% of creative businesses with skills gaps in the workforce had lost business as a result. Greater technical and business skills for the creative industries should be regarded as a high priority.

Businesses in the creative sector are primarily microbusinesses that employ fewer than five people. Figures provided by Creative and Cultural Skills indicate that 78% of businesses in the sector employ five or fewer people. That leads to a number of challenges, including skills issues, which may make it less likely for microbusinesses to access finance, tap into export opportunities or feed their innovation and practices into the wider economy.

It is also important to set the creative industries in a wider context. The sector has a close economic relationship with tourism, hospitality, museums and galleries, heritage and sport, and the social economy and community and voluntary sectors. The creative industries also provide benefits to local communities and social cohesion, and make a real contribution to improving the health of our people. Those aspects of the creative industries are less well publicised, and that can be seen as a further challenge.

To address some of those challenges, the Committee believes that the effective branding of creative industries in Northern Ireland would be a significant step forward. That would allow for the Department to make its leadership role clear. Members also consider that such a brand could be supported by creative industries champions or heroes. That sort of approach would allow the establishment of a single entry point to streamlined support to the sector. The result could be improved collaboration across all levels and branches of government, industry and academia, and the provision of a one-stop shop or portal to deliver strategy, funding, advocacy, research and policy development.

The Committee is also of the view that the development of creative quarters or hubs could also contribute significantly to the establishment of a creative industries brand and would allow the development of spatial foci for the creative industries across Northern Ireland, in both urban and rural areas.

Engagement with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI

would also ensure that challenges are met by the sector. The Committee recommends that the Department should work with DETI and Invest NI to seek to assess the funding and financing needs of the creative industries, with the aim of developing pathways to develop their capacity to access international markets and create guidance on the creative industries here to better enable potential investors and funders to more adequately assess the viability of creative products and companies, making the provision of funding and investment easier and more likely.

Witnesses highlighted that there is difficulty accessing short-term finance for creative companies, and that those difficulties exist in accessing private and public sector funding. However, the Committee noted that, over recent years, there has been major capital investment for culture and arts, including the MAC theatre, the UK City of Culture and the Lyric Theatre.

Concerns were expressed, however, that the benefit of that capital investment will not be fully utilised and realised unless follow-up investment in culture and the arts is made. The Committee heard from Digital Derry that seed funding was needed to encourage innovation, development and growth and that the requirement for match funding should not be a barrier. The Committee also heard that Invest NI had the resources to support the creative industries but its models of support are too large for small, emergent creative companies. A gap was identified between the creative industries innovation fund, which generally goes up to around £10,000, and Invest NI investment, which generally begins at around £100,000.

There is a need to develop mechanisms for businesses in the creative industries to better access experienced business mentoring and improve signposting of those services in the creative industries. Modifications to our education, training and skills development and careers systems can help to meet the challenges faced by the creative industries. The Committee believes that the Department should work with the Department for Employment and Learning to commission research to investigate vocational and work-based routes into the creative industries that would reduce outward migration. Links with industry for student placements and project-based learning need to be improved to provide the foundation for the development of a bespoke creative industries apprenticeship programme.

The Department must work with the Department of Education to establish an environment and ethos in all schools that encourages young people to be creative and engage with arts and creative subjects. ICT in schools must incorporate skills that are applicable to the creative industries, such as design and software development. There needs to be early engagement with pupils to identify career pathways for them to the creative industries and the variety of employment and business opportunities in the sector. Advice must be provided by professional career advisers, and guidance on the subjects and subject combinations needed for creative career pathways should be available to all young people.

Further and higher education needs to be more responsive to rapid developments in the creative industries. Intervention is required to develop closer working relationships with industry to increase employer confidence in the qualifications system and create vocational qualifications that meet industry standards. One solution suggested by the Arts Council is a Northern Ireland-wide knowledge transfer partnership as a way of strengthening links between industry and academia. We need more internships, work experience and sandwich placements.

The Committee believes that the STEM agenda should be transformed into a STEAM agenda to include the arts. That would maximise the use of art and creativity in schools, colleges and universities. Encouraging art and creative subjects in tandem with the STEM subjects will go much further towards ensuring that our young people have the broadest range of skills possible and enable them to explore careers options in the creative industries.

Collaboration is also a way to meet the challenges faced by the sector. The Committee strongly believes that there is a need for economic development bodies at departmental and local government level to establish a much more joined-up approach towards financing, mentoring and generally assisting intervention and signposting to help to give guidance. That should be done by Invest NI and local councils. The Department acknowledged that more needs to be done to invigorate councils and local enterprise agencies. It is hopeful that the collaborative framework will go some way towards addressing that issue.

The Committee is clear in its view that the Department's draft collaborative framework to support the creative industries is not a strategy. The Department highlighted that it was not

intended to be and argued that a strategy is not what is required at present. The Department stressed the need for a framework that can be responsive and adaptive to support individual subsectors and the sector as a whole. During the inquiry, the Committee heard evidence supporting the view that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be appropriate for the creative industries.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Miss M McIlveen: Mr Deputy Speaker, you will appreciate that this is a substantial report. Given the time constraints, I have managed merely to highlight a number of the many recommendations. I look forward to an interesting and useful debate. I commend the Committee's inquiry report to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that Members will agree that you did very well.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i bhfabhar na tuairascála agus an rúin. I will speak in favour of the report and the motion. I commend the Committee, its Clerk and staff for their work to date. More than a year has gone into this, and I pay tribute to those who contributed. There were, however, some gaps, particularly in the north-west, and I think that, possibly, evidence should have been taken in the Derry region.

There has been a deep recognition of the close economic relationship between the creative industries and other sectors, including tourism, hospitality, museums, galleries, heritage, education, sport, the social economy and the community and voluntary sector. Other benefits are to social cohesion and local communities. However, an overriding theme in submissions to the Committee during the inquiry was that there has been a lack of the economies of scale and critical mass required to deliver sustainability in many of the disciplines in the creative industries. There is no doubt that there is a bright future for the creative industries, but there must be a rationalisation of how those are delivered and the relationships that can deliver on a North/South, west-east and international basis.

The Committee recognises the creation of the very successful creative quarters, including the Cathedral Quarter, the Titanic Quarter and the Gaeltacht Quarter, as well as Ebrington Square in Derry. Those have shown best practice

across the sector and can be replicated in any other field.

There is, as the Chair rightly said, a central role for education as well. The creative industries innovation fund should, as well as promoting start-ups, contribute to increased mentoring, as is the case in the rest of Ireland. Councils and local government need to access funding, as their Southern counterparts do, through the likes of the International Fund for Ireland and other sources. In the past year alone, two of our neighbouring councils — Cavan and Donegal — have accessed nearly £500,000 for the creative industries. Councils in the North need to replicate that.

Representation on Culture Action Europe is needed. We are currently not represented. Opportunities for networking, co-operation and co-ordination, and the sharing of skills and talent should be paramount. That is very clear in the film and TV industry. As a result of tax relief and official encouragement from the Southern Government, major blockbusters have been made and the places where they were set have become part of the tourist trail. I think particularly of my visit last year to Wicklow, where, within a very small area, 40 major films had been made, dating back as far as the 1930s. There have been successes here, including the likes of 'The Shore' and 'Game of Thrones', but there is so much more potential.

The potential of "Made by hand locally" should be stressed and strengthened. Local musical talent should be highlighted because we probably have more musicians per capita than any other region. The Ulster Orchestra, through carrying out good work in schools and communities, needs to up its collaboration, particularly with the RTÉ orchestra and the NI Youth Orchestra.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Given the roles that many of us play in the House, I think that we should all declare an interest as being part of the creative industries. People looking in might think that that is how we should be titled.

Does the Member agree that there is an issue — he has not really got to the nub of it — with where education sits? The Chair referred to further and higher education and STEM subjects. Do he and his colleagues not need to address that with the Minister of Education to ensure a joined-up approach?

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for his intervention. If he reads Hansard, he will see that I mentioned the core role of mentoring in

higher education. That has worked particularly successfully in the South in the past, and we should look at it very closely here.

The BBC needs to extend, deepen and expand its co-ordination and co-operation with other producers, such as RTÉ, TG Ceathair and S4C, as well as the independent and community-based TV companies.

The City of Culture provides an opportunity to showcase all that is good in the creative industries. I hope that this will happen and that it will leave a legacy.

I call on the House to endorse the report, and I hope that the Minister will implement the recommendations.

2.00 pm

Mrs McKeivitt: I welcome today's publication of the creative industries report, which the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure commissioned back in September 2011. I commend my colleagues and the clerking staff of the Committee for their huge effort and input in hearing from all representative bodies and formulating a strategy and framework to help shape and support the creative industries.

We learned of the enormous benefits — social and economic — that could be derived from our creative industries. Gaps in support for the industry were highlighted, as was the need for enhanced co-ordination across Departments. The proposal for a one-stop shop is critical, as it is the one proposal that will help deliver needed support to those on the ground who sometimes have no idea where to turn to for funding, funding advice and advocacy.

The proposals concerning education and the recognition of the arts in our curriculums are also critical, given all the opportunities opening up for creative people. I support enhancement of the STEM initiatives to include the arts and the adding of an "A" to change the acronym to "STEAM".

We are told that 36,000 people are employed in the creative industries in Northern Ireland, although I have an inkling that that figure, if updated, would significantly increase, given the number employed in new media. Film production attracts major inward investment, and I welcome the news that Colin Farrell, along with a host of stars, is beginning to film 'Miss Julie' in Fermanagh next month. I also note that the producers are searching for a little girl to play young Julie. What a wonderful opportunity that would be for any young lady.

The integration of new media into the community is also a growing industry that should be supported and encouraged. I had the pleasure of attending Newry and Mourne District Council's civic awards recently in the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre, which, incidentally, is a wonderful example of how to promote the arts locally. Two individuals from Destination Newry received awards for their contribution to the community through streaming local football matches and events across the internet. They are both volunteers for that aspect of Destination Newry's fledgling enterprise. The pair have a following of thousands, made up of local people who are unable to attend matches owing to illness or disability and of expats across the world who then contribute to the live blog. The interaction that the service facilitates for families at home and abroad, along with the vibrant duo who commentate on the matches and every aspect of social activity in Newry and Mourne, makes it unique. Such opportunities are growing daily as the technology improves, and the introduction of 4G will allow opportunities to develop further. However, all initiatives and business ideas need support, and the report is aimed at doing just that.

We need to ensure that all 18 recommendations are implemented and fully supported by all Departments. I commend the report.

Mr McGimpsey: As member of the Committee, I am happy to support the motion. I do so with a sense of déjà vu, bearing in mind that I was the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure 12 years ago, when the Unlocking Creativity policy was launched. That was, of course, about much more than the creative industries. Today's motion is specifically about the creative industries, and they play a very important part. However, important as they are, they will function only with the support that we looked at 12 years ago.

That support included our mission to discover, inspire and value a creative confidence in every person. That translated a great deal to our young people. We brought together DCAL, which was in the lead, the Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. They came together to collaborate on certain priorities that we had to promote — for example, creativity in education, which has been mentioned and is a key part in the spheres of education and employment and learning. Other priorities included promoting creative and cultural development, training and employment opportunities and partnership

between sectors. Another priority was to look at the creative industries, assess their future needs and determine how we foster talent and bring forward business incubation. That would allow us to come forward with creative industries that, as everyone understands, have a huge future. They are a sunrise business, and, even if we emulate only a small part of what is happening in the rest of the British Isles, it will serve our Province extremely well.

Some of the most clarion examples, such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, were practically unheard of 12 years ago and have suddenly exploded on to the scene. They came about as a result of innovation and the creativity of individuals who thought up a new way forward. There is another example in Northern Ireland. A business called Chain Reaction Cycles, which uses the internet to sell parts of bicycles, has exploded into a multimillion pound business by using new technologies. I give credit to its founders, who thought up new ideas and had the intelligence and the creativity to go forward and got the support.

The cross-cutting themes that we looked at in those days were key to the process. They were building enterprise, promoting inclusion and accessibility, investing in ideas generation, and fostering talent in creativity. The key tools that we used were analysis and evaluation. We looked at where we were, how well we were doing, the threats and the opportunities. Looking at it today, the analysis is somewhat problematic. It appears to be impossible to get clarity on the levels of employment in sectors, and that is clearly a crucial part of this. Our gross value added measurement decreased by 25% between 2008 and 2009, and there was no change in the number of creative businesses in 2010-2011. That appears to suggest stagnation. The creativity seed fund, which I set up, is now called the creative industries innovation fund, and funding from that will be reduced by 40% over the next four years from 2011 to 2015. We do not want to encourage those steps.

I am happy to endorse the Committee's report and recommendations, but we have huge challenges. Without support from Education, Employment and Learning and Enterprise, Trade and Investment to identify opportunities, we will not achieve our full potential. Those are key collaborations. There are other threats of course, such as RPA. What will happen to DCAL and DEL under the new arrangements? It is likely that those two Departments will disappear. Twelve years ago, we looked at how we could clarify DCAL's role to set it in stone, and that was to be done as we worked

our way through this. A series of strategies were announced in the direct rule days.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr McGimpsey: We still do not have that. It has to be done before we start looking at how we abandon DEL and DCAL in RPA.

Ms Lo: I rise on behalf of the Alliance Party to support the motion. Although I am not a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and am, therefore, not involved in this inquiry, I am sure that we all agree that an inquiry into what can be done to facilitate the development of the creative industries in Northern Ireland is extremely positive, and I commend the Committee for undertaking that work.

It is estimated that approximately 31,000 people are employed in the creative industries sector, be they architects, scriptwriters, jewellery designers or software developers. The report seeks to establish how best to support those businesses, which are so often overlooked, and that is to be welcomed. The report particularly emphasises the economic benefit of growing those industries and highlights the challenges that must be overcome in order to do so. It is fair to point out that, throughout the world, creative industries have great economic and societal potential that we have not fully capitalised upon. The report indicates that 2,200 business units belong to the creative industries sector, which is 3.2% of all business units in Northern Ireland. The 31,000 people employed in creative businesses represent 4.1% of the total number of people in employment. Although we have seen growth in sectors such as film, software and electronic publishing, there is clear potential for more growth. With job creation, investment and better use of funding, there is room to break into international markets and encourage innovation and entrepreneurialism. Audiences NI forecasts that Northern Ireland will see a growth of 31% in gross value added (GVA) by 2020. This is somewhat optimistic, but perhaps a more joined-up approach across Departments can make that forecast a reality.

