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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 2 June 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Speaker's Business

The late Sir John Gorman

Mr Speaker: I was sorry to learn of the passing of Sir John Gorman. The constant theme running through Sir John's life was one of public service and dedication to the community in a variety of significant roles, from military service through to being elected in 1998, like me, as a Member of this House. Sir John was an affable and thoughtful person, and, as Deputy Speaker, he attracted the same huge respect across the entire Chamber as he did in the wider community. I express my sincere condolences, on behalf of the whole Assembly, to his family and many friends and, of course, to the Ulster Unionist Party.

As we have done in the past on these occasions, I will call a representative of each of the parties to pay tribute to our late friend and colleague Sir John Gorman.

Mr Nesbitt: Indeed, we gather to pay tribute not only to a former Member of this House but to a public servant of the highest calibre, a business leader of true stature and a soldier whose feats of derring-do were simply legendary. To say that Sir John lived a full life hardly cuts it. He was a war hero at 21 years of age, decorated with a Military Cross for his actions at Normandy as a tank commander with the Irish Guards. After the war, he was a district inspector in the RUC before going into the private sector and pursuing a career with the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC). He then returned home to continue service, heading up the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Institute of Directors (IOD).

As if that was not enough, in 1996, he was elected to the Northern Ireland Forum and served as chairman. In 1998, he was elected to this Chamber as an MLA for North Down and went on to become a Deputy Speaker. He had a full and varied life of service, a life woven from threads throughout the island of Ireland.

John Gorman was born in Omagh on 1 February 1923, but his family roots were in Tipperary on his father's side and County Cork on his mother's. Both parents were unionists and Catholic, a faith to which he remained true all his days. His father served in the Irish Guards during the First World War. On his return, he joined the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). He was present for the handover of Phoenix Park barracks to no less a person than Michael Collins before he transferred to the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

John was a boarder at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen but soon found himself in the Irish Guards armoured division and in the thick of the action in Normandy, where he famously used his Sherman tank to ram a German Royal Tiger tank, an action for which he received the Military Cross and the French Croix de Guerre, as well as appearing on the cover of 'The Victor' boys' magazine. He went on to participate in the liberation of Belgium and Holland through Arnhem, northern Germany and on to Denmark.

In 1998, every Member of the first Assembly was invited to Brussels for a familiarisation trip on the European Union. Those on the coach from the airport will never forget the moment when the city came into view and Sir John uttered the simple, factual words:

"Last time I was here, I was liberating the city from Nazi Germany."

Over the weekend, I came across a photo of Sir John posing with another military hero Captain Doug Beattie — another holder of the Military Cross — at an event in Killyleagh to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the poppy appeal. Sir John was one of a number of speakers who recounted their war exploits. Of course, he stole the show.

After the war, in 1946, Sir John's next stop was Enniskillen and the RUC. While training, I believe that he and some colleagues managed to build a poteen still and indeed to present a bottle to Princess Elizabeth at their passing out

parade. When asked about it and the aftermath, he used the famous phrase, "There was a frightful row."

After passing out, he served in north Antrim. It was during that period that he met his wife, Heather. In 1979, he became deputy chairman and chief executive of the Housing Executive. Indeed, he was so successful in that role that one politician — now the First Minister of this House — referred to him as the "acceptable face" of the Housing Executive.

In the mid-1980s, he became director of the Institute of Directors. I had the privilege of working with him and the IOD's then chairman, Sir George Quigley. Sir John and Sir George commanded the respect of the business community north and south of the border. Together, they promoted a focus on cross-border trade with the novel concept of an eastern economic corridor from Belfast to Dublin and beyond. After all that, he decided to enter politics.

The last time that I saw him was at a branch meeting of the Ulster Unionist Party in Killyleagh. He was 90 years of age and barely mobile. He said that he was there simply to support me. I was humbled by that gesture. In his death, I am more determined to deliver better politics in his memory. He was truly one of a kind.

John Gorman: Ulsterman, Irishman, soldier, businessman, politician, public servant and the public's friend, husband, father and grandfather. What a man. What a life.

Mr Weir: It was with sadness that I learnt of the death last week of my friend and former colleague Sir John Gorman. I had the great honour and privilege of serving alongside Sir John, first in the Northern Ireland Forum and latterly in the first term of the Northern Ireland Assembly, to which Sir John was elected for the constituency of North Down. As the only representative from North Down who has been here since 1998, I welcome the valuable contribution that he made to the life of the constituency.

Sir John came late to politics. Mention has been made that he took his first elected office in the Northern Ireland Forum at the age of 73. In many ways, that was typical of the man. Mention has been made that he packed several lifetimes into one life.

Mention has been made of Sir John's service throughout the post-war period, in BOAC, the Institute of Directors and the Housing Executive

before he entered politics. If there are two words that sum up John Gorman, they are "service" and "duty": he gave service to his country, and he did his duty for his fellow citizens throughout Northern Ireland. He did his best, without fear or favour, to represent them all.

Sir John Gorman was a decorated war hero. Mention has been made of the Military Cross and, later, the Croix de Guerre that he received for his actions in France and, later, Belgium. Indeed, the incident that led to the military honours that he received typified the man. Even when faced with a probably technically superior German tank, he had the courage to ram the tank and, indeed, do his duty for his country. Above all, the incident showed that, before he took any other action, he made sure that the men under him were safe. That was very much the spirit of the man.

When he came to the Northern Ireland Forum, he was, in many ways, pitched into the deep end with the Speaker's role, which was very difficult to perform, but he embraced it with aplomb. I do not think that anyone from any side of the House would say that he did not treat his roles, whether as Speaker at that stage or as Deputy Speaker later, with impartiality and good humour. Indeed, he was a friend to everyone.