The report investigates gaps in current policies and calls for a cross-departmental response, with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure taking the lead. Continued development in the sector is vital, and I welcome the Department for Employment and Learning's review of apprenticeships, which commenced last month. My party colleague

Minister Farry advises me that creative industries are very much in mind and will be central to the review. I hope that the other relevant Departments are as committed, and I am curious to know how the Minister envisages this collaborative approach being successful.

It came as little surprise to learn that, during the inquiry, the Committee was made aware of the benefits that creative industries have for local communities and the sense of social cohesion that they are able to provide. I have long been a supporter of the arts, and I recognise the value that creativity has in generating new modes of thought. We desperately need new ways of thinking in Northern Ireland, but equally important are incentives for the younger generations to stay. If we can develop more opportunities in our industries, we can lessen the brain drain.

It is my view that a diverse society is a prosperous one, and we should do all that we can to support and raise the profile of industries that are, at times, overshadowed, not only because of their economic value but because arts have no boundaries and bring all sections of our community together. They are for everyone.

Mr Hilditch: As a member of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, I support the motion, not only to seek its approval but to highlight this important piece of work, which is very much cross-cutting and should receive the attention of a number of our devolved Departments as the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister potentially seeks to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

Like others, I thank the Committee Clerk, staff and researchers, who have worked tirelessly to get the report over the line. It may have taken longer than expected to complete, but I am sure that, at the outset, many of us were unaware of the size of the sector or of the impact that the creative industries have on our economy and local communities. Indeed, this is highlighted in the section of the report on lack of visibility. Many of the industries come in under the radar, are not recognisable and find it difficult to establish themselves in the marketplace. This report comprehensively brings together government, the subsectors and all key stakeholders and will, hopefully, take the industry forward.

While the report focuses largely on the benefits to the economy — rightly so — there are other advantages to having a healthy sector. With my background being local government and the voluntary sector, I was particularly interested in

the social and health benefits section, where many contributors gave examples of partnership working with local communities, both as groups and individuals working through to partnerships and mental health support. The wider benefits of the creative industries were recognised by, for example, Carrickfergus Borough Council, which stated in its support that it is vitally important for:

"ensuring the lifeblood of the local economy as well as to improving the health and well-being of many of our residents and visitors alike, many of whom directly benefit from exposure to the creative industries".

It is my understanding, and I hope that the Minister shares my view, that this type of partnership breaks down perceived economic and social barriers, especially in areas of social deprivation, stimulates the mind, creates a sense of civic pride, promotes capacity-building and allows the opportunity for exposure to the arts and other forms of creative activity outside the usual day-to-day routines.

2.15 pm

Turning to the economic development responsibilities of local government, it was very disappointing that only four of the 26 councils contributed to the inquiry. Within the limited number of responses, it was clear that some important work is going on at that level, but there appeared to be inconsistencies across the Province. Those most active were working locally on advice and guidance, in conjunction with Invest NI, and also opening doors to access European assistance.

Disappointingly, as the matter was debated in Committee, it became clear that parts of the Province were disadvantaged and did not have the same opportunity for joined-up partnership working. However, on the positive side, it gave me an opportunity to highlight the work of agencies such as Larne Enterprise Development Company and Carrickfergus Enterprise, which work very well and provide an excellent service and a conduit between client, local government and central government.

Clearly, most people will focus on the employment opportunities contained in the report and the potential for growth within the creative industries for new business. Therefore, I urge the Minister to lead on communication and connectivity between Departments, such as the Department for Employment and Learning, which is carrying out an inquiry into careers education,

information, guidance and advice, the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and to bridge the gaps that exist in current policy, strategies and delivery between all stakeholders to move the sector onto a new plane.

I support the motion, and look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank the Committee Clerk and his staff for bringing the report.

In September 2011, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure agreed to conduct an inquiry into the creative industries. At the core of the inquiry, two questions were asked. The first was: why are the creative industries in Northern Ireland not fulfilling their potential? The second was: what can be done to facilitate the development and the capitalisation of their potential?

The Committee also sought to find gaps in existing policies, strategies and current delivery methods, including in the areas of financial support, training, skills development, European funding and, in particular, the Barroso task force. The Committee also highlighted the importance of better networking locally and regionally, and the need for improved co-operation between the key stakeholders who could facilitate and help develop the creative industries.

One of the topics, when we talked of networking, was the branding that existed for such industry in England, Scotland, Wales and the South of Ireland. We do not have that branding here at all, and it is a problem. We looked at what we can give a brand name to, and whether we are big enough to market the creative industry through our own separate brand. That developed discussion, and will continue to do so, as the creative industries progress.

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee maintained the belief that there was considerable potential for the creative industries to contribute not only to the economy but to the development of our people. In 2009, the total numbers employed in the creative industries was estimated at 31,000, or 4.1% of total employment.

The Committee was disappointed that only four of the 26 councils submitted evidence to the inquiry. The Committee believes that councils,

through their economic development departments, must adopt a more joined-up approach to supporting the creative industries. The review of public administration (RPA) was seen by members as a unique chance to change the thinking of local government. However, in defence of local government, when councils considered applying for funding, there was a fear that they had to match funding. A lot of councils could not afford that. I sat on the smallest of the councils, Moyle. Its base is very small and it is very limited in what it can match fund. So that was something.

Now, with the review of public administration, we are being merged into bigger council groupings and that should allow us a bigger base for economic development. The creative industries must be more within the remit of councils. NILGA, as the governing body, now has the opportunity to push that. NILGA stated that councils could be more supportive of local artists. When we talk about local artists, the creative industries, the craft industry and the small entrepreneurs starting up, we must not forget that that young man or woman is heavily dependent on benefits to keep going. With the cuts to the benefits regime, there is a real fear that a lot of those people will drop out of the creative industries altogether because they cannot afford to stay in, and that was mentioned during the inquiry.

We also referred to the Welsh model where the councils transferred resources and shared staff across council areas. There has always been the perception that the bulk of funding went to urban areas, but now, with RPA, there is a real chance to change that. However, that can happen only with an equal distribution of funding in councils and colleges. Councils need to look outside the box. My party comrade Mr Ó hOisín referred to the IFI. The IFI's annual report stated that five councils in the South of Ireland drew down almost €750,000. However, there is no mention of a council here doing that for the creative industries.

One of the issues that came to light in the inquiry, and which was not in the terms of reference, was the question of disability and special needs. That is remarkable, when you consider that the creative sector employs more disabled people and those with special needs than the economy in general.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr McMullan: I support the motion.

Mr Humphrey: I support the Committee's report. I congratulate DCAL and DETI for their work in the promotion of the creative industries.

Film-making, music, television, software design, fashion, arts and crafts, along with tourism, are vital to the Northern Ireland economy and Belfast in particular, and I say that as a member of Belfast City Council and declare an interest. I understand that Visit Britain has suggested that 21% of all tourists who travel to a destination do so because of music, and Belfast has benefited from that immeasurably over the past number of years.

Others have talked about the placement of such investments in cities and towns across Northern Ireland. I do so as a Member representing North Belfast, and Belfast City Council had a discussion around that issue recently. When people talk about quarters of the city, whether it is the Linen Quarter, the Queen's Quarter, the Cathedral Quarter or the Titanic Quarter, we cannot talk about those quarters — I know that there are more than four of them — and not mention the arterial routes.

As far as I am concerned, we in government and city councils working together need to look at the provision of pump-priming, and I will give an example. If the decision had been taken not to locate the stadia for the facilitation of the Olympic Games in the east end of London in a run-down area, that could not have acted as pump-priming for other investment that led to tens of millions of pounds of investment in that part of London. Equally, I know that Belfast City Council has visited Dublin and looked at the Liberties, where there has been investment for a digital hub, and I will return to that point.

As a city, Belfast is obviously the economic driver, the capital city and the tourism hub for Northern Ireland, and it has suffered greatly with the decline of the sunset industries such as shipbuilding, heavy engineering and, of course, the linen industry. Given the import of the new industries that we are talking about today, the effectiveness of a lobby for the creative sector is essential. I also agree with other Members that branding for creative industries and creative Northern Ireland is also hugely important, not just nationally but internationally. As the Chair of the Committee outlined, a collaborative, joined-up approach around the issue is essential. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, local government, the Arts Council, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Education must work together to get a holistic approach, so that

young people in deprived parts of this city and in other towns and cities across Northern Ireland and those in rural communities are able to avail themselves of courses as much as those who come from a more privileged background or are more academically bright. So, it is important that we get a joined-up approach.

I agree with the idea and the concept of a one-stop shop. That was created a number of years ago for the Ulster-Scots community when the Ulster-Scots Agency, the Ulster-Scots Community Network and the Ulster-Scots Language Society came together. That has proved to be successful, and Ulster Scots has progressed because of that.

We should also look at profiling Northern Ireland internationally. Consideration should be given to Departments working with the Irish Football Association. When the Northern Ireland team travels to international destinations, DETI, Invest Northern Ireland, the Tourist Board and so on should travel to that destination to promote this region as somewhere for people to invest in. That would make a huge contribution to marketing Northern Ireland internationally.

Finally, I know that other areas are competing for a digital hub for Northern Ireland, including Londonderry, but as a Member for North Belfast, I make a plea that the Minister considers Crumlin Road prison as a destination for the digital hub. One particular wing that has been redeveloped is ideally suited for a digital hub, which I am sure will be the first of many to be placed in North Belfast.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Dominic Bradley.

The debate stood suspended.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 9 and 11 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Urban Development Grant Scheme

1. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the delivery of his Department's corporate plan commitment to leveraging an average of £6 million in private sector investment through the urban development grant scheme. (AQO 3575/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department's corporate plan sets out our approach to social development and describes the context in which we will operate and how we contribute to improving the quality of life and well-being of society in Northern Ireland, linking to the Programme for Government aims and priorities 2011 to 2015. My commitment is to lever in an average of £6 million of private sector investment to the urban development grant scheme during the period of that plan, and I am delighted to say that, as of 31 December 2012, my Department had levered in over £5 million.

Mr McAleer: Does the Minister believe that the criteria for receiving the grant need to be amended?

Mr McCausland: I believe that things should constantly be kept under review. I am always open to suggestions or comments, but the fact that we are leveraging in money at the level that we are, and in view of the fact that many developers are experiencing difficulty in accessing money from the banks, indicate to me that it is the right sort of scheme.

Ms P Bradley: If the UK Government's proposal to remove Northern Ireland's automatic right to 100% assisted area coverage is implemented, what impact may that have on the availability of urban development grants across Northern Ireland?

Mr McCausland: I appreciate the Member's concern, but there are no indications that

Northern Ireland will lose 100% area coverage. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is engaged in discussions on the issue with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. I will await the outcome of those discussions and then assess the implications of any decision reached.

Mr Dallat: Will the Minister, in his usual honest way, give his assessment of the success of the urban development grant scheme?

Mr McCausland: I think that the figures speak for themselves. We committed ourselves in the Programme for Government to lever in £6 million. We are well on target, and I believe that by the end of the financial year, which is in a few weeks' time, we will have reached our target.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Anna Lo.

Ms Lo: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. May I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your recent success? I am very sorry that I will lose you from the Environment Committee, and I thank you for your support and work on the Committee.

Multiple Deprivation: South Belfast

2. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department will lead a multiagency approach to tackling multiple deprivation in the Belvoir and Milltown areas of South Belfast. (AQO 3576/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has the lead on tackling deprivation in Northern Ireland. As addressed during the recent Adjournment debate on this subject, the Belvoir and Milltown areas do not currently fulfil the criteria for inclusion in my Department's main programmes that seek to address deprivation. The issue was raised during that Adjournment debate, but that was the first contact made with me on the matter. Normally, when these matters arise, people approach me directly, maybe asking for a meeting or a response in writing. However, the Adjournment debate was the first time that it was mentioned, and the areas concerned do not meet the criteria.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his response. The Minister has been very supportive and responsive since that Adjournment debate. Minister, we will welcome you warmly when you come to visit Belvoir in the next couple of weeks. Outside the criteria for neighbourhood renewal and the new areas at risk programme,

is there any funding stream that the Department can use to help these very deprived communities with housing, community development and community involvement?

Mr McCausland: We target our resources primarily at the areas of greatest disadvantage. Neighbourhood renewal areas cover the top 10% of areas of deprivation, and the top 20% of areas of deprivation can be considered for designation as areas at risk. The Milltown/Belvoir area does not fall within the top 20%. I am sure that the Member will agree that it is right and proper that we focus on the areas of greatest deprivation and try to tackle those. That presents us with a difficulty. However, I have indicated that there will be a meeting and visit in due course. That will present an opportunity to explain the situation as it is and to hear local people's concerns.

Mr McDevitt: I acknowledge the Minister's statistical reply. Can he confirm what steps the Housing Executive is taking in the Milltown area in particular, which is an area with multiple specific areas of deprivation, albeit below award level, to co-operate better with other agencies, most notably the PSNI, around the issue of antisocial behaviour from Housing Executive tenants?

Mr McCausland: That is the first time that it has been brought to my attention that there is a problem there. I have not had any correspondence that I can recall from the Member. His silence confirms that he has not bothered writing to me about it. Writing to me is the normal approach. I am open to hearing representations, be they written or verbal, and I am happy to pursue matters. However, Members have a responsibility to bring them to my attention if they are really concerned about them.

Mr McGimpsey: How does the Minister plan to address pockets of deprivation in such areas as Belvoir, Milltown and, indeed, Newtownbreda village, which are in areas not of plenty but of greater prosperity, if they are not in a neighbourhood renewal area but have definite needs and requirements for investment?

Mr McCausland: For almost a decade, neighbourhood renewal has been the primary way of addressing deprivation. It remains our priority, along with the areas-at-risk approach. Across the Province, in my constituency and, indeed, in the Member's constituency, there are small areas that fall outside that. There is no single answer to that question. It requires commitment, involvement and dedication by

local representatives, statutory organisations, and so on, to look at the areas. I am waiting until the meeting that will take place, at which we will be able to see the information that Members bring forward about the area. When we see the details of that, there will be an opportunity to decide on the best approach, if, indeed, we are able to do something. I hope that we will be able to do something.

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy Penalty

3. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Social Development how many additional properties are estimated to be needed to enable tenants to move to accommodation of an appropriate size in order to avoid the underoccupancy penalty within the Welfare Reform Bill. (AQO 3577/11-15)

12. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Social Development how much revenue would be deducted from the block grant in the event that the underoccupancy penalty was not applied. (AQO 3586/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will take questions 3 and 12 together, because they are closely connected. Question 9 will also be taken in writing.