Sir John Gorman was a man of great principle and strong convictions. As one who had a chequered relationship with the Ulster Unionist Party around that period, there were many occasions on which Sir John Gorman and I found ourselves on different sides of the coin in discussions or arguments. However, even when Sir John disagreed with you, he treated everyone with the utmost respect and courtesy. Above all, he was a gentleman. He gave service and devotion to his country and to his people throughout his life. He will be sadly missed. From this side of the House, I add my condolences and my thoughts and prayers to his family. We have lost a great man in the past week, and we all mourn his passing.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I want to add my condolences and regrets on the passing of John Gorman to his family, family circle and friends.

I got to know the man, in the first instance, at the Forum and, subsequently, in the first mandate of the Assembly. Previously, when I was an elected representative in Derry City Council, I exchanged correspondence with him, but I never had the opportunity or the pleasure of meeting the man because I normally worked

through the local district office. However, in all our remote and personal exchanges, I found him to be someone who was prepared to listen and to engage.

I thought that John Gorman was the epitome of the type of person needed during the dramatically changing situation in the period from 1996 to 1998 and the establishment of the Assembly. There were tremendous challenges and difficulties, and, quite often, that resulted in considerable acrimony and perhaps more heat than light, not unlike today's circumstances. However, he always managed to keep his cool and to keep the lines of communication open. I think that he embraced, completely and absolutely, the changes that had to come. He recognised that that might be more difficult for some than it was for him, and he was prepared to give example and leadership. For that, I will always fondly remember him. I took a lot of sustenance from it. At times, it was very easy to get depressed and concerned about whether we could eventually bridge our differences, but John Gorman showed that it could be done. I think that that is the lasting testimony to his vision, commitment and strength of character.

Dr McDonnell: With a sense of loss, I, too, pay tribute to Sir John Gorman and offer my condolences to his family and friends. I also pay tribute to the massive contribution that he made to society and to his total commitment to public service.

12.15 pm

As others have said, he was larger than life — much, much larger. He had a glowing military career, and many of his exploits are still renowned. Indeed, the Brussels story is legendary, and I can vouch for it because I was on the bus when he made that statement. There are very few of us left — the founders of the House. He was there with us and very matter-of-factly made his statement and said, "The last time I was here, I came to lead the liberation." Some were very nonplussed at that, but the rest of us were all very plussed.

Subsequently, he was an exceptionally professional policeman and district inspector, and provided total commitment to public service in that role. When he went into business, he was involved with BOAC and the whole airline business. He then moved to the Housing Executive and, later, to the IOD.

John came late to politics. He came to the House when we were elected in 1998 and, for a time, was a distinguished Member. He acted

as Deputy Speaker and was outstanding in that role. I consider it a privilege to have known him and to have shared his company on many occasions. Sir John reached a ripe age; I will not say "old age" because he was always young. He had a great life, and I think all of us are unlikely to see his like again. We thank him for the memories and pray to God in all his mercy to look kindly on Sir John's immortal soul. May God bless you, John. You will be missed.

Dr Farry: I rise as a successor to Sir John as an MLA for the North Down constituency. However, he was clearly much more than a Member for North Down. He was very much a servant to all of Northern Ireland, and it is clear from the comments that have been made today, and, indeed, more widely outside the Chamber, that he provided that service in a range of different ways throughout his life. His life was characterised by service, whether it was what he did during the Second World War, in the police, in business, in our public bodies and, ultimately, in politics.

It is worth reflecting on some of the challenges that characterised the context in which he operated. It is noteworthy that he was serving in the Housing Executive at a time when we were moving from a situation where housing was seen as very politicised to one where the importance of integrity around housing was paramount. To have a man with such integrity heading up the Housing Executive clearly provided confidence right across the community.

He tried to make Northern Ireland an economic success at a time when there were major challenges on the security and violence front that were operating in a different direction. It was important that people tried their best to maintain Northern Ireland as a functioning economic area at those times of challenge. The actions of people such as Sir John allowed us the platform on which we can build today and, if it were not for his actions, we would be in a much worse place.

He was also, in some ways, a midwife to our political developments. As people have said, he entered politics at a late age but was sprung into some very important and sensitive roles as our peace process and political process were unfurling and we were beginning to see the way forward in the new structures. In particular, his chairing of the Forum for Political Dialogue was a critical intervention. Someone with integrity had to come forward to make that new start for us all.

In conclusion, it is also worth remarking on the fact that we are now losing more and more people from the wartime generation. The perspective that they brought to our politics and to wider society from their experiences of that war was of huge value. It points out to us the cost when things go wrong and the importance of standing up for our values and being prepared to go the full way with bravery and commitment to ensure that our values ultimately triumph over the forces of evil in this world. Ultimately, his actions when he was a very young man most characterise his legacy.

In closing, I think that it is appropriate that we pass on our condolences to his immediate family and his wider family circle.

Mr B McCrea: I rise to offer my condolences to the family and to pay my respects to Sir John Gorman. At this stage in the proceedings, a lot has already been said about the formal side of Sir John's life. People have recounted his heroism and the other contributions that he made. My reflections are of a rather more personal nature. Sir John was a district inspector in the RUC, as was my grandfather. They arrived at those posts by different means. When Sir John came out of the army, there was a fast-track process where people could be demobilised into the police, but my grandfather rose through the ranks from constable right the way up to become a district inspector. There was great debate, when those changes were going on, about what the new man was like. Those people were coming in from different places, so it caused quite a lot of discussion. When I last spoke to Sir John — I have had the privilege of talking to him on quite a number of occasions — he was quite taken about that because he had never really understood that there might be some consternation about how things would go, but he was very generous and very likeable, and we talked about a lot of things. My family was also in the services during the war, so we had a lot to talk about.