I have significant concerns around the measure to be implemented in Northern Ireland and the potential impact on those affected. I agree that it is reasonable to assist benefit recipients with housing costs and that it should be the case that the assistance is necessary. It is also reasonable that the taxpayer should not subsidise individuals or households to live in accommodation that many working, low-income households cannot afford. Households should take decisions regarding their accommodation based on their own particular needs and circumstances and taking account of what is reasonable for the benefits system to pay.

On the Member's specific question on the number of additional properties that are estimated to be needed to enable tenants to move to accommodation of an appropriate size as a result of the underoccupancy provision, I can advise that work is ongoing to get an accurate picture of the difficulties that particular provision may pose. It is estimated that some 32,500 housing benefit recipients may be impacted on. That is the starting point for estimating what deficits exist in our existing housing stock and how we address such a deficit.

It is a difficult issue. Some 32,500 existing housing benefit recipients are thought to be impacted on, but work is ongoing to determine the characteristics and precise make-up of the group.

Existing social security legislation contains some protections. For example, couples over state pension age and in receipt of housing credit would remain exempt from the underoccupancy provisions.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr McCausland: However, I can advise Members that, based on the introduction of the underoccupancy provision in GB, those who continue to underoccupy properties by one bedroom would lose £7 per week. Those who underoccupy by two bedrooms would lose £14 per week.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his response. The bedroom tax is turning out to be one of the most chaotic and, indeed, shambolic aspects of the so-called reform process. In addition to the problems that the Minister has already detailed, does he agree with his DUP colleagues not least the MP for Lagan Valley who recently voted against the clause in Parliament because:

"it will hurt many in poverty and those with disabilities."

Mr McCausland: The Member would have noticed that, right at the start of my answer, I said that I have significant concerns about the measure. That is why my party colleagues at Westminster opposed it.

There are particular difficulties for people here in Northern Ireland. The fact of the matter is that the battle was fought at Westminster, which was the right place in which to fight that battle. Members will be aware of the parity principle on social security, on which I have briefed the Assembly on several occasions. In practical terms, it effectively dictates that an individual in Northern Ireland gets the same level of social security benefits, subject to the same conditions, as someone elsewhere in GB. The fact is that if we were to dispense with that, it is thought that the cost to the block grant in Northern Ireland would be around £17 million a year. That would be a recurring cost. That is our current estimate.

Mr Agnew: Given the Minister's previous response and, indeed, his party's opposition to the bedroom tax at Westminster, does he

believe that £17 million may be an acceptable cost, so that the Assembly does not have to implement that particular welfare reform provision?

Mr McCausland: A number of welfare reform issues, of which this is one, are currently before the Executive. It will be a matter for members of the Northern Ireland Executive collectively to discuss that to see what the appropriate response should be to the welfare reform proposals. It is a difficult issue. However, it is one of many. I am sure that the Member will realise that we have to have a balanced, inclusive discussion. We will take the views of different political parties on board, listen to them and reach a conclusion through the Executive.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I offer you my comhghairdeas on your recent election.

Will the Minister confirm that the Housing Executive has, recently, in the course of deliberations on the Welfare Reform Bill, gone on record to say that it cannot meet the needs of people who are obliged to move as a result of the enactment of this provision?

Mr McCausland: The fact is that if the current housing stock in Northern Ireland is matched against the current population that requires social housing, the two do not match up. That is the result of decisions that were taken over a number of years, whereby houses, homes of the wrong size to match the need, were built. It would take quite a number of years — there are various estimates of how long that would be — to ensure that we actually have the right provision. That work needs to be done. It needs to happen. However, it will take quite a number of years to be completed in order for the right number of single-bed and two-bed accommodation to be built in the right parts of the Province. That task will take some years.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister referred to an exemption from the underoccupancy penalty for couples who are over state pension age. Will he confirm whether that exemption would apply to mixed-age couples in which one partner has reached stage pension age?

Mr McCausland: I can simply say that, at this point, we want to look at all of the options. The point that the Member raised is one of a number of difficult questions that have been identified in the GB situation. We are looking at all of the different scenarios to see what is the right outcome for Northern Ireland.

2.45 pm

Mr McCarthy: In relation to this evil bedroom tax, will the Minister tell the Assembly what — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister tell the Assembly what information he has given to those who will come under this evil bedroom tax, and what is he planning to do?

Mr McCausland: It seems that the Member has not learned the lesson about not walking into it.

Frankly, we are in the process of preparing an information leaflet for circulation to people across Northern Ireland. In that leaflet, we can be very specific on certain things; there are other things that have not yet been determined. However, it is, I think, important to get out as much information as possible, not least to dispel some of the ill-founded misinformation that has been circulated.

The Member used very strong language in describing it as "evil". Some of the Members around me seem to be making the point that his good friends in the Liberal Democrats seemed to think that it was a great idea.

Housing: Developer Contributions

4. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the introduction of a developer contribution. (AQO 3578/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have been looking critically at this issue over the past year with Minister Attwood. I remain supportive of introducing a system of developer contributions for affordable housing. However, two key factors will impact on the timing of their introduction. Appropriate processes need to be in place to manage any regime efficiently, and the timing of introduction is crucial in the light of the economic climate facing the construction sector currently.

In the present market conditions, it will prove extremely difficult to realise contributions. Therefore, I am minded to revisit this matter later this year, when, hopefully, the housing construction market will have had an opportunity to improve.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for that answer. In his reflection or consideration, has he looked at the question of

mixed tenure — a mix of social and private housing — in private developments? Will that be among his recommendations?

Mr McCausland: The Member will realise that developer contributions feature in the housing strategy as an element to help increase the supply of and access to affordable housing. Mixed tenure is something that we generally support, and there is no reason why it should not be part of the way forward.

Mr Beggs: Developer contributions can result in community benefit. However, it is unfortunate that, despite developer contributions having been talked about at the start of the previous Assembly mandate, they are still just being talked about. Will the Minister indicate how he proposes to work with those who are developing mixed-tenure housing to overcome practical problems, such as extended timetables that can result from the development occurring in different phases?

Mr McCausland: As I indicated in my initial answer, I am supportive of this. I will revisit it later this year, when, hopefully, the housing construction market will have improved somewhat. The Member suggested that there has been quite a time lag in the introduction of developer contributions, and I think that most people realise that the state of the construction market in Northern Ireland and the general financial situation have contributed almost entirely to that delay.

DSD: Delivery Support Arrangements

5. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has plans to formally engage with the volunteering sector as part of his review of delivery support arrangements. (AQO 3579/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As you are aware, the volunteering sector covers a wide range of organisations, and my departmental officials frequently engage with organisations from this sector in their day-to-day work. Formal volunteering is undertaken by nearly 200,000 people in Northern Ireland in a range of areas, including sport, health, faith-based organisations, youth groups and people with disabilities.

Volunteering has many definitions, but consistent themes run through all of them. It is an important part of our society and contributes in many different ways. Formal engagement with the volunteering sector was undertaken prior to the publication of our first ever

volunteering strategy in March last year, when over 200 submissions were received and analysed. Clearly embedded in the strategy is the need to support front line volunteering and strengthen the infrastructure. The infrastructure support includes support for volunteering-involving organisations, such as voluntary and community organisations, and volunteering-support organisations, such as volunteer centres.

I have instructed my officials to ensure that any strategy delivery proposals must be consistent with my policy direction of supporting front line activity. Given the previous consultation, further formal consultation is not considered necessary as we strive for successful implementation of the strategy. I confirm that officials will continue to engage regularly with all relevant stakeholders.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer. I join him in praising the people who contribute so much to our society on a voluntary basis. I am sure that the Minister will be aware that such reviews have a destabilising impact on volunteers and organisations. Will he commit to a timescale for completion of the review within the next two months?

Mr McCausland: My Department considered five areas of regional infrastructure support. We were able to move ahead very quickly on three of those: general generic support through the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA); the advice sector — again, there was a coming together of different organisations to collaborate and work together — and the churches faith-based sector. The Churches' Community Work Alliance (CCWA) has the contract for that work. However, there were two areas, one of which was volunteering, where there were tensions and difficulties. There was a lack of collaboration within the sector, and that created the difficulty. That is what we are trying to resolve. I want to see, and I am sure that the Member wants to see, the maximum level of collaboration, where all parties can work together, not to the exclusion or detriment of some.

Mr Anderson: Will the Minister provide some detail on why the previous process for providing infrastructure support was terminated?

Mr McCausland: The process for selecting the volunteering infrastructure partners was terminated in September last year. That was around concerns, which I hinted at and which were identified, regarding the level of non-collaboration between potential infrastructure

partners. There was also the potential for a legal challenge to the process, and I did not consider that to be a good use of public funding.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister tell us what rate of cuts he faces to the regional infrastructure plan?

Mr McCausland: The priority for me is to get maximum value for the money we have. Of course, that has to be a priority for the sector right across the board. As I indicated earlier in my answers, rather than money being spent centrally, I am keen to see as much of it as possible get out on the ground to local organisations. We will get a much better result and a better return if we get the money out on the ground.

Community Development: Voluntary Sector

6. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department intends to outsource aspects of community development to the voluntary sector. (AQO 3580/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not directly deliver aspects of community development and has always provided contracts for funding to voluntary and community organisations and others, which enables them to assist us in delivering on our objectives on urban regeneration and community and voluntary sector development.

My voluntary and community sector unit provides over £14 million annually to various organisations, including local authorities, supporting volunteering, advice, faith-based organisations, generic support for voluntary sector organisations and capacity-building.

The Housing Executive also provides £60 million annually through its Supporting People fund.

The neighbourhood renewal investment fund, managed through our neighbourhood partnerships, contributes over £26 million annually.

My Department's areas at risk programme makes available an annual budget of £1 million to areas at risk of decline.

My Department is also responsible for key policy development within the voluntary and community sector.

The Belfast Community Investment Programme is another example of how community development support will be provided to communities. That programme is being developed between my Department's Belfast Regeneration Office, the voluntary and community unit, and Belfast City Council. The programme is due to start in April 2014, and its aim is to promote community development work across the city through funding and support.

Mr Ó hOisín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire fosta. Given the Minister's continued support for the community and voluntary sector, will that be matched with adequate and, indeed, accessible funding?

Mr McCausland: I am happy to give that commitment within the departmental funding constraints that we all face. My Department is no different from any other. I recognise quite clearly the contribution that the voluntary and community sector makes in so many areas of life. We talked about some examples. I am happy to commit to continuing to support it.

Mr A Maginness: What support arrangements are there for the voluntary sector due to the anticipated changes in welfare? In other words, what contribution will the Department make in that regard?

Mr McCausland: The primary sector is advice-giving to ensure that people have the right information and get advice on how to deal with situations that they might face as a result of welfare reform. We will monitor very closely the work of the advice sector. We keep in regular contact with it. In fact, it is part of our stakeholder network for welfare reform. It is very much at the heart of the discussions. We keep a careful watch on the issues that it faces.

Mrs Hale: Can the Minister tell the House whether any other key policy areas are being developed by his Department that significantly impact on communities?

Mr McCausland: One example is where the Department for Social Development is leading on a policy framework for community asset transfer. That involves a change in management and/or ownership of land or buildings from public sector bodies to community organisations. It represents a means of investing in regeneration so that there is positive social, economic and environmental change in our local communities. It is expected that consultation on a draft policy framework for

community asset transfer will take place in May this year.

Fuel Poverty: Gas Prices

7. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact of the recent increase in gas prices on levels of fuel poverty. (AQO 3581/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Member will be very aware that I have no control over the cost of energy. However, there is no doubt that any increase in the cost of energy affects every household in Northern Ireland and carries the real risk of increasing the number of homes where people are feeling the effects of fuel poverty.

Fuel poverty is determined by three factors: household income, energy efficiency and energy price. My Department continues to fund a range of energy efficiency schemes that are designed to improve the thermal comfort of the home and to help to reduce energy bills for the householder. Oil is currently 30% to 35% more expensive than natural gas, which means that switching to gas could still lower a household's energy costs and help to tackle fuel poverty.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he give an update on the pay-as-you-go oil scheme that he introduced and piloted?

Mr McCausland: The Member will recall that that project was taken forward in co-operation with Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services. The pilot commenced in February last year. It was tested in a number of areas: Dungannon, Coalisland, Newcastle and Camlough. The technology works well, but the results of the pilot survey were disappointing regarding the proportion of participants who benefited from lower oil costs.

There are a couple of crucial issues around the cost and delivery of introducing a pay-as-you-go scheme into my Department's mainstream energy efficiency improvement schemes: the costs associated with the production and administration of the scheme; and who will supply the oil to the customer. Those were the difficulties that we encountered. I concluded that it is not feasible to introduce a scheme at this time. However, I am always open to new ideas and innovative approaches to tackling fuel poverty. We will continue to press for innovative solutions to help to address the issue.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also offer my congratulations to you. Given that benefits rates will be frozen at 1% over the next three years, does the Minister not accept that that will lead to increased levels of fuel poverty?

Mr McCausland: The Member's point is well made. One of the factors in fuel poverty is level of income. There is a particular issue for homes that are heavily dependent on benefit.

The matter was raised on the news this morning; I heard it discussed then. The decisions of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition Government on that will have an impact.

3.00 pm

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 8 and 9 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Sport: Community and School Facilities

1. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Education to open up community and school facilities for use by sports groups. (AQO 3588/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his question. I am having ongoing discussions with the Minister of Education regarding the opening up and sharing of school facilities with the local community and sports groups. Indeed, as part of the delivery of the Sport Matters strategy, Sport NI, in conjunction with the Department of Education, has developed a draft document on the community use of school sports facilities. I hope to launch that with the support of the Minister of Education later this year.

Responsibility for the provision of community sports facilities rests with councils. Council-run leisure facilities are available to the wider community, including sports groups that wish to avail themselves of them. The councils, through SOLACE and NILGA, and the Minister of the Environment, though the Environment Agency, are represented on my Sport Matters monitoring group, which oversees the delivery

of my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her response. In light of the budgetary constraints and the target to increase physical activity, what strategy is being pursued to ensure that there is a greater opening-up of facilities for those in social need?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. He makes a valid point: we need to increase access for people, particularly those in deprived areas, and give them a greater potential and opportunity to avail themselves of facilities.