It is worth reflecting that when people pass away, the things that you are left with are the memories, and Sir John certainly left us with a lot of good memories and made a huge contribution to our society.

Mr Allister: I did not have the opportunity to become acquainted with Sir John Gorman, but from everything that I have read about him and heard about him, it is quite clear that the glowing tributes paid in the House today are deserved in respect of the very full contribution that he made to public life, right through from his very notable military career and acknowledgement of his role in Normandy and

the award of the Military Cross to his service for 17 years in the RUC through the border campaign of the IRA in the 1950s, and then his public service in a public role, followed by his political service. Few people, I suspect, will pack as much into their lives and leave as many glowing tributes as there have been today, so I am very happy to join in expressing my acknowledgement of him as a man and to convey to his family the respect and condolences of this House.

Mr Agnew: I offer my condolences and the condolences of the Green Party in Northern Ireland to the family of Sir John Gorman and the wide circle of friends and well-wishers who knew and respected the man. Personally, as an MLA, I did not know Sir John Gorman myself, but having read the achievements of his life and the many varied roles that he played, in all cases as a public servant to some degree or other, I cannot help but be humbled to occupy one of the positions that he occupied, which was that of MLA for North Down. He certainly set the bar high for the calibre of man who undertook that role. It is a standard that few of us will achieve but, certainly in representing North Down, all of us should aspire to.

As we reflect at the end of Sir John's life, I cannot help thinking that, at my stage of life, I am already somewhat behind where he would have been at a similar age, such were his achievements. Again, going forward, I hope I can pack in even a small proportion of the roles and service that he did. Having read about him and learned about him today and through the many tributes that have come, I can see what can be done with a life. We should not waste it; we are here but once. He certainly led the way in how we can serve our community and act as individuals as part of a greater effort to serve the wider society. I pay tribute to him and pass on my condolences to his family. Today, we can certainly celebrate a life well lived.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the tributes to Sir John Gorman. Before we move to the ministerial statement, I wish to inform the House that I will be absent from the House tomorrow on official Assembly business.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make the following statement on the seventeenth North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in the health and food safety sectoral format, which was held in the NSMC joint secretariat offices in Armagh on Wednesday, 30 April 2014. Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Dr James Reilly, Minister for Health. I chaired the meeting on this occasion. This statement has been agreed with Minister O'Neill, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

We had a discussion on various priorities and noted that they will be contained in a report to be considered at a future NSMC institutional meeting as part of the ongoing review into sectoral priorities. We received an update on a range of health promotion work that is ongoing across the island of Ireland. Ministers noted that the EU tobacco products directive will come into force in May 2014 and that the all-island tobacco conference, which was held in Belfast in November 2013, had allowed for the sharing of innovative ideas to benefit the health of people from both jurisdictions.

The ongoing collaborative work between the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland on the voluntary display of calorie information on menus in the catering business was discussed. It was noted that an online calorie calculator had been launched in Ireland on 9 April 2014 and that it will be made available in Northern Ireland.

Ministers also considered the issue of suicide and noted that all-island media guidelines for the reporting of suicide and self-harm have now been issued. We also noted that a joint conference, hosted by the Irish Association of Suicidology and Contact NI, had taken place in October 2013. It showcased global and local best practice in tackling suicide.

The Council welcomed the initiatives being taken forward in both jurisdictions to support mothers breastfeeding their children.

We also welcomed a presentation, "Reducing alcohol-related harm by addressing availability — Maximising the benefits from North South

co-operation", by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland. Ministers noted the key findings and recommendations from a report into that issue and agreed that officials from both jurisdictions should consider the relevant findings and take them forward as appropriate in line with their respective alcohol strategies. Ministers requested that an update on progress be provided at a future meeting.

The Council received an update on the radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin and noted that the business case process for the development of the unit continues to be progressed. Ministers were advised that officials from both jurisdictions are working to finalise a memorandum of understanding and service level agreement for the operation of the unit. That work is almost complete.

We welcomed the continued progress of the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium and noted that the fifth of its series of international conferences will take place in Belfast during May 2015.

Ministers also noted the continued success of the US/Ireland R&D partnership and welcomed the approval of a further project, which aims to develop a novel test for prostate cancer.

Ministers noted that the child protection work programme, which was agreed at a previous meeting, continues to be progressed and that updates will be reported to future meetings. We welcomed the development of an app to allow access to the North/South child protection hub.

The Council noted a progress report provided by the chief executive of Safefood. Ministers were briefed on the continued development of the awareness campaign targeting childhood overweight issues and obesity and noted the success of the international food safety conference, which was held in Queen's University Belfast. We also noted a range of reports and surveys completed by Safefood in recent months.

Ministers took the opportunity to thank the outgoing chief executive of Safefood, Martin Higgins, for his work in the Food Safety Promotion Board over the years and wished him well for his retirement.

12.30 pm

The Council was advised that Safefood had prepared a draft 2014-16 corporate plan and 2014 business plan. Those plans are progressing through the approval process, and

they will be submitted to the NSMC for final approval in due course. The Council considered a report on nutrition surveillance on the island of Ireland prepared by the Safefood scientific advisory committee. Ministers noted the recommendations from the report on an all-island approach to nutritional surveillance. We noted the progress to date in recruiting a new chief executive for the Food Safety Promotion Board and approved the proposal to install an acting chief executive, if required. Ministers also approved the proposal to reduce the salary of the CEO, subject to the agreement of the Finance Ministers.

Finally, we agreed that the next NSMC health and food safety meeting will be held in autumn 2014.