The Member is right: budgets are constrained. I am not putting off answering a question that will be asked by one of your colleagues later, but, even if we look at the three proposed stadia, it is crucial that we look at every opportunity to make sure that there is a better provision of facilities and a better opportunity to use those facilities. Co-operation between schools, councils, sports groups and the governing bodies of those facilities is the way forward.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister provide examples of schools that are opening their facilities to the local and wider community?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A number of schools are doing that. I do not think that I need to declare an interest, but, in north Belfast, the Belfast Boys' Model School and the Belfast Model School for Girls are examples of facilities where a range of community and sport and physical activity initiatives are being fulfilled. Also, St Patrick's High School, Keady, has been used as exemplar in the Sport Matters strategy. That school has a partnership with Armagh City and District Council that has been significant in the use and promotion of facilities not only by schools but by sports clubs and individuals. Arts groups also use those spaces for dancing and practice, and older and younger people use them for tea dances, salsa and line dancing, which all sounds very energetic.

I think that the question that both Members asked is whether the facilities we have provision for are being used to their best potential. We are going in the right direction, but we are certainly not there yet.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra agus ba

mhaith liom go ndéanfadh sí machnamh ar an rún áirithe seo. Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for her answer.

Will the Minister consider setting up an interdepartmental group between her Department, the Department of Education, the Department of the Environment and the Department for Social Development to co-ordinate and maximise investment in sports facilities? She could use examples such as St Patrick's High School, Keady, where there is a partnership between the Department of Education and the local council, St Colman's College, where there is a partnership between DSD and the local council, and the Model Schools in her constituency.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. All of those people are represented on the Sport Matters implementation group. In the past, a big concern was that schools had excellent sports facilities but the community could not make use of them. This draft document that we hope to launch later in the year will bridge those gaps. The Member is right: other partners could bring something to making sure that we have the widest possible opportunity to share facilities. I am working with the Minister for Social Development on where there are gaps, and we are keen to close those gaps to ensure that people have access.

Mr McNarry: In my constituency, in my village of Ballygowan, Ballycloughan Primary School has been empty for two years and is up for sale. In light of the Minister's answers so far, which I appreciate, is the Education Minister's policy of selling defunct school buildings that could be used by community sports groups a helpful one?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I mean no disrespect to the Member, but it strikes me that his question is more for the Minister of Education than me.

Mr Swann: The Minister mentioned the other Departments that she will work with. Will she also give a commitment to work with the Minister for Employment and Learning to open up facilities at Queen's and the University of Ulster, so that more people can access sport?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly. I have a good working relationship with the Department and the Minister on matters involving Queen's, the Jordanstown campus, St Mary's college and other universities. We will enhance where we can the memorandum of understanding or any strategy that will open up facilities, particularly

centres of excellence, so that youngsters and communities can access them. That is a bit of an issue that we are certainly keen to look at.

World Police and Fire Games: Cultural Programmes

2. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what cultural programmes will be developed around the World Police and Fire Games 2013. (AQO 3589/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. DCAL is exploring a variety of cultural proposals in order to maximise the potential for a comprehensive programme around the World Police and Fire Games. Work on the detail of the cultural programme is ongoing, and I will certainly provide more information in due course. Furthermore, DCAL chairs the 2013 stakeholder group, which seeks to maximise the opportunities that the events of 2013 will create by bringing together stakeholders from government and non-government organisations to exchange ideas, information and best practice on cultural issues. It is important that athletes, their families and visitors here for the games are provided with a range of high-quality cultural options to enhance and enrich their stay.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Gregory Campbell. Sorry about that, it was my mistake. Mr Lynch for a supplementary.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I hope that that was not because you are forgetting about us now that you are an MP. *[Laughter.]* Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. How will the Minister ensure maximum tourism benefits from the games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said in my main answer, we are looking at a number of stakeholders, and DCAL chairs the 2013 stakeholder group, which looks at the overall tourist product, not just the cultural programme. We are looking at events such as the City of Culture, Féile an Phobail, Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, "The Gathering" and the World Police and Fire Games in conjunction and partnership with the Tourist Board and Discover Ireland. It is important that we sell this not only as a place for people to compete in and visit in 2013 but as a place that they will come back to.

Mr Campbell: In the interests of inclusiveness and to avoid any churlishness on the election, I

should include myself in congratulating Nigel Lutton on doing very well.

Will the Minister ensure that all communities across Northern Ireland will benefit from any of her cultural proposals that manifest themselves?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, but the Member is aware that Belfast is hosting the games and so it needs to come up with the cultural programme. People who are based in Belfast but do not work exclusively there are in discussions with the Department about this. We are looking to the experience and support from the Member's city in seeing how we can help to enhance the cultural programme for World Police and Fire Games visitors.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister assure the House that there will be sufficient bedrooms for this year's visitors and competitors here for the World Police and Fire Games, visitors to the UK City of Culture attractions and tourists from whatever source?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That question comes up all the time. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I receive regular reports to say that every avenue is being explored to ensure that there is enough proper accommodation for the anticipated visitors. I have not received any report or indication that that is not the case. Indeed, owners of B&Bs and guesthouses are now included on the list of people who may be able to offer their business as part of the World Police and Fire Games experience.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I should add my congratulations to you on taking the scalp in Mid Ulster. I acknowledge, of course, that Patsy McGlone had the highest increase of any candidate in the field —

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McDevitt: Indeed. On the question of competitive sport, will the Minister tell us whether the Arts Council has allocated any specific funding to organisations to support them with the development of the cultural programme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. In looking at sports and competitions, all that you have to do is look at this House. I think that we all deserve a gold medal for one-upmanship. I remind Members that this is questions to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

The Arts Council has, as part of ongoing contributions, made some funding available, but I am looking at funding from my own Department for this. I see it as one of the small gaps. It is to add to the cultural programme that the Arts Council, Belfast City Council, the Tourist Board and Discover Ireland are putting on. We want to make sure that we do everything that we can and that all those opportunities are explored, rather than wait until afterwards, knowing that there was a small gap and saying with regret that we did not plug it. That is what this is about.

Country Sports

3. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she is promoting country sports including angling, shooting and riding. (AQO 3590/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. It is important that I clarify what "country sports" means. "Country sports" tends to be a generic term that is focused on hunting or the shooting of live quarry and also hunting on horseback. As the Member will be aware, those activities are not recognised as sports and, as such, do not fall within the remit of my Department. However, shooting such as clay pigeon, small-bore or full-bore shooting, equestrian sports such as jumping, eventing and dressage as well as recreational riding and angling are recognised as sports. Responsibility for the promotion of those sports rests, in the first instance, with the various governing bodies. Over the past three financial years, the Department, through Sport NI, has provided over £800,000 to assist with the promotion of these sports.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her reply. Will she give some thought to looking again at the definition of country sports? Is she aware that, for instance, shooting on its own generates some 2,100 full-time jobs and £45 million a year? I think that that merits consideration, and I ask the Minister to take a look at it again, because I believe it is one of those areas that has been and is being neglected.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will take the Member's question into consideration. He is right about those figures — from the 2006 report — of £45 million per annum and over 2,100 full-time jobs from country sports in the North. If anything, we need to have a look at that report to see what else we can do, but I will certainly take the Member's question into consideration. I will just be clear: I do not support hunting and do not

recognise it as a sport, but I will certainly have a look at anything in between.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a ghabháil leat as an bhua sa toghchán. I congratulate you on your success in the election, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

An dtig liom iarraidh ar an Aire cá mhéad maoinithe a tugadh do spóirt tuaithe sna trí bliana seo caite? How much funding has been given to rural sports in the past three years?

Ms Ní Chuilín: For the various shooting sports that I mentioned earlier, just over £500,000 of financial support has been made available by Sport NI over the past three years through the athlete investment programme and the Investing in Performance Sport programme. Sport NI has provided over £27,000 of funding towards the promotion and support of equestrian sports in the North.

Angling has received almost £4,000 from Sport NI in the past three years. Other sports based in rural areas have received funding, but those are the figures for those categories.

3.15 pm

Mr McGlone: Thanks very much, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle — soon to be Iar-Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle or former Principal Deputy Speaker. I have already congratulated you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but another congratulations is no problem.

I will pick up on something that the Minister said. I represent and, indeed, participate in country sports. She mentioned earlier that she does not support hunting. Will she define clearly what she means by that? That is a very important point for the many people in my constituency who participate in hunting and what are referred to as country sports.

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is my personal view. Hunting is not recognised as a sport, and that is something that goes well beyond me. There is no definition of country sports, and that is the anomaly. There are generic sports that people associate with country areas and rural areas. Those are what are referred to as country sports, but there are no proper definitions. All that I can give the Member are definitions of sports that I do support, namely clay-pigeon shooting, small-bore and full-bore shooting, equestrian sports and angling.

Community Sporting Hubs

4. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to create community sporting hubs. (AQO 3591/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that the Scottish Government, as part of their plans for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014, are creating community sports hubs based in existing local facilities and aimed at bringing people together and providing a home for local clubs and sports organisations. My Department has already written to Sport NI to ask it to explore the concept of community hubs and how it might impact on the achievement of the targets set out in Sport Matters.

I am looking particularly at a more integrated partnership approach to the provision of sports facilities, with a view to improving quality, quantity and having a range of local facilities that are accessible to local people. Furthermore, as part of developing plans for the three stadia, the GAA, the IFA and rugby have engaged in consultation with local communities and Belfast City Council, for example. That consultation will help to inform the final arrangements for the new grounds. It is intended that the stadiums and the adjacent sporting facilities will be used as community hubs to support local clubs, sporting organisations and community groups.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister agree that, based on the Scottish model, an opportunity exists to develop a cross-cutting project or strategy involving the Departments of Education and Health, particularly in areas of social deprivation?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I absolutely agree with the Member. I have looked at the Scottish model as an example. It is primarily my function, but all our Departments need to look at good practice and best practice from other Governments and jurisdictions and try to incorporate that where possible.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister also look to local councils in coming to an assessment of the value of community sports hubs?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can give the Member a commitment that I will do that. I have already started discussions with local councils, although not serious discussions, on how that will happen. I have had meetings recently with a lot of councils. We need to look at collaboration,

partnership and what is known as future-proofing to develop the facilities. Councils need to work with the Department, and the Department needs to work with councils. We need to provide the best product for people that will give maximum opportunity for them to get engaged.

Mrs D Kelly: I add my congratulations to you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, although, with all the words that have been spoken, it is beginning to sound like, "Here's your coat, what's your hurry?"

My question relates to demographic changes. The Minister mentioned collaborative partnerships. How is your Department planning and encouraging in this regard? How are you ensuring that the types of activities that are available will be of interest to people over the next decade?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. Quite a lot of research goes on in the background. There is not just the census but the household survey. There are also discussions with councils. Councils will tell you that facilities that they developed 10 or 15 years ago are still being used but that, if they had the wisdom of hindsight, they would do things differently. I think that we have to accept the evidence and expertise coming from people who are expert in this field. We are also looking at community groups and the development of better access for people. As I said to a Member in answer to a previous question, using dance as a physical activity is something that needs to be incorporated into provision as well. Certainly, a lot of research goes on, and it does take trends into consideration. However, the best thing that I have heard so far is the experience of people who do this all day every day.

Mr McGimpsey: Bearing in mind the huge advantages there are with community hubs that include but go beyond sports — I am thinking, for example, of the facilities on the Shore Road, which the Minister will be familiar with — to include swimming pool, gym, library, health centre, pharmacy and other services, will the Minister tell us how she is working with other Departments to develop such hubs?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The discussions are at an early stage. However, the Member is right. Look at the Grove Wellbeing Centre on the Shore Road. It looks at libraries, social services, physical activity and leisure provision. It also looks at a community hub and a space that people can use for meetings, because there are

huge costs involved for groups that do not have any money to hire rooms in halls. It looks at all that and more. The discussions with the Minister for Social Development, DE, DEL and others are starting to shape up into each of us bringing forward not only a budget, but evidence about future-proofing the development of facilities. It is really important that we try to provide the best possible services for anyone trying to engage in physical activity, borrow a book, rent a room or whatever the case may be.

Promoting Equality, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion Through Sport Programme

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate you on your recent election success.

5. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department's Promoting Equality, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion Through Sport programme, particularly in relation to funding for rugby, soccer and Gaelic football. (AQO 3592/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive endorsed my bid for £4.5 million within the current CSR period towards a programme for promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion through sport. The funding is to be distributed between the governing bodies for rugby, football and Gaelic games. The governing bodies will receive £0.5 million each in the financial years 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15, with the funding split between capital and revenue spend. Each of the bodies was asked to identify projects and programmes that promote equality, tackle poverty, tackle social inclusion and provide opportunities to realise social and economic benefits and returns to the community.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for that answer. Can she tell us whether those within rugby, Gaelic and soccer fully understand what is required of them when they receive those funding packages?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I assure the Member that they do. In fact, I am looking at some of the draft ideas coming from the three sporting bodies. The additional money is conditional. It is conditional on them meeting the essential criteria. I am happy to say that, through the development of a good working relationship, the three sporting bodies welcome this additional

money, and they are totally clear what it is to be spent on.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister explain whether there is any work with local councils to progress the strategy? Are there any mechanisms to include it in the review of public administration that is coming up?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The money is for the three sporting bodies. It is not for councils. It is certainly not to be used for RPA. It is to be used for promoting equality, tackling poverty and tackling social exclusion. Future-proofing for the years ahead and what will happen after 2015 is being discussed, I am sure. Our Sport Matters monitoring group, which has representatives of SOLACE and NILGA, is involved in some of the tentative discussions around the leisure provision for future years. However, local government is not involved in relation to the additional money.

Mr Irwin: How does the Minister plan to monitor her Department's programme in relation to tackling poverty and social exclusion and promoting equality?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I will monitor it in the same way that I am monitoring the stadia programme moneys. We have regular meetings. There are regular vouching meetings. There are meetings to do with the development of programmes. There are also meetings with the sports governing bodies specifically in relation to what their ideas are and whether those match the criteria. In fairness to the three sporting bodies, some of the ideas and plans that they are bringing forward directly meet the essential criteria for the funding. This House will wish them well, because they are applying for additional money for work that they are doing. The additional money recognises the work that they are doing. It just gives a complexion to that work and a bit of additional support.

Omagh Riding for the Disabled Association

6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an assessment of the sporting and wider achievements of the Omagh Riding for the Disabled Association. (AQO 3593/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Omagh Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) has provided the only facility for disabled riders in the Omagh District Council area for over 26 years. It gives disabled riders

opportunities to develop life skills, engage in social interaction, work towards their personal ambitions and enjoy the outdoors while connecting with the horses and ponies that provide the focus of their activities and interest.