Mr Wells (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I apologise on behalf of the Chair, who has been delayed. I am sure that, had she been here, she would have raised the issue of the radiotherapy centre in Altnagelvin in Londonderry. I welcome that the Minister has discussed it with Dr Reilly in the Irish Republic. Will he put a bit more flesh on the bones? It is an incredibly important project that will bring considerable benefits to cancer sufferers throughout the north-west of Northern Ireland and counties Donegal and Sligo. It would be very helpful if he would bring us up to date with the progress with the scheme. Can he give us a definite date of when it will be open and used by the people of the north-west?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for raising what is a very important issue. We recognised that it had to be dealt with at the outset. Therefore, we were delighted to give the go-ahead for the facility. It remains on target to become operational in 2016. Key things are happening on that front. Various pieces of work need to be carried out at the Altnagelvin site, including the removal and replacement of some existing buildings. That preparation work has to be done. The business case and memorandum of understanding are nearing completion, which will allow a lot of progress to be made. Obviously, a training programme will have to be put in place for radiotherapists to carry out that important work.

The satellite facility that will be available at Altnagelvin hospital, which will cover Donegal as well, will be of significant benefit to people not just in the north-west of the Province but right across Northern Ireland. Anybody who knows people who visit the radiotherapy centre at the City Hospital will recognise that that service is very heavily used. Consequently,

had we not taken the decision to open the facility in Altnagelvin, it would have led to a circumstance in which we would not have had the capacity in Belfast to deal with cancer. There was only one logical conclusion to the recommendation, and that was approval. I am glad to say that things are working apace.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, you said that Ministers considered the issue of suicide and noted that all-island media guidelines for the reporting of suicide and self-harm have been issued. As you are aware, suicide is one of the major issues in our society, North and South. Are there plans to continue to provide an effective suicide awareness and prevention strategy on an all-island basis?

Mr Poots: Suicide is clearly something that causes major problems in both jurisdictions and right across the British Isles. However, we have different elements of suicide in that regard: in England, for example, suicide tends to be among the older population, whereas, here in Northern Ireland, it tends to be among the younger population. It is important that we identify what is specific to our area for the purposes of targeting.

As for the all-island action plan on suicide prevention, there continues to be a rolling programme of cost-effective and mutually beneficial actions to tackle suicide. Those will be public awareness campaigns; the production of guidelines for media reporting of suicide; the evaluation of assist training; the publication of the report on the all-Ireland Young Men and Suicide Project to identify a range of possible means to promote positive mental health among young men; the extension of the deliberate self-harm registry to all trust areas in Northern Ireland; and the establishment of formal arrangements for monitoring media reporting of suicide and self-harm.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the news that the NCI Cancer Consortium conference will take place in Belfast next year. I also welcome the fact that the memorandum of understanding that underpins its work has been extended twice since it was first signed in 1999. Let us hope that it can be extended again.

Dominating the conference will be the nature of the consortium's work, which is around scientific collaboration, policy analysis, treatment and diagnosis. Would the Minister care to contrast that with the lack of information available here around progressive drugs and the fact that 39

cancer drugs that are available in the UK, which have been developed as a result of some of those discussions, are not available here?

Mr Poots: We in Northern Ireland desire to have the widest range of drugs available to cover a range of clinical conditions. We have made considerable progress on that, and there are many drugs available in Northern Ireland that are not available in England. If we wish to make the provision of cancer drugs a priority, I am happy to give consideration to that. I have indicated that we may have to look at other means of raising funding for doing that, because if that were to be done purely through a cut in services, I am not aware of the Member having suggested which service he believes should be cut. Those are the difficult decisions that we have to make. If we are not to cut services elsewhere, we must look at how we can bring in funding to do that.

On a positive note, considerable research work is being carried out on cancer through the collaboration that we have at the City Hospital with Queen's University Belfast. Over 1,000 people are availing themselves of drugs that would not otherwise be available because of the close collaboration that exists through that research. Northern Ireland people are at an advantage in many circumstances when it comes to cancer treatments because of the collaboration that is taking place on cancer research between Queen's University Belfast and the Belfast Trust.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he mentioned the ongoing collaborative work between the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. Can the Minister provide us with any additional detail of discussions that may have occurred regarding illegal milk movements across the border or illegal meat movements, perhaps linked to the illegal slaughterhouse in south Armagh, both of which can endanger the public and are a threat to our high-quality food processing industry?

Mr Poots: Safefood has a scientific advisory committee, which has convened a working group of members and co-opted experts to review nutrition and surveillance activities. It has been looking at carrying out a gap analysis in that area. My Department remains in contact with the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland to see how we can ensure that food is and continues to be safe.

The transportation of milk is a fairly significant issue because milk needs to be kept in chilled

conditions. If it is being transported in vehicles that are not suited to that, it causes a risk to human health. Considerable work is being done to ensure that these illegal activities are not allowed to continue. I think that the issue around the transportation of milk will disappear very soon with the removal of quotas, but that does not mean that we should take our eye off the ball in general. When it comes to food, it is important that high standards are maintained.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his statement. Ministers noted the recommendations of the report on nutritional surveillance on the island of Ireland, but we do not know what those recommendations are. Could the Minister tell us whether any means have been identified to deal with those recommendations that are not being adhered to?

Mr Poots: We have been looking at any gaps that there might be to ensure that all the recommendations are applied. We have a vision for the future of nutrition surveillance. My Department will continue to work with the Department in the Republic of Ireland to implement the recommendations of the Safefood report.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his statement this afternoon. On the theme of nutrition, I noted that in your statement you talked about the voluntary display of calorie information on menus in catering businesses. I welcome that, as it is very useful. What more is being done to address obesity in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: There is obviously quite a bit going on. Obesity remains a major problem, and it is a problem that very often starts when people are young. Therefore, cooperation with education is particularly important. In March 2012, we launched the framework for preventing and addressing obesity and overweight in Northern Ireland. That recognises the complex nature of obesity and addresses these issues through a coordinated, integrated, cross-departmental and cross-sectoral approach that contains a range of outcomes that are designed to create an environment that will support and promote a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet and that will benefit longer-term health. One of the key challenges in overweight and obesity prevention is bringing about a behaviour change in individuals throughout all life courses, stages and settings. This framework aims to empower the population to adopt a healthier

lifestyle. So, that is a course of work that continues.