In training teams for competitions and even Special Olympics teams, Omagh RDA has a programme in place to recognise and develop elite riders who can progress to competition level, wherever those competitions may be. It also prepares riders for entering mainstream competitions, either through pony riding clubs or showjumping associations. Any activity that enables those with physical and other disabilities to gain therapeutic benefits, while providing opportunities for them to achieve their personal goals, from learning basic skills through to participation in a major competitive setting, is to be welcomed and, indeed, encouraged.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her acknowledgement of the many sporting and wider achievements of the Omagh Riding for the Disabled Association. The Minister may also be aware that the group has plans to extend service provision, principally for disabled service users, in response to evidenced demand. Will the Minister or her senior officials meet the group at Stormont, in Omagh or at the departmental headquarters to discuss how best the Department might support the group in meeting its future requirements?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A meeting can be arranged at any of the three venues that the Member outlined. It is important that people from Omagh, particularly the Omagh RDA, have access to DCAL and other officials and have the ability to put their points across. Certainly, I support a meeting happening regardless of where it takes place. In fact, I would rather the meeting happened in Omagh: Government need to go to Omagh, rather than the people of Omagh having to come to Belfast.

Sports Stadia

7. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department's stadia programme. (AQO 3594/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There has been considerable activity over the past eight months, with the Ravenhill stadium project now on site. The Windsor Park and Casement Park projects will be on site in the latter end of 2013.

Social clauses have been put in place for the Ravenhill construction contract and are being developed for the Casement Park and Windsor Park construction contracts to ensure that opportunities exist for the long-term unemployed, apprenticeships and student placements.

The IFA had planning approval granted just last month, and an invitation to tender will be released to the shortlisted contractors in early March. Construction is planned to commence in August 2013, with the works expected to be completed by June 2015. I will allow the Member time to ask her supplementary. I have a long list of developments here, which I am happy to share with her in writing.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her answer. What specific measures is she taking to ensure that there are opportunities for the long-term unemployed to benefit from the stadia programme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The long-term unemployed need to be at the centre of all the opportunities. Social clauses will be included in the procurement, tender and contract documentation. Those will specify, for example, the required number of apprenticeships and the number of long-term unemployed to be hired. They will specify that those people are to be employed in various elements of the project. For example, the Ravenhill contract will look at employing seven or more of the long-term unemployed, look at new apprenticeships, look at workforce-recognised apprenticeship schemes, look at student placements, and so on. It is crucial that employment of the long-term unemployed is included in the conditions of the social clauses.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister confirm whether any funding streams are available for Irish League stadia upgrades?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sorry, I had trouble hearing the Member. Sorry.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister confirm whether any funding streams are available for Irish League stadia upgrades?

3.30 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín: I think that the Member is referring to the subregional development, and, if that is the case, there is no money available yet for that. My understanding is that the IFA is looking at a facilities management plan, which I

have not seen yet. No money will be available until that plan is brought forward.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister. I thank everyone across the Chamber for their goodwill and messages of support.

Committee Business

Creative Industries: Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure Report

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on its inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries (NIA 98/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to implement the recommendations contained in the report. — [Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure).]

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Déanaim comhghairdeas leat fosta faoi do bhua an tseachtain seo caite. Tá an-áthas orm deis cainte a bheith agam labhairt sa díospóireacht seo ar an tuarascáil ar an fhiosrúchán ar na tionscail chruthaitheacha. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I add my congratulations to those already expressed, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the report on the inquiry into the creative industries carried out by the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

The creative industries cover a wide range of activities from the traditional crafts to theatre, design, architecture and arts and to the products of the more modern digital age. The Chair and the Committee have managed to keep the inquiry focused in such a way as to include as wide a spectrum of activities as possible while keeping it manageable. I thank them for that and for the hard work that they have done in preparing this very worthwhile report.

The creative industries have the potential to create employment for all our people, especially at this time of economic difficulty, and we need to do all in our power to create as many jobs as we can. To do so through the creative industries, we must ensure that all efforts are co-ordinated and that collaboration between stakeholders is maximised. Departments, with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure taking the lead, should create the supportive conditions for optimum growth within the huge potential that the sector offers. The number of Departments involved and the diverse nature of the creative sector can mean that, for example, a potential entrepreneur or a young person seeking a career in the industry can be at a loss as to who to turn to for advice, guidance and support. For that reason, I welcome the report's

recommendation that a one-stop shop should be set up to provide all necessary information and to cover strategy, funding, research and policy development.

Some Members who spoke earlier mentioned the importance of branding, and the report advocates creative champions to inspire creative talent to remain here. The concept of creative quarters is useful in encouraging cluster points, which will lead to better collaboration. The draft collaborative framework to support the creative industries is a good start to greater co-ordination of efforts to support and develop the creative industries. Greater North/South, east-west and international collaboration will add to the opportunities and ideas available. The recommendation in the report of benchmarking the creative industries here against other jurisdictions will provide valuable information on performance and will help to establish the future direction of travel for the industry.

Education has been mentioned on a number of occasions, and it has an important role to play in preparing pupils to be creative entrepreneurs. Schools can encourage an environment and ethos of creativity as well as developing links with creative enterprises locally. We have a good education system here, and the creative industries is a major part of the knowledge economy that we need to exploit to the full. Many of the stakeholders observed that the current information technology area of the curriculum does not provide the type of skills that certain sectors of the industry require. Indeed, the shortfall in those skills has been compensated for by the CoderDojo movement, which teaches young people how to code and develop websites, apps, programmes, games and more.

I welcome the investment that the Minister has directed to the CoderDojo movement — it is a bit of a mouthful — but there is a clear need to ensure that the school curriculum and courses at tertiary level are serving the needs of the creative industries in this respect.

By inserting an "A" for arts in the acronym STEM, it could easily become the STEAM agenda, encouraging arts and creative subjects in tandem with STEM and helping to ensure that our young people will have the broadest possible range of skills, which will open up careers in the creative industries to them. It is important to note that creativity is not alien to science, technology, engineering or mathematics.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: First Derivatives, a global company based in Newry, has clearly shown this to be the case in producing financial software that is used all over the world. I have other points, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but time has caught up with me.

Mr Newton: I welcome and support the report, as all other Members have done. I agree that the report recognises the need for a holistic approach, which means that more than one Department needs to be involved. As a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I am glad that the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure has sought the involvement of that Committee, and, as the report is rolled out, I hope that it will continue to do so. We have a positive role to play in that area.

The report acknowledges the need to brand the sector. That is important, and branding is a creative skill that needs to be employed. It recognises the role of education and skills development, and local councils. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council, and I am pleased that the council was one of the respondents. The report acknowledges the role of Invest NI in the strategy as it rolls out.

I will highlight three areas whose importance the report recognises: training and skills development; accessing international markets; and funding from the European Union. DEL and the Committee for Employment and Learning have a major role in skills development. The new Chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning is here today, and that Committee could and should have made a major and significant contribution to this issue over the past years under its previous Chair, but maybe he had other priorities that were taking up his time. It is important that we do not view the money that we spend on university education as a cost but an investment and that graduates are not cut adrift. Particularly in the area of creativity, there is an opportunity to allow graduates to develop their commercial thinking and skills. There is a huge opportunity for the commercialisation of graduates and the potential for them to work abroad for skills development. That knowledge and skills area needs to be commercialised and capitalised on by Northern Ireland. From my experience of Leonardo, I know that there are funding opportunities for our graduates to work in other parts of Europe and to be placed with internationally famous host companies. The

Chairman referred to fashion design, and Leonardo offers potential in that area.

No less a person than Albert Einstein said:

"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge."

I believe that the joy of creativity has to permeate the thinking in education, from primary level through to university graduates.

The report refers to the potential of mentoring, and such opportunities exist, as I have said. However, there is also the potential to match individual graduates with host companies in Northern Ireland. Often, the complaint from companies that take on new graduates is that they have to spend time training them after they have been educated, and the difference between training and education is stark. Graduates have the basic knowledge but need, as I said earlier, to be commercialised. Host companies in Northern Ireland need to be supported to develop graduates' commercialisation, particularly in the area of skills.

Champions of creativity are mentioned, and they need to be special people who have a track record of creativity.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Newton: Champions of creativity can play a very positive role in this area.

Mr Swann: I speak as Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning and a former member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. As the new Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I note with interest that it has already conducted work relating to five of the report's recommendations for the Department for Employment and Learning. The Committee for Employment and Learning is taking evidence as part of its inquiry into careers education, information, advice and guidance in Northern Ireland and has received evidence from Creative and Cultural Skills on routes into employment in that sector. That will tie in quite well with the work being undertaken by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and its findings.

The Employment and Learning Committee is aware of just how vital it is for professional advice to be given to schoolchildren about all the career pathways, including vocational and

work-based routes, that are available to them before they make choices about GCSEs, A levels or further or higher education. The Committee is aware of the need for more engagement between the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education on these matters. It has made efforts to open up its work on the inquiry to the Committee for Education.

On the issue of doing more for vulnerable young people and those with difficulties, the Committee for Employment and Learning recently agreed to engage further on a strategy for people over the age of 19 who have special educational needs. The Committee has arranged a briefing and a study visit to inform itself before receiving a briefing from the Department.

The Committee has always championed schemes that allow children to engage in a range of learning opportunities and activities outside normal school hours. One such scheme is the Children's University, which was launched on 13 February 2013 in an event sponsored by the Committee.

The Committee is also in the process of assessing best practice around the world in apprenticeship programmes and is to receive a briefing on research that it requested on the German model, which is considered one of the best. I have no doubt that the Committee will raise questions with the Department as a result of those considerations and how they tie in with the Committee's recommendations in the report.

The report makes a recommendation on digital media. The Committee has supported the work of all the regional colleges on that matter, and it has visited them to see their innovative approaches and the bespoke centres developed to promote the creative industries, as did the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

As Chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I assure the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure — and Mr Newton — that the areas on which it makes recommendations for the Department for Employment and Learning are being pursued by the Committee, and I will raise the issues with the Department.

I will now say a few words as a former Ulster Unionist member of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. I commend the staff, the researchers and the Chair for their work in completing this very detailed report. There were a lot of evidence sessions, and, as

mentioned in the debate, they had a wide scope. The creative industries in Northern Ireland cover everything from architecture to fashion to garden design. So when the Committee started down this route, one of its first challenges was to describe what a creative industry was before it could get into the work of the report and formulating recommendations.

As a former member of that Committee, I commend the report and recommendations to the Minister, and I ask her to take up the challenge contained therein. I know that, when my party colleague Mr Michael McGimpsey was Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, work had already begun in a number of those areas, and I hope that the Minister can continue that.

3.45 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. To short-circuit this a bit, I agree with everything that everybody has said, which is rare in the Assembly.

As we near the conclusion of the debate, I thank Members for their contributions and for the insight and perspectives that have been shared across the Benches. It has been a very good and very informative debate. I am confident that the members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee recognise that, from the first day of the inquiry, my Department was fully and positively engaged in the report. I welcome and support the inquiry because of the public focus that it brings to the creative industries. It is a focal point from which we can provide the many stakeholders in the sector with support.

The key findings have been listed, and I am not going to go through Members' contributions. However, a few central and overwhelming themes have emerged from the inquiry. It is clear that it is necessary to look at meaningful collaboration across a range of stakeholders, not just in Departments but in local government, the industry, academia and the community and voluntary sectors.

My Department has also made it clear to the Committee that stimulating and supporting such a collaborative and joined-up approach is the bedrock of its efforts in supporting the creative industries. The Committee is fully aware of the Department's direction of travel, and I am pleased that its approach has been broadly welcomed and endorsed by Members, not only those on the Committee, who spoke today. The Committee also knows that my Department intends to use the Committee's report and recommendations to shape its approach further

and to finalise and bring forward a collaborative framework for the creative industries.

I thank the Committee members and current and previous officials for their considerable efforts and the substantial work contained in the report. I do so not merely out of politeness or by way of bland statement. A huge effort has been undertaken. I also acknowledge the work of the stakeholders and those who gave evidence. This is a very worthy report, which I fully support and value, and I will use it to bring forward the framework.

In endorsing the need for real and meaningful partnership, the Committee's report has provided a local evidence base that should and must help to drive change across central and local government in support of our creative industries. My Department will show leadership by spearheading such change, and I know what that means. We must lead in developing the change that must reshape and strengthen the way in which government, industry, academia and the community and voluntary sectors work together to maximise potential and the economic and social benefits of the creative industries. I know that that is no mean feat, but it is my job to lift this, run with it and pursue it.

Meaningful collaboration and joined-up thinking to tackle previously fragmented approaches and shatter the silo mentality is something that is often talked about in government, but the practice needs to be challenged. However, we are not just asking for it today. Together, the Assembly is sending out a clear message that, with my support, we must do something very different to support our creative industries. We must do something very different for all in our society to realise the potential impact of creativity in our economy and the challenges that we face in areas such as health, education, employment, the environment, and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Many management gurus say that culture trumps strategy. What they mean is that a strategy document will not achieve its objectives if that strategy conflicts with the culture in which it is to be delivered; that is, the things that people already believe or the way in which they behave or make decisions. It is culture that translates these strategies into meaningful change and impact on the ground — culture, as in the way in which we do things around here. Too often, particularly in government, the prevailing culture is determined by the way in which things have been done in the past, and that fuels the silo mentality. It reinforces fragmentation, and that embeds the pursuit of narrow interests rather

than common purpose, and that needs to be changed.

Our Programme for Government is very clear. Our top priorities are to rebuild and rebalance the economy and to tackle disadvantage. However, we cannot expect to do that successfully or expect to maximise the potential of our creative industries unless we shift gears to a different way of thinking and can stimulate and deliver new ideas and approaches to tackle the key challenges that face our society.

It has been mentioned, not least by the previous Member who spoke, that, in 2001, the unlocking creativity strategy was devised with the support of Ken Robinson, who is a world famous educationalist and creativity expert. The strategy had many brilliant proposals and was welcomed and endorsed by all. However, nearly 12 years later, we are faced with many of the same challenges, and very few of the strategy's action points were delivered in full. Creativity was unlocked, but we only got a glimpse of it. People and organisations then retreated back into their silos, due to a lack of leadership, and the broader culture to sustain that change was not there or was not strong enough or persuasive enough. Therefore, DCAL's strategic approach to supporting the creative industries is to stimulate a cultural change across a diverse range of stakeholders so as to foster and nurture collaboration and a wider creativity agenda.