As regards prevalence, 25% of children aged between 2 and 10 were classified as either overweight or obese, one fifth were classified as overweight, and 6% were classified as obese. There is no significant difference between boys and girls, by the way. So, it is very important that we get the message out to young people in particular, because, very often, young people who are overweight carry that throughout their lives. It is very important to get the messages out there, to engage in communities where obesity is a problem to ensure that there is better nutrition and diet, and to ensure that, in education circles, the right health promotion messages are going out to young people to encourage them to look after themselves.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas agus a chuid freagraí. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers. In the statement and his answer to Mr Wells, he referred to the north-west radiotherapy centre and the fact that it is now on course for delivery in 2016. He mentioned the training programme in his answer to Mr Wells. Is the Minister confident that the training places will all be filled with appropriate staff in 2016?

Mr Poots: That is certainly our aim, and a course of work will be carried out to ensure that that is the case. We are doing more and more on radiotherapy in Northern Ireland, and the standards are rising all the time. I remember being questioned about stereotactic radiotherapy, for example. Those sorts of things used to have to go to England, but a lot of them are coming back to Northern Ireland. So, the quality of radiotherapy that we are able to provide continues to improve. Therefore, it is important that we have the appropriate training in place. I believe that it is a very attractive career option for individuals. It is certainly a career option that will provide great rewards, because, in later years, they will meet many people who have had some role in saving their lives.

Mr Dunne: I also thank the Minister for his statement. What potential is there for a cross-border air ambulance between Northern Ireland and the Republic? I think that we all recognise and have no doubt that such a service would have potential, especially in the aftermath of accidents or major incidents.

12.45 pm

Mr Poots: Yes, and speaking of air ambulances and major incidents, I think that it would be good to remember the loss of many people from this country on the Mull of Kintyre 20 years ago today. Some 25 people lost their life in that incident. They were people who served their country faithfully and well, and they were an immense loss to it.

Both Minister Reilly and I have a major desire to progress this and get to the point at which an air ambulance is available. The conditions have changed considerably since I first took office. In the first instance, running an air ambulance that crosses into the Republic of Ireland would help to reduce the cost burden to us. Also, the fact that Altnagelvin hospital will have a 24/7 cath lab available later this year is critical. It is important for people in, for example, west Fermanagh, to be able to travel to that unit and have the work carried out as quickly as possible. An air ambulance would be greatly beneficial in that respect.

The air ambulance would be available right across Ireland, but the fact that we will have the 24/7 cath labs in place increases the quality of the business case for bringing one to Northern Ireland. It is a matter of ongoing discussions, and we are working closely with officials on the matter, but it is believed that there would be significant benefits in having an air ambulance available to the population here in Northern Ireland.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the statement to the House. I want to follow on from a question by Mickey Brady. The relationship between self-harm/suicide, and alcohol/ substance abuse is relevant across all of our constituencies, as are the emotions raised, particularly among families who have lost loved ones. I am reminded that the North/South Parliamentary Forum had a plenary meeting recently, and those two matters were subject to debate by politicians on both sides of the border. Will the Minister outline to the House what action plan there will be to look at best practice on the alcohol and substance abuse related to self-harm and suicide in order to try to address the issue?

Mr Poots: Alcohol abuse continues to be a major issue for us. We continue to have considerable numbers of people drinking excessively. It is not a case of being killjoys and wanting to stop moderate drinkers from carrying out their activities, but there seems to be a prevalence across these islands of people who drink until they are incapable of standing

up and think that that is something that should be aspired to. We need to continue to work on this on the basis of educating and giving people qualitative advice about the sensible use of alcohol.

On a North/South basis, we share many problems, and it therefore makes sense to us to explore benefits from working in partnership. A conference was held in Armagh on 26 January 2012, and the Institute of Public Health in Ireland has now established a North/South alcohol policy advisory group, which has been looking at a number of issues and presented a paper on alcohol availability to the meeting on 30 April this year. The paper will be disseminated widely, and I will ensure that the Assembly and the Committee are given copies for their consideration.

We are also looking at minimum unit pricing for alcohol. Sometimes, alcohol is sold at a cheaper price than bottled water, for example, or soft drinks. I believe that minimum unit pricing may be a means of targeting the stronger alcohol products in particular and ensuring that they are sold at a sensible price.

On a UK basis, I recently met the Ministers in Scotland and Wales, and they, too, are very keen to proceed with minimum unit pricing and to do more to tackle the scourge of alcohol abuse. So there is certainly a focus right across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and, indeed, Great Britain. We cannot afford to ignore it; we need to do more. We know that alcohol is a depressant, and many people who take their own lives are found to have a high level of alcohol in the blood when pathology testing is carried out.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, welcome the Minister's statement. He will be aware that some concerns have been raised recently over the provision of foster care services in Northern Ireland. When the Minister was speaking to his counterpart in another European jurisdiction, such as the Republic of Ireland, were there any lessons to be learned for this part of the United Kingdom?

Mr Poots: Certainly, child protection and foster care services go hand in hand. We want to promote more kinship care placements in Northern Ireland. The numbers on the child protection register have been rising. I consider that to be a sign of success rather than failure, because it is better to identify a problem than pretend it does not exist. You cannot deal with problems if you do not know that they exist. Therefore, better identification of children who are at risk is very important.

In terms of placing those children in places of safety where they can have a good-quality home life, residential care homes are not the ideal solution; we much prefer people to go into family settings but there will always be a role for residential care for children, particularly in very difficult cases. In May 2012, my Department published minimum kinship care standards, which recognise the importance of the unique role played by family and friends who are carers in the lives of children separated from their parents. We have recently completed a public consultation on fostering agency regulations and it is hoped that these new regulations will commence in the late autumn.

Other initiatives in foster care include the Fostering Achievement scheme, which was established under the children and young people's funding package in 2006 and is delivered by the Health and Social Care Board. We continue to support the Going the Extra Mile scheme, which seeks to promote continuity of living arrangements in post-care life for young people aged 18 to 21. For young people who are currently residing with foster carers or kinship carers, the scheme ensures that appropriate and agreed levels of financial support are available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of those young people.

Mr Campbell: The Minister mentioned the continuing progress in the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium. In a previous answer, he mentioned the conference forthcoming this time next year. Can he give a brief outline of progress to date?

Mr Poots: The consortium is a collaborative framework that has been in place for almost 15 years with the aim of reducing the burden of cancer. Current work focuses on five work streams which were identified in the most recent memorandum of understanding. They are: capacity building for clinical research; public health and well-being/prevention/health promotion, including population health research; nursing; palliative and end-of-life care; and survivorship. The conference we are organising in Belfast will highlight progress through research relevant to all of those work streams and their benefits for patients and the public, for policy and for healthcare service providers.

Mr Allister: I will take the Minister back to the radiotherapy centre for Londonderry. He told us in his statement that work is ongoing on the memorandum of understanding and the service

level agreement, which, presumably, will touch on how the Republic of Ireland will pay for the services. That work seems to have been ongoing now for a very long time. On the Northern Ireland side, is the decision on that only for his Department or is it an Executive decision, requiring the Executive's approval? If so, is it in danger of being caught by the logjam in the malfunctioning Executive?

Mr Poots: The decision will remain with my Department unless it is called into the Executive. Therefore, I do not expect or anticipate that there will be a logjam. I am not particularly interested in establishing straw men when we are dealing with cancer issues. I do not think that there will be a problem or an issue in taking forward this very important initiative, which will ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland will receive quality cancer care and will be of assistance to people who live on the border with Northern Ireland.

Committee Business

Social Security (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S. R. 2014/133): Prayer of Annulment

Mr Speaker: As is normal with debates on legislation, there will be no time limit for this debate. As a valid petition of concern was presented on Friday 30 May in relation to the motion, the vote will be on a cross-community basis.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Social Security (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (S. R. 2014/133) be annulled.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Committee for Social Development first considered the Department's proposal to make the Social Security (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations at its meeting on 6 March. At that stage, the Committee was not content for the regulations to proceed and deferred consideration until the Department was able to brief it and provide further clarification.

Departmental officials briefed the Committee at its meeting on 20 March, but, if anything, certainly in the minds of a number of members, that briefing raised more questions than answers. The Committee was advised that most applicants will have to satisfy a habitual residency test for income-related benefits. That test has two strands: proving that applicants have a right to reside — a legal right to live here and claim certain benefits; and proving that they intend to settle here for the time being and secure habitual residence.

Members noted that a three-month residency rule was introduced on 1 January 2014, which applies to European Economic Area (EEA) jobseekers and nationals returning from abroad. That requires evidence of how long applicants have been living in the UK or common travel area and will require them to have lived here for at least three months before they can make a jobseeker's allowance (JSA) claim. The Committee was particularly concerned about the impact of the regulations on returning nationals and the need for them to satisfy habitual residence requirements.

At its meeting of 20 March, the Committee divided and indicated that it was not content for the regulations to be made at that time. Subsequently, at its meeting of 15 May, the Committee received the statutory rule relating to the regulations. Some members were still not convinced by the Department's explanation of the restrictions that could apply to returning nationals and the lack of clarity on the habitual residency test. For example, some members were of the opinion that the new regulations would mean that people who, for instance, had been doing Church or missionary work overseas, had been involved in voluntary service overseas or had emigrated as a result of the economic conditions of the past few years will no longer be treated as satisfying the habitual residency requirements immediately, or very soon after, their return to the North. Indeed, it is the view of the Law Centre that the three-month rule is much more likely to affect returning UK or Irish nationals than EEA nationals, given that EEA nationals rarely make successful claims for JSA within the first three months of arriving here.

Departmental officials have advised the Committee that the regulations are intended to make changes to a number of income-related benefit regulations and to provide clarity and consistency in the way that an EEA national's right of residency is determined for benefit purposes. In short, we are told, the aim is to prevent so-called benefit tourism, although no evidence has been produced to substantiate the extent of that or, indeed, to show whether it exists at all. Indeed, in an extensive report by a consultancy on behalf of the European Commission, it was clear that employment is the key driver for intra-EU migration and that the budgetary impact of benefit claims on national welfare budgets is indeed very low. The greater effect of the regulations, therefore, will be felt by returning nationals.

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

I do not believe that any members of the Committee want anything but a fair benefits system. That has been quite clear throughout all the discussions over the past couple of years. They want a fair benefits system that is transparent and that has clear criteria for applicants to meet. I do not believe for one second that anybody wants a system that is open to abuse. However, in creating a fair system, our approach should not be reactive to the almost hysterical projections of the number of immigrants who we are told are intending to come here to settle on the back of what is described as a generous welfare system, or the idea that immigrants are somehow treated

better by the welfare system than our local nationals and that, therefore, we need a more stringent regime to prevent this. This is a false notion, and it is wrong. We need to be reflective, not reactive, when it comes to this complex area.

In conclusion, in attempting to address the unsubstantiated claims about EEA nationals and their impact on the welfare system, the regulations are, paradoxically, far more likely to impact on returning nationals.