We must unlock creativity again, and, this time, we must keep the door well and truly open to make sure that it is not locked again.

The creative and cultural industries are recognised across the world as a catalyst for wider economic and social innovation. We will forge local, national and international networks, and, together with the meaningful links and collaboration that we have all mentioned here today — with academia, across government, with the community and voluntary sectors — we will work to develop and deliver the joined-up approach that is required to move our creative industries from what they are to what they can become.

I believe in maximising and harnessing the full potential, particularly in the creative industries. The evidence that we have heard today and that contained in the report clearly demonstrate the impact of the creative industries on wider economic development and social innovation.

Creative people, entrepreneurs, creative businesses and organisations do not necessarily spontaneously spring into

existence. A creative industries pipeline must be established and sustained not only to support and grow our creative industries but to support creative approaches and challenges facing our society. That has been mentioned in respect of getting into education, further education, and so on.

That pipeline is strengthened by the creative and cultural infrastructure and landscape supported by my Department. For example, libraries, museums, arts and other areas must play a key role in inspiring and supporting the emergence of creative people and their creative ideas.

I am very pleased to note the Committee's references to the role of the creative industries in supporting vulnerable people in our community. That confirms the importance of the sector and wider creativity to stimulating social innovation. Tackling poverty and social exclusion is the top priority for me. We can do that by growing our economy and providing employment opportunities for more people in our society. We can also do it by stimulating more creative approaches to social challenges.

I mentioned Ken Robinson earlier. He believes that creativity is as important as literacy. He says:

"We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process, it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development. All you can do...is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish."

Far too many of our young people believe that they are no good at work, they are no good at books, and they are no good at school. We need to be more creative in our approaches to supporting lifelong opportunities to lifelong environments in school, at home and in the community, which encourage people who want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions and interests. The creative and cultural landscape supported by my Department can help more of our young people and more people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to flourish.

In conclusion, it is very appropriate that we begin this debate in March, which is creativity month. It is about building momentum around creativity and the creative industries and inspiring people and organisations, but, more so, government, to think differently. We need to think creatively, and we need to look at possibilities for the future. The initiative provides an opportunity for organisations

across the North to showcase their work in developing creative and innovative solutions to societal challenges across the economy, the Departments of Health, Education, Environment and many other Departments.

This year's theme will include a particular focus on tackling poverty and social exclusion. Today's debate also takes place as many of our local musicians are taking part in a trade mission to Austin, Texas, for the world's premier business convention exploring the convergence between music, film, the arts and interactive media. The trade mission is supported by my Department and Invest NI. We are about to launch a recruitment exercise to establish a new music business support programme here.

A lot is being done, but we all recognise that there is much more work to be done. By working together, we can promote a wider creativity agenda to share ideas and make connections to deliver a lasting impact across the North, the island and many other regions. It is only by working together that we can help our children and young people — and those in the industry — to have the big dreams and ideas, to be inventors and entrepreneurs, and to change things.

I thank the staff, Committee members and stakeholders for a very worthy and worthwhile report. Like Robin Newton, I am going to quote Albert Einstein, who said that imagination was more important than knowledge. He also said that creativity was contagious and that we all needed to pass it on. So, well done and all the very best.

Mr Irwin (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I support this important motion. I thank Members for their contributions. I also join the Chair in thanking the Minister for responding. I think it is clear that the Committee's inquiry has proved to be a valuable piece of work that will provide useful information and recommendations to the Minister and her officials, which they can take forward to further develop the creative industries here.

I echo the Chair's thanks to the Committee for its work on the inquiry, and also the Committee staff. As the Chair said, the Committee took some time to bring forward the report, but its recommendations show that it was time well spent. The inquiry covered a broad subject, and, while being thorough, there are areas that the Committee has asked the Minister to take forward with her officials and Executive colleagues. The Committee has only limited

resources, and there is work that we must leave to the Minister to undertake.

As a number of Members have outlined, the Committee's primary purpose in undertaking the inquiry was to identify the economic benefits of the creative industries, as well as the challenges that the sector faces. We identified gaps in policy and delivery and in funding, education, careers and skills development. That said, the Committee found a lot of important and positive work that is being undertaken around the creative industries by the Minister and her Executive colleagues. In addition, the sector is vibrant and dynamic, as the Chair highlighted, and is constantly moving forward and innovating. That makes it all the more complicated to provide support, as it needs to be applied quickly.

The debate has reflected how important the creative industries are here. The Committee report highlighted how the sector needs to become more visible and be better mapped and explored so that interventions can be more useful, positive and relevant. There is undoubted potential for the creative industries to contribute not only to the economy of Northern Ireland but to our health, society and education system at all levels, as the Chair said. The sector also has the ability to support social inclusion, as the Minister indicated.

There is a tremendous variety and diversity in our creative industries, and although that contributes to it being vibrant and dynamic, it also means that there is fragmentation and a lack of collaboration between sub-sectors and between the creative industries and other business sectors. That very diversity also means that a particular effort has to be made to join up government interventions in support of the sector. As the Chair reminded us, no single Department, local council, agency or body can fully realise the sector's potential in isolation. A clear identity for creative industries, and a collaborative approach by government and the sector, has been highlighted as essential for the development of the sector.

As the Chair said, the Committee has recommended that a recognisable local brand be developed for the creative industries so that the sector can be better marketed and gain better access to international markets. A unified voice for the sector is vital, and the Minister needs to provide clear leadership on taking that forward, as the Committee has recommended.

4.00 pm

As has been highlighted by so many contributors today, the skills gap in the creative industries is also a key challenge. Creative enterprises here can grow only if they have properly qualified staff. We must ensure that we link the sector's needs to our education curriculum and third-level courses to allow us to close that skills gap. The majority of creative enterprises here are microbusinesses that employ fewer than five people. Therefore, they are not in a position to develop training on a sufficient scale to close the skills gap. That is why the Committee is calling for the Minister and her Executive colleagues to make the appropriate interventions.

As has been outlined by a number of Members today, there are issues and challenges around the funding options available to the sector. There are good programmes, which are well targeted, but there is a gap between the small grants available and the larger-scale funding. We need greater funding delivery in the middle ground, where it will be most useful.

We must also improve the linkages between the creative industries and other sectors with a close economic relationship, such as tourism, hospitality, museums and galleries, heritage and sport, and the social economy and community and voluntary sectors. Those linkages will be supported and directed by a number of the Committee's recommendations involving a more joined-up approach, across all levels of government, to the development of the sector.

As the Chair outlined, a clear branding of the sector with a portal, where all relevant support, advice and guidance can be accessed, will provide a considerable step forward for the creative industries here. That will be underpinned by champions or heroes and the development of hubs or clusters where creative enterprises can benefit from economies of scale and other shared facilities and support. Those hubs can also be linked with each other and provide bridges between urban and rural creative enterprises. Those microbusinesses will be made stronger by working together and supporting each other.

The Committee's recommendation to the Minister that she work with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI to better develop the funding and financing offerings to the creative industries will allow the development of more sector-relevant programmes. That should include access to long-term finance and seed funding to encourage innovation, development and growth. Better co-ordinated and targeted

funding packages should also be developed in conjunction with local councils and their economic development bodies. Further work also needs to be undertaken with respect to providing experienced business mentors to creative enterprises.

The Committee has identified a need for the development of more vocational and work-based routes into the creative industries. That will also help to reduce outward migration. Links with industry for student placements and project-based learning need to be improved, too. We must look at the development of a focused creative industries apprenticeship programme. That will involve discussions between the Minister and the Employment and Learning Minister.

The Minister must work with the Education Minister to ensure that schools encourage young people to be creative and to engage with arts and creative subjects. The ICT curriculum in schools must incorporate skills needed by the creative industries, such as design and software development. As the Chair said, young people need professional career advice and guidance on subjects and subject combinations needed for creative career pathways.

A key recommendation is the development of the STEM agenda into a STEAM agenda, with the addition of arts subjects. Schools need to allow young people to study a more mixed range of subjects further into their school careers to allow them to keep their options open for longer. We must ensure that our young people are as flexible as possible in the skills that they possess so that they can adapt to a changing job market, particularly in the creative industries.

Collaboration is emphasised a great deal in the inquiry report and the Committee's recommendations, and that should be applied across government and the creative industries. The Department's draft collaborative framework to support the creative industries can now look to the Committee's inquiry for suggestions as to the gaps that the Committee has highlighted.

The Committee understands that the time is not yet right for a strategy for the creative industries. Members appreciate that the strategy can follow only when the sector has been mapped thoroughly and its needs assessed comprehensively. The Committee has made recommendations on how that can be achieved. It will support the Minister in taking those recommendations forward.

As the Chair said, the Committee welcomes the framework's proposal for the ministerial advisory group, which should provide a forum for industry, government and academia to engage and work together in realising the potential of the creative industries. That illustrates how better collaboration can be taken forward.

The Committee also reflected at length on the importance of ensuring that our creative industries make full use of the programmes and funding that the European Union has to offer. The Committee has identified ways in which that can be achieved. Appropriate recommendations have been made. The Committee has already indicated that it will follow up on that in its EU work stream.

At this point, I would like to reflect on some of the contributions that have been made during the debate. Mr Ó hOisín talked about the economic importance of the creative industries and the lack of economies of scale being exploited by them. He supported creative quarters, mentoring for business, and collaboration, co-ordination and networking.

Mrs McKeivitt highlighted gaps in co-ordination and support for the creative industries. She supported the one-stop shop for the sector and highlighted the need to transform STEM into STEAM.

Mr McGimpsey advocated a joined-up approach by Departments with more partnership between sectors and a focus on training and education. He also talked about building enterprise and fostering creative innovation.

Anna Lo referred to the creative industries having great economic and community potential, which is currently not being used fully. She talked about the investment that is needed to break into international markets and about reducing the brain drain.

Mr Hilditch discussed the need for greater collaboration between Departments and local councils. He also advocated the need for accessing EU funding. He referenced the DEL review of apprenticeships.

Mr McMullan stressed the need for branding and the potential of the RPA for new thinking. He also referred to the potential for disabled people and people with special needs in the creative industries.

Mr Humphrey commended DCAL and DETI for the work that they do for the creative industries.

He highlighted the potential for music tourism. He supported the concept of a one-stop shop for the creative industries. He appealed for a digital hub and suggested Crumlin Road jail as a possible location. He also suggested that the Northern Ireland football team's away games should be an opportunity to market abroad what Northern Ireland offers.

Dominic Bradley said that the creative industries have the potential to create employment. To do so, all efforts must be co-ordinated. He also referred to the shortfall in skills, particularly in ICT.

Robin Newton welcomed the report. He also highlighted gaps in skills and training in graduates. That needs to be addressed. Creative champions need to be specialist people.

Robin Swann said that the Committee for Employment and Learning has already undertaken work on five of the recommendations. The Committee is also assessing best practice with regard to the apprenticeships programme.

I am sure that everyone who is here today will agree that it has been a useful and very positive debate on an important issue. The Committee looks forward to the Minister's written response to its recommendations and working with her to take them forward for the benefit of the creative industries here. Once again, I thank Members and the Minister for their contributions. I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on its inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries (NIA 98/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

Private Members' Business

Age Discrimination Legislation

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Fearon: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges and endorses the Programme for Government commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that, in delivering on this commitment, the legislation affords protection to everyone regardless of age.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak in support of the motion and against the tabled amendment. There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to make it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the basis of age in respect of the provision of goods, facilities and services. Nowhere does it specify that it should apply to over-18s only. This legislation should apply to everyone regardless of age. It should be non-exclusive.

There is a clear need to protect older people, but children and young people should also have the right to the same protections. These two groups, although years apart, face many of the same discriminations. The age sector has demonstrated that it is also in favour of the legislation being broad and inclusive with protection for all. From my party's perspective, at no stage was this ever solely for older people.

I am aware of how progressive Australia has been in implementing legislation that is anti-age discrimination. To those who claim that to include children and young people in the legislation will open the floodgates to complaints and litigation, it is important to note that, since the implementation of an Act in Australia in 2004, complaints have averaged at only 6.6% for children and young people, with

the majority of enquiries — around 78% — being in relation to older people's issues.

There are obvious exclusions from the legislation, such as the sale of restricted goods — for example, alcohol and cigarettes — to minors. There may also be some exemptions in the legislation for services, as there is with all legislation. If implemented for all, there will be improvements in the lives of many across the North. As my party's spokesperson on families, children and young people, I will focus on some issues that will be addressed under this legislation.

There is serious room for improvement in health provision for children and young people, given that around one quarter of the population is under 18 years of age. These improvements can be made, particularly in mental health provision. At present, less than 8% of the total mental health budget is spent on specialist child and adolescent mental health services, which equates to less than 0.5% of the overall budget. There is a clear underprovision of mental health services for children and young people. As waiting lists continue to grow, the risk of child suicide or self-harm invariably increases. In the past 25 years, the number of teenagers with anxiety disorders, eating disorders or depression has increased by 70%. It is unacceptable that there is a continuing lack of resources in this important area and that there continues to be a very severe lack of age-appropriate facilities for treatment.

The Compton report, 'Transforming Your Care', referred to elements of this in relation to children and family services, stating:

"the level of investment in Children and Families Services in [the North] is approximately 30% less than in other parts of the [UK]".

This demonstrates some aspects of health provision in which children and young people are discriminated against.

One case that confronted me recently was that of a 17-year-old boy who was charged with driving offences and treated, in that way, as an adult. He subsequently developed mental ill-health but was no longer treated as an adult when it came to accessing the services that he needed, and, unfortunately, that case ended tragically.

The same is true of older people. A perfect example comes from my constituency, when, in 2007 —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Pardon, can I interrupt? Someone's mobile phone is going mad, and it is interrupting the translation system. Can you just switch off mobile phones? Sorry, Megan.

Ms Fearon: In 2007, a 76-year-old man from south Armagh was refused access to specialist brain injury care because of his age, as services in Musgrave Park Hospital catered only for people up to the age of 65.

In education, the July and August admission criteria, which were used to allocate nursery places, were reversed by the Education Minister, as they were deemed to be discriminatory.

There is a serious issue with the demonisation of children and young people, particularly by the media. This legislation could go some way towards addressing that, because we need to bring about a change in the ageist culture that still exists here.