1.00 pm

Departing from my comments as the Chairperson of the Committee to speak as a party representative, I think that Members should reflect on this prayer of annulment. I ask Members to reflect on how they would like to try to explain to their constituents why they were prepared to support regulations that are more likely to impact on their returning relatives than any notional EEA immigrants. I think that I would have a hard time explaining that one. I therefore ask the House to support the Committee motion to annul this regulation.

Ms P Bradley: I rise to speak against this prayer of annulment. As the Chair of the Committee stated, when the proposed statutory rule was brought before the Committee on 6 March 2014, all members, including me and my party colleagues, were in agreement that this should be brought back to the Committee for a full explanation in order to satisfy members before the rule would be made. On 20 March, we received a briefing from the Department, and what appeared to be the main concern highlighted by the majority of members was that of persons from the United Kingdom returning home to Northern Ireland after working or living abroad, and how this statutory rule would affect them. The DSD officials explained that all persons entering Northern Ireland would be subject to the same tests in relation to income-related benefits, albeit that it might be easier for someone originally from the United Kingdom to satisfy the habitual residency test.

However, the statutory rule is in no way to be aligned to issues concerning immigration but is quite simply to determine whether someone is habitually resident in order to receive income-related benefits. As part of the Government's economic plan from Westminster, we want to ensure that those with the right to be in Northern Ireland and who plan to contribute to the economy can make a claim on this benefits system.

Mrs D Kelly: I rise on behalf of the SDLP to support the prayer of annulment. As a member of the Social Development Committee, I was immediately concerned about the adverse impact that this would have on people returning to Northern Ireland, whether they were young people who had left these shores to seek work elsewhere or people who had worked in churches or, indeed, gap year students. I believe that the British Government, without great consideration, rushed these regulations through in Westminster in advance of the deluge of people who were anticipated to be coming to these shores from Bulgaria and Romania. As we all know, that never materialised.

These regulations are supposed to target any people who would want to abuse the system and who would be called benefit tourists. There are no examples or rationale. The evidence has not stacked up in relation to that. I think that we should all be very mindful, in particular, of the young people who have left these shores and who will be adversely impacted by these regulations, should they remain on our statute books. I support the prayer of annulment and oppose the introduction of these regulations.

Mr Copeland: I welcome the opportunity to make a few brief comments on this prayer. First, however, I want to wish the Minister well after his recent fall on the campaign trail. To paraphrase, I suppose that he did experience the rough and tumble of politics. I wish him a speedy and successful recovery.

On today's statutory rule, let me say that, on the whole, I and my party understand why it would be preferable if the IRB regulations were to refer to the immigration EEA regulations rather than the directive, as at present. I voted against this rule on 20 March and will vote for the prayer of annulment today because, in my opinion, there are still too many questions remaining unanswered on the wider issue of how the habitual residency test will look in the future.

Everyone in the Chamber will understand, I hope, why such a test is necessary: whether it is to cut down on so-called benefit tourism or ensure that only people genuinely in the country receive support. The test, I think, must be fit for purpose. Whilst the changes to the test will apply to all EEA nationals, people from Northern Ireland, who may have worked or lived abroad up to a certain point, will, or may be, impacted by these changes. We need to understand that people sometimes leave the country for a whole range of reasons: they may have been offered short-term employment; they

may take a few months out to do voluntary work — and the latter, in particular, can occur quite often across the church sector; and, sadly, people can leave and return hastily following the breakdown of family or business relationships. Essentially, there is a whole range of circumstances to be considered. The changes to the residency test have removed the flexibility to treat claimants within a reasonable time of returning to Northern Ireland.

I will cite the example of an individual in my constituency who went on holiday to Tenerife and stayed on for just over six months. When he returned, he found that he was excluded from any support from the system to which he had financially contributed for almost all of his working life, despite the fact that he maintained his home, which he is purchasing in Northern Ireland, and had returned twice during the six-month period. We need more clarity from the Department, and that, in my opinion, was not totally forthcoming from the meetings on 6 and 20 March.

On a wider issue, I must express concern at the repeated use of the petition of concern mechanism in matters of this type. My party and I will be supporting the Committee motion.

Mr Dickson: I also support the prayer of annulment, and I do so because of the real concerns that have emerged, particularly, as others have remarked, on the effect on UK and Irish citizens returning to Northern Ireland from working, studying or volunteering abroad.

The regulations may seem quite innocuous, but they have the potential to have a detrimental effect on many citizens. I believe very strongly in parity between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, but we should not just parrot regulations, and we have the opportunity ourselves to scope out the reality of regulations. Therefore, that is why I believe that it is not appropriate to introduce the regulations at this stage. They are being put forward to combat what has been termed as benefit tourism, yet, when you examine the issue, there is very little evidence to suggest that this is a problem in Northern Ireland, let alone throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. Indeed, last year, an EU Commission report found that mobile EU citizens are less likely to receive disability and unemployment benefits in most countries studied, including the United Kingdom. The regulations, therefore, are designed to tackle a problem that is not a problem, but they will have a significant impact, as others have said, on UK and Irish citizens.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: Sure.

Mr Wilson: I take the point that the Member makes that this may not be a huge issue in Northern Ireland at present. However, it is an issue for other parts of the United Kingdom. Does he accept that if the regulation here is different to other parts of the United Kingdom, the problem could shift from other parts of the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland, hence the reason for uniformity?

Mr Dickson: Mr Speaker, on many issues, I would not disagree with the comments from Mr Wilson with regard to the matter. However, as I have just said, the reality is that not only is it not a problem, with respect to benefit tourism, in Northern Ireland, the statistics show that it is not a problem in the rest of the United Kingdom. While there may be circumstances where it is important to take the comments into account, the reality, with respect to this particular regulation, does not fit with the comment that has been made.