4.15 pm

Too often, I have had reports of security staff intimidating children by following them around shops, not allowing more than two or three in at a time or forcing them to leave their belongings outside or at a door. The most abhorrent practice, in my opinion, is the use of Mosquito devices. Shops install such devices, which emit a high-frequency sound that only children can hear, to discourage them from entering. Nobody knows what harmful effects they have on a child's hearing or general health or the effects that they could have on an unborn baby.

Another issue is the age of criminal responsibility. Currently, 10-year-olds are deemed responsible enough to be subject to the law but not afforded the rights that match that responsibility, nor are they afforded equal access to goods, facilities and services. A degree of consistency needs to be developed in relation to children and young people.

I will touch very briefly on some other disparities under the law. Last year, the Assembly voted in favour of extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds. That is an example of young people being given adult responsibilities in their daily lives but not having the rights to match those responsibilities.

A further issue is the differential in the minimum wage, which is lower for young people. That, unfortunately, is a reserved matter, but it is one

inequality that I would like to be addressed in the future.

Age discrimination legislation that applies to all people will help to tackle the negative stereotypes that are placed on children and young people as well as older people. It will help to tackle bad attitudes towards children and young people, address their needs and greatly improve their lives.

Some in the House seek to rewrite the Programme for Government commitment because of their desire to discriminate against children and young people. Why would the Assembly seek to introduce anti-discrimination legislation and, from the very outset, discriminate against a large group of people?

I commend the motion, without the amendment, to the House, and I encourage everyone to support it.

Mr Moutray: I beg to move the following amendment

Leave out all after "protection" and insert

"to people aged 18 and over, in line with international best practice."

In proposing the amendment, we believe that we are delivering on a promise made to the older person's sector, particularly through the Executive's older people strategy, Ageing in an Inclusive Society. Without doubt, this extension in legislation will assist in reducing social exclusion and in improving active ageing and independent living by older people through improved access to various services.

We are all too aware of the ageing population in Northern Ireland and the need to address discrimination against older persons in accessing goods, facilities and services, so much so that in the Programme for Government, we detailed that the House would extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services by 2015. I remind all in the House of the need to deliver on that pledge in the timescale that we set ourselves to ensure further protection and align ourselves with the rest of the United Kingdom.

I know that there has been much discussion and lobbying and many questions asked in the House about the matter, particularly on the inclusion of all ages as opposed to those aged 18 and over, whom our party wishes to be included as per our amendment.

It is important to set this in the context of the rest of the UK. I note that the Equality Act 2010, which came into effect on 1 October 2012, covers banning age discrimination against adults in the provision of services and public functions. It is important to note in passing that the Republic of Ireland also has in place the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2004, which legislate against discrimination in the provision of facilities, goods and services. The salient point that I want Members to bear in mind is that both apply to over-18s. Although I recognise the lobbying that there has been for the inclusion of the children and young person's sector, I believe that it is unnecessary, and I will endeavour to outline my rationale for stating that.

We have legislated against age discrimination in the workplace. By introducing the said legislation on the provision of goods, services and facilities, protection will be extended to outside the workplace. The changes that the law will bring about will ensure, as per the Equality Commission's report, that individuals will have the right to seek redress in court if they, without justification, receive an inferior service and are unable to access goods and services simply on the basis of their age. If we consider international best practice on whether children should be included, we see clearly, through what has been introduced in other jurisdictions, and particularly from their scoping of the issue when introducing the legislation, that the best practice is for the legislation to apply only to adults.

Australia is the only jurisdiction that includes children in its legislation. If the legislation were to include children, it would mean that many exemptions would have to be included. Those exemptions would ultimately weaken the legislation for those who are 18 and above, and it would be practically meaningless because of what had been removed. It could even have unintended consequences for services. For example, age-based services could be withdrawn by service providers because they would be operating outside the law.

Logically, a toddler cannot be given the same rights as an 18-year-old. When my children were growing up, the word "no" had to be used on more than one occasion. If legislation were in place, would I as a parent be liable or, indeed, open to a civil case because I denied my child getting something? It also raises concerns around parental consent. Would a child no longer need permission to access services, particularly health-related ones?

What about children-go-free holiday deals? Ultimately, under the legislation, that may be deemed unlawful, because, if a five-year-old can go free, why can an 18-year-old or a 25-year-old not?

What about the purchasing of goods that are currently sold to people 18 years of age and above? Would small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) be liable to challenge if they refused a five-, six- or seven-year-old permission to purchase them? What about a retail store, such as a shop near a school, that has implemented a policy that schoolchildren must leave bags outside the shop or that only two children at a time are allowed in? In essence, that would be illegal because, under the law, the shopkeeper would need to force all adults to leave bags at the door and allow access to only two senior citizens if the shop wanted to keep a check on schoolchildren. The words that I use to describe those possible issues if we were to include children in the law are "unintended consequences".

In summary, I support the amendment, which states clearly "18 and over". Yes, it is important for the House to look at our children and young people, because I, too, want to see them protected. However, it is wrong via age discrimination legislation. There are other ways and means of dealing with the concerns. It is important that the Committee look at the issues and develop a localised strategy for dealing with them. I firmly believe that extending protection to under-18s would outweigh the benefits or positive impacts of a general prohibition for people aged 18 and over.

Mr Eastwood: I support the motion but not the amendment. It is unfortunate that once again in the House we seem to be playing out the arguments that are being had behind closed doors in OFMDFM. I cannot understand why it cannot get it together. It would be very important legislation if we could get it to the House. Our very strong view is that it should extend to everyone.

We can deal with some of the issues that Mr Moutray outlined by having exemptions that would ensure that we do not get to the ridiculous situation in which an eight-year-old would be allowed to buy a packet of cigarettes, or whatever else. It is very easy in legislation to deal with exemptions. It is done all the time. Nobody is asking that we go into the realms of the ridiculous. We want to ensure that young people are not wilfully discriminated against.

I am very glad that we are at least agreed that we can get to a stage at which older people will

be provided with some discrimination protection in law. It is clear that we need to be very focused on providing the most strident protection for older people in our society. However, there is no reason that that cannot be done alongside providing protection for people under 18. Evidence collated by the Children's Rights Alliance for England highlighted unequal treatment of children in a range of service areas. Some of the examples that it found included children being refused access to shops without any justification; being refused entry to services such as libraries, leisure centres and museums; being refused access to buses; and being treated less favourably by bus drivers. I do not see any difficulty in legislating to try to stop that.

All of us — the media and politicians — are guilty of stereotyping young people as antisocial troublemakers. We are very good at it. Every time you open a newspaper, you see words like "yob" and "thugs" and all that kind of stuff. Instead of trying to criminalise, sensationalise and stereotype the difficulties that many young people face, we need to embrace young people and ensure that they can become full members of our community.

If we in the House say that we are not prepared to take the advice of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Equality Commission or the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner, we are saying to young people that they do not really count and are not equal citizens in this part of the world. That is not good enough. Sometimes, we up here need to remember that we represent everyone in the community and not just those who were entitled and allowed to vote for us.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that the UK should take:

"all necessary measures to ensure that cases of discrimination against children in all sectors of society are addressed effectively, including with disciplinary, administrative or, if necessary, penal sanctions."

It went on to say that there is no reason why children and young people could not be included in this kind of legislation.

Further independent research, entitled 'Making Older People Equal: Reforming the Law on Access to Services in Northern Ireland', although focusing on the position of older people, was of the view that:

"any reform of the law in this area in Northern Ireland must benefit people of every age."

We are hearing it from everybody we ask.

I could quote you figures that show that almost nine out of 10 young people in Northern Ireland said that they were treated with disrespect because of their age, 67% had been treated suspiciously by staff in a shop, 57% were told to move on when standing with friends —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Eastwood: — and eight out of 10 young people felt that the media portrayed young people negatively.

Rather than coming to the Chamber, putting down motions and people arguing across the Chamber, it would be much better if the First Minister and the deputy First Minister could agree the things that were supposedly agreed in the run-up to the Programme for Government, and we did not have to have this public row over and over again. I hope that the motion is agreed to.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Principal Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. Before I open my remarks as Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, perhaps, on a personal basis, I could add to the congratulations on your recent electoral success.

The Programme for Government 2011-15 makes the commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. When the Committee considered the draft Programme for Government, it welcomed the commitment to extend protection. During the Committee's consultation on the draft Programme for Government, the Equality Commission and the Commissioner for Older People also welcomed that commitment.

The March 2012 delivery plan for this commitment — it is the most recent the Committee has had sight of, even though it is now March 2013 — outlined that the Department was to have produced initial proposals for consultation by 30 September last, with the consultation on the proposals by 31 March 2013. On the motion, Members may wish to note that the summary section of the delivery plan, albeit dated March last year,

indicates that the groups who will benefit most from this legislation will generally be older people and younger people.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

4.30 pm

The strategic online report for the period April to September, which was sent to the Committee last December, suggested that this commitment was still on track:

"It is proposed that policy proposals will issue for public consultation in early 2013 in line with the Programme for Government commitment and milestone."

Ms Fearon has brought this issue up on a number of occasions in Committee. The most recent response from the Department to the Committee's request for a briefing was received on 19 February last, when the Department advised:

"Consideration is currently being given to the scope of the legislation. In order to inform discussion, research has been commissioned into all age group experiences of discrimination in relation to the provision of Goods, Facilities and Services. Officials, in liaison with NICS Departments, are continuing to identify the issues likely to apply to all age groups, and mapping out the possible policy areas requiring further development."

"As the proposed legislation is still at the early stages of development, we would suggest that a presentation to the Committee is postponed for a short period until the scope and policy proposals are clearer, at which time officials would be pleased to attend the Committee for an oral brief."

The Committee is to be briefed on this Programme for Government commitment at this week's meeting, when we will receive an update on progress to date. Age NI has also written to the Committee in relation to the delay in this issue, and the Committee will take evidence from Age NI after Easter.

That concludes my remarks as Committee Chair. As a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, I support the motion and the amendment. Given that DUP amendment, it is clear that this is not an issue that has gained the agreement of the two main blocs of the coalition Government nor yet been considered at the Executive table. Given the fact that it is an

important commitment in the Programme of Government and that legislation is scheduled to come before the Assembly in this calendar year, we should all be acutely aware of the need to facilitate an agreed outcome.

At Question Time on 2 October 2012, the deputy First Minister said that "a considerable number of steps" needed to be taken to move this issue forward, including a "period of detailed policy development". I would welcome clarification today of what stage that process is at, and how the Department expects to perform against that Programme for Government target. I say that in light of the substantial slippage witnessed in other areas within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, such as childcare funding and the social investment fund.

We are all aware that the major bone of contention here is whether it is appropriate that this legislation should extend to under-18s. It seems to me that the primary aim of the legislation is to extend protection beyond the workplace to goods, facilities and services. Although I am not against protection for under-18s, they hardly seem to be the key target. I also add a note of caution. We recently introduced gender-neutral insurance. We did not have a choice; it was a European directive. The outworking is that young female drivers are assessed as lower risk and are, in effect, now subsidising young male drivers.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Nesbitt: In short: you can agree a principle of equality but please remember that somebody always has to pay. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Lyttle: I agree with Mr Eastwood that it is somewhat embarrassing and frustrating that the joint DUP/Sinn Féin OFMDFM is openly disagreeing over an issue as important as equal access to goods, facilities and services for all ages and that, as is too often the case, it has been unable to send even one of the four Ministers that it has available to the House.

I support the motion on behalf of the Alliance Party. We believe that legislation to prevent age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services will be a positive move, of benefit to many across Northern Ireland, particularly older people, as has been mentioned. Research conducted in August 2010 by Millward Brown on behalf of Age NI found that 45% of older people interviewed had

been treated with less dignity and respect when accessing services because of their age. This discrimination in accessing services applies to a wide range of areas, including health and social care.

The legislation would also, of course, benefit younger people. For example, research conducted by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People found that 90% of young people had been discriminated against and 85% believed that they were judged negatively because of their age. Examples of that discrimination include refusal of entry to services such as libraries or museums and difficulties in accessing mental health services and legal services.

It is one of my greatest privileges as an MLA to be able to work with wonderful people from all backgrounds and ages, and it is clear that discrimination and prejudice in relation to both older and younger people in our society remains to be challenged. The legislation should seek to ensure that people of all ages are treated fairly and have equal opportunity to access services.

After careful consideration, I do not believe that the DUP's proposed amendment is required. The principle of non-discrimination for all people, irrespective of age, should be established, and the application of existing and well-established principles of genuine occupation requirements and genuine special requirements would protect against any unintended consequences and make provision for specific age exemptions when absolutely necessary in the public interest. That can, therefore, be used when needed, and the introduction of a blanket exclusion of minors, which would in fact perpetuate the very discrimination against our young people that we have mentioned, needs to be ruled out.

In closing, although the Alliance Party welcomes the motion, I would also like to put on record our deep disappointment if that is the summit of OFMDFM's ambition on equality legislation for this Assembly term. A racial equality strategy and sexual orientation strategy are beyond overdue and leave Northern Ireland embarrassingly behind Great Britain in terms of equality. The Alliance Party's legislative proposals for this Assembly term included a single equality Bill, and we call on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to bring forward a single equality Bill, a racial equality strategy and a sexual orientation strategy without further delay. It is the responsibility of the Assembly to ensure that all our citizens can

access the services and protection from discrimination that they deserve.

Mr G Robinson: The motion is undoubtedly well meant, but, considering that age-specific legislation would be best for the under-18s, it seems unnecessary to add confusion when specific legislation would be more beneficial. Therefore, the amendment is put forward to maintain clarity in the law, but, crucially, still leaves tough legislation in place to protect our young people. It is also essential that any legislation should be as specific as possible in addressing the needs and requirements of a particular sector or, in this case, age group.

I do not believe that people of 18 years and younger will benefit from inclusion on this occasion. As the amendment states, it is being based on international best practice, something that is beneficial and practical when comparison is used appropriately. Indeed, the Australian example shows the number of exclusions required, which is concerning. As I stated earlier, legislation to address the provision of goods, facilities and services would be better produced on a very specific level, relevant to age. If the legislation as planned is passed, the courts may be asked to adjudicate on the numerous exemptions that there will have to be at a later date.

As specific legislation exists for free television licences for the over-75s and the winter fuel allowance so that our older population can be treated differently, age-specific legislation should be available for the under-18s because of the challenges that they face in education, health, housing, or job-seeking. As young people's needs change rapidly in their teens, age-specific legislation can best address those points. The Westminster Government did consult with young people and their representatives, but there was acknowledgement that discrimination legislation was not the best way to address the requirements of the age group. Therefore, it is my firm belief that, due to the number of exemptions that will be required, the motion is not feasible. That is why I am supporting the amendment tabled by my colleagues and me.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion and oppose the amendment. The Programme for Government has a commitment to make it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the basis of age in the provision of goods, facilities and service. This legislation will help to ensure that the North complies with the anticipated requirements of the draft European Commission directive on the provision of goods and services. The

legislation, when introduced, will also be in keeping with international obligations and principles relating to age equality.

We also need to be mindful of our obligations under section 75. The North is subject to equality legislation under section 75. There are nine groupings in that. One of those groupings is age, and there is a statutory duty on public authorities to consider the experiences of people in this category, as well as others, by examining all their new and existing policies.

The Equality Commission is opposed to the blanket exclusion of minors under statutory protection. In its proposals for reform, 'Ending Age Discrimination in the Provision of Goods and Services', the Equality Commission has made it clear that everyone, regardless of their age, has the right to be treated fairly and to have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Our position is reflective of a wider view, including that of the Equality Commission, the wider children's sector and the Age Sector Platform.

I believe that the amendment flies in the face of social inclusion, which is about improving the equality of services, maximising participation and responsibility, and ensuring equality of opportunity for all. That should be at the core of everyone's thinking when they consider the motion. It is important that everyone gets fair treatment and legal protection. As is stated in the research paper, a new law that bans age discrimination but discriminates against people because of their age does not make sense. In other countries where equal protection has been introduced, like Australia, it is apparently working well.

The Equality Commission recommends that the legislation, if introduced, should allow differential treatment on the grounds of age in circumstances in which it can be objectively justified. No one is saying that children have to be treated absolutely equally to adults; that would be ridiculous. There have to be safeguards regarding the obvious things like smoking and drinking. As the Equality Commission stated, this is about ensuring that people of all ages do not receive an inferior service or have their access to a product restricted simply on the basis of their age.

A ban on age discrimination is in force in England, Wales and Scotland. However, it is not absolute. We believe that that position is inconsistent with the British Government's support for the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Their decision to exclude children from the legislation is contrary to article 21 of the charter. The British Government's position is contrary to the recommendation of the UN

Committee on the Rights of the Child that effective measures are taken to address discrimination against children. The Government's proposals are also contrary to accepted international norms as found in the Australian Age Discrimination Act 2004 and the proposed EU directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion, disability, age or sexual orientation.

This legislation will help us to meet our obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which indicates that we should take all necessary measures to ensure that cases of discrimination against children in all sectors of society are addressed effectively. There are numerous examples of the tangible impact that this legislation could have. For example, there is evidence that children and young people experience difficulty in accessing age appropriate health and social care services, including mental health services. Age discrimination legislation will address the Compton report, for example. Transforming Your Care referred to elements of this when it stated:

"the level of investment in Children and Families Services in NI is approximately 30% less than in other parts of the United Kingdom."

The Equality Commission has stated that it considers that its recommendations are clearly aligned with the draft European Commission directive to outlaw discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services. The Equality Commission also stated that the draft directive did not contain an exception in this area to exclude children and young people from protection against age discrimination.

I support the motion.

Mr Agnew: I apologise to those who tabled the motion for missing the opening speech. When it is yourself alone, it is sometimes hard to be everywhere at once. I apologise to them and, indeed, to Members whose subsequent contributions I missed.

4.45 pm

I support the motion and oppose the amendment, which I believe is misguided. There will be examples of when we need exemptions that may apply to those under the age of 18, but a blanket exemption is the wrong way forward. Somebody mentioned that the

legislation is about the provision of goods and services only and will not apply to the same extent to children and young people. However, I think of some areas in health. I declare an interest at this point: my partner works in child and adolescent mental health services. Some children's services in our Health Service have been hard fought for and are, indeed, still inadequate. The amendment would allow for a get-out clause that is not acceptable. Mental health provision and addiction services were denied to children for a long time because we simply said that children do not have addiction, drug or alcohol problems. We know that not to be true, and there is a risk of suicide in children and young people that may be associated with some of those issues. We need to step up our provision of services for children and young people. We need this duty, and it would be misguided to exempt children.

There is one general exemption that I certainly support, whereby we have legislation that differentiates children and young people to protect them — for example, the purchasing of alcohol is an exemption to protect young people and their health. However, this legislation is designed to protect people from age discrimination that would be harmful to them. I do not see any contradiction in those two things. As I said, with well-considered amendments, that could be catered for.

I can think of other examples of discrimination against children and young people in the provision of services. A well-known music festival — the largest in Ireland — is free if you are under the age of 12 and accompanied by an adult; adults have to pay to get in; and if you are between the ages of 13 and 18, you cannot get in because alcohol is served. As a former employee of Virgin Megastore, I know that that age group is probably one of the biggest purchasers of music. Teenagers are purchasing music but being discriminated against when it comes to local concerts and gigs, which are often licensed so teenagers are excluded.

With antisocial behaviour, it is that type of exclusion that adds to the problem because people do not feel that they have a stake or a place. Until we start planning our towns, cities and events with young people in mind, as full citizens rather than second-class citizens, we will not start to address those issues. I have seen incidents in shopping malls. A group of young people go to a mall, maybe to get a coffee in the food court. Somebody will stand behind them, just waiting. As soon as they finish their last sip, that person says: "Right, you. Out. If you are not buying anything else,

go." That would never happen to older people. We need to be clear that that type of differential and discriminatory treatment is unacceptable. We have the opportunity to lead the way on this issue, alongside Australia, and show that, when we talk about being against age discrimination, we mean it across the board and do not discriminate against a whole age group in our society.

Mrs Hale: I thank Members for the detailed debate on this important issue, especially for anyone who may have been subject to discrimination in the past. Although I appreciate the stance taken by Sinn Féin and other Members in tabling the motion, the reason for not extending legislation to under-18s is not because of a lack of compassion, or indeed a failure to ensure protectionism to our most vulnerable citizens, but is of a most practical nature. Like every Member in the Chamber today, I want to ensure that no baby, child, young adult or older person is discriminated against in any walk of life. However, this is not the legislation in which to do that.

There remain many challenges in children's rights, including tackling negative societal attitudes, but, like our colleagues in Westminster, I do not believe that discrimination legislation is the most appropriate way to resolve either of the issues or to protect the well-being of children and young people.

To illustrate that, it is worth summarising some of the important reasons why I and my party colleagues believe strongly in applying the legislation only to those aged 18 and over. Mr Moutray, in proposing the amendment, spoke of the UK Equality Act 2010 and the Republic of Ireland's Equal Status Act 2000 and Equality Act 2004, both of which apply to over-18s. Mr Nesbitt, the Chair of the OFMFDM Committee, asked whether it was appropriate to extend the provision to under-18s.

First, legislation aimed at including under-18s would require numerous complex and comprehensive exception clauses just to ensure that all different treatments for ages nought to 18 could be exempted with clarity. That would require so many exceptions that the same legislation would be rendered virtually meaningless as it would fail to address discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services and, as my colleague Mr Robinson stated, our commitment in the Programme for Government.

Secondly, it would lead to many problems for service providers as they would be forced to move to a position of standardisation across all

services and all age groups or withdraw totally from providing the service.

Thirdly, it is vital to note that children are not an homogenous group, which creates a number of problems in its own right. If a baby is given the same rights as a 16-year-old, how can we begin to legislate on graduate schemes without discriminating? Indeed, it would be interesting to see what the legal position of parents would be if a child felt that his or her family was denying his or her right to services, goods and facilities?

Finally, the most important point was made by my colleague Mr Moutray, who said that, if the motion went unchallenged, it would remove the ability to set services in an age-appropriate way. It seems ludicrous that the wording of the motion would make it impossible to offer different levels of service or services tailored to the various age spectrums depending on their personal need.

It is clear that, although the motion is well meant, Sinn Féin's rationale is misguided. The motion could lead to significant negative consequences. If left unchallenged, it could lead to the ending of age-appropriate services, but, most notably, it could hinder this Government in trying to support and help the very young people whom we wish to protect. I welcome the very sensible and pragmatic amendment to the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and oppose the amendment. My colleague Megan Fearon concentrated on the impact of the legislation on younger people, so, for obvious reasons, I will concentrate on its impact on older people.

There is a Programme for Government commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. It was hoped that, after consultation, legislation would be completed by 2014-15. On 25 September 2012, junior Minister Jennifer McCann said:

"The equality agenda is about fairness. That is equal treatment and equal opportunity. We want everyone to have the opportunity to realise their full potential. One way we can do this is by ensuring that people are treated fairly regardless of their age."

Junior Minister Bell stated, on the same day:

"Inequalities do exist and we will continue to work hard to eliminate inequalities. The

Programme for Government includes a commitment to make it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of age, for the provision of goods, facilities and services."

Mr McCarthy: I am very grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it is rather disappointing that neither Jonathan Bell nor Jennifer McCann came to the Chamber today? We can understand the First Minister and deputy First Minister not being here as they are away on business, but the junior Ministers might well have appeared in the Chamber today.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention.

An independent report titled 'Making Older People Equal: Reforming the Law on Access to Services' focused on older people, but it highlighted the fact that any reform of the law in this area in the North must benefit people of every age. If certain age groups were excluded from protection, it would immediately undermine the principal objection to ageism, which is that treating people unequally merely because they happen to have been alive for a longer or shorter period than someone else is inherently unjust. It is important that people of all ages do not receive an inferior service or have access to a product restricted simply on the basis of their age.

Strengthening age discrimination legislation is in keeping with the overarching aims and objectives of the Executive's older people's strategy, Ageing in an Inclusive Society.

A key objective of the strategy is:

"To promote equality of opportunity for older people and their full participation in civic life, and challenge ageism wherever it is found."

Older people can and do contribute to the ongoing development of communities and society in the North as carers, volunteers, mentors, employees, employers, campaigners, and so on. Age NI believes that strategic policy responses are required to ensure that older people are able to participate at all levels in our society, and the development of a new ageing strategy presents an enormous opportunity to ensure that the rights and needs of older people here are promoted, protected and fulfilled across all aspects of society.

The strategy must be overarching and cut across all Departments. It must deliver a mainstream approach to older people's issues

while simultaneously identifying distinct policies, practices and services that are required to address concerns specific to the lives of people in later life. The removal of structural barriers such as legal discrimination is a fundamental building block to older people's increased participation. Up to 45% of people aged 65 and over are aware of instances in which older people have been treated with less dignity and respect because of their age when accessing services.

I will comment on what Members said. My colleague Megan Fearon proposed the motion and stated that it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of age. Nowhere does the proposed legislation mention 18. It should be inclusive legislation, with protection for all. She talked about the Australian model from 2004 and said that only 6.6% of complaints come from children and young people. She spoke about the restricted sale of goods to minors and about improvements to life.

She said that a quarter of the population is under 18. She talked about mental health and said that less than 8% of the health budget is spent on mental health services for young people. Other Members referred to that. She talked about anxiety disorder, and so on. She talked about the Compton report 'Transforming Your Care' and said that there is 30% less investment for children and young people than in Britain. She gave the example of a 17-year-old who was not provided with the proper services. She talked about a case that I remember well when, in 2007, a constituent of ours was refused specialist brain injury services because of age. That was later resolved.

She said that the legislation should address the attitude to young people, and she talked about some shops emitting high frequency sounds that can be heard only by children and therefore affect them. She talked about the criminal age of responsibility, the differential in the minimum wage and 16-year-olds having the right to vote.

Stephen Moutray proposed the amendment. He talked about ageing in an inclusive society and said that that would help reduce social exclusion. He talked about older persons' access to services and the need to deliver legislation within the timescale proposed. He talked about the inclusion of all ages and the Equality Act 2010. He said that legislation on goods and services in the Republic of Ireland is all for over-18s. Irrespective of what other jurisdictions may or may not do, this is an opportunity for the Assembly to be innovative with legislation.

He also talked about individuals having the right to address grievances in court. He talked about national best practice and about the Australian legislation and its inclusion of children, which he thought weakened that legislation. He then gave us some insight into his domestic discipline and how often he says no to his children. That was a subjective view on the motion and the amendment. He talked about free entry to venues for children. When you think about it, common sense has to prevail. He talked about adults, not young people, having to be asked to leave bags outside shops. As I said, common sense has to prevail.

Colum Eastwood supported the motion but not the amendment. He talked about his problems with the delay in legislation from OFMDFM and said that the legislation should extend to everyone. He said that exemptions would be easy to deal with, ensuring that young people are not wilfully discriminated against. He talked about protection for minors, where children are refused access to shops, libraries, buses and so on without justification. He said that the media and a lot of adults are guilty of stereotyping young people. He talked about the Equality Commission.

5.00 pm

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: I do not have that much time. I want to try to finish as quickly as possible.

Mike Nesbitt started with magnanimous congratulations to the Principal Deputy Speaker. He then talked about the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister welcoming the draft Programme for Government and then talked about the proposals that are yet to be dealt with. He talked about the groups that benefit most — older people and younger people — and the policy proposals coming through early in 2013. He talked about a briefing request from the Department that has been postponed. He also mentioned that Age NI is concerned with the delay and that there will be a briefing from it after Easter. He supported the motion as amended.

Chris Lyttle supported the motion but not the amendment. He talked about the disagreement between parties, and I presume that he was referring to Sinn Féin and the DUP in OFMDFM. He talked about the fact that older people represent 45% of the population and that, in many cases, they had been dealt with in a discriminatory fashion because of their age.

He outlined incidences of discrimination against young people. He does not believe that the amendment is required, and he expressed deep disappointment about OFMDFM's approach to equality. He called on OFMDFM to implement a single equality Bill.

George Robinson spoke to the amendment. He talked about retaining parity. He does not believe that people under age 18 will benefit from this legislation, but he really did not give us any reasons why. He mentioned the Australian example, which was dealt with by other Members, on the amount of complaints and so on emanating from young people. He talked about young people's needs changing rapidly, but, surely, their rights do not change. We all change, but equality and rights do not change.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Would the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Brady: Bronwyn McGahan supported the motion and talked about the need for compliance with the UN directive on goods and services. Steven Agnew supported the motion and opposed the amendment. He talked about the need for some obvious exemptions for under-18s.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Brady: Thank you. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 39; Noes 44.

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D McIlveen and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Brady and Ms Fearon.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges and endorses the Programme for Government commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that, in delivering on this commitment, the legislation affords protection to everyone regardless of age.

Adjourned at 5.17 pm.



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