We have heard reference to how those working abroad for short periods could be affected. For example, many people from Northern Ireland go and work in marine security or the oil industry, which puts them in a similar situation when they return to Northern Ireland or any other part of the United Kingdom.

Many people who have attempted to find work in the United Kingdom go abroad to find alternative employment in other countries. As an example, I can quote a teacher who went to South Korea to teach English. They continued to pay their income tax in the United Kingdom but would be denied benefits on their return. We have already heard of the difficult and distressing circumstances of family breakdown, and in those circumstances a speedy return to the United Kingdom is required for the family member. To add additional pressures in relation to benefits is unfair and unreasonable.

As I have said, this prayer of annulment would break parity; but, under devolution, it sometimes feels appropriate to do so in these matters. In this limited context, I believe that that is the right course of action. It is important to note that we could implement similar measures at any time, were it deemed necessary, to take up Mr Wilson's point. Given the serious concerns raised, we should pass this prayer of annulment and make sure that we give the appropriate scrutiny and consideration that is deserved.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I have listened with interest to all the Members who spoke in the debate, and I thank them all for their input.

As Minister with responsibility for social security matters, I will take a few minutes to provide a brief background and to outline the purpose of the regulations we are discussing here today. Perhaps, when I have finished speaking, it will be evident to everyone why voting to annul the regulations would not be the right thing to do.

Firstly, I will explain what is meant by habitual residence. Most people who apply for welfare benefits have to satisfy what is known as the habitual residence test in order to claim income-related benefits. The requirements for satisfying this test are set out in each of the income-related benefit regulations. To meet the conditions of the test, persons must prove, firstly, that they have a right to reside in the United Kingdom in accordance with immigration legislation and, secondly, that they intend to settle in the United Kingdom, Isle of Man, Channel Islands or Irish Republic, and make it home for the time being. That is known as habitual residence.

A person has the right to reside if, for example, they are looking for work, are self-employed, a jobseeker or a student or have sufficient resources for them and their family members not to become a burden on the social-assistance system. The right to reside element of the test ensures that economically inactive migrants have no entitlement to income-related, social assistance-type benefits.

A British citizen who has recently returned to the United Kingdom after a period living outside of the common travel area may also have to show that they satisfy the habitual residence test in order to claim certain benefits. They would be subject to the test if they had broken their links to the United Kingdom by, for example, having been on a very extended holiday or a gap year or, indeed, if they had spent many years away and no longer have property or any close family in the United Kingdom.

Prior to the introduction of the Social Security (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations, the EEA legal right of residence — ie the right of citizens of the European Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states — was defined, for income-related benefit legislation, with reference to European directive 2004/38/EC. However, the Home Office transposed this directive into the Immigration

(European Economic Area) Regulations and subsequently amended the regulations to create a new statutory presumption that, from 1 January 2014, an EEA national's right to reside as a jobseeker or retained worker in the United Kingdom will cease after six months, unless they can prove that they are actively seeking work and can demonstrate that they have a genuine prospect of getting a job.

It is intended that only those with a legal right to be in the United Kingdom and who plan to contribute to the economy, as demonstrated by their intention to secure employment, can make a claim for benefit. Therefore, the purpose of the regulations that we are debating here today is to ensure consistency in defining the EEA national's legal right of residence for benefit purposes.

It is crucial that our legislation makes reference to the UK's Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations rather than the directive because, as you will know, the Home Office is ultimately responsible for immigration issues.

1.15 pm

While the regulations are consequential in nature, I hope you will now understand the importance of ensuring that our income-related benefit legislation reflects the immigration law as it stands. I recognise that some who spoke during the debate have real concerns regarding the overall immigration issue and the impact it could have on our benefit system. I would caution, however, that concerns around immigration policy are not relevant in this debate.

While social security is a transferred matter, Assembly colleagues will be only too well aware that immigration and issues regarding UK residency are in themselves considered excepted matters and remain the exclusive competence of the Westminster Parliament. Therefore, irrespective of whether we vote to annul these regulations today, the wider policy regarding the rules that are applied to EEA nationals' entitlement to reside will remain and be applied on a UK-wide basis and within the same time frames.

I, therefore, hope that Members will be persuaded that these regulations merely ensure consistency in defining an EEA national's legal right of residence for benefit purposes in our income-related legislation. I advise Members also to take account of the point that was well made by Sammy Wilson about the dangers and possible implications of getting in some way out

of step with the rest of the United Kingdom. Therefore, I urge Members to reject this prayer of annulment.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the prayer of annulment. I will put into context the issue of habitual residence. The habitual residence test was introduced in 1995 by Tory Minister Peter Lilley. A lot of people at that time regarded it as a form of xenophobia. I am convinced that there was an element of that in it.

When it was introduced, there was flexibility in the test. We have been talking about people from here returning after working or living abroad, and there was a lot of flexibility in the sense that, because of commissioners' decisions at that time, there was no set time for how long a person had to be here. Commissioners' decisions at that time stated that, the longer you were here, the more habitually resident you became, so a person could be here for a week, a fortnight or month and be considered as being habitually resident and benefit could be paid.

This legislation has now put in a three-month rule, so it does not matter whether you are habitually resident or not — you will not get benefit for three months. It is a fairly extreme measure. Michael Copeland mentioned the petition of concern. Sammy Wilson is saying that we should be led by the nose all the time and fall into line with what is happening in the rest of Britain, even if people from here who are coming back are affected by this test.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. The point I was making, and I would like to hear his response to it, was that, if we have a different arrangement here from what pertains in the rest of the United Kingdom, in other words, there is no uniformity, those who wish to escape the habitually resident definition in the rest of the United Kingdom will naturally gravitate towards Northern Ireland, so we become the repository of those who want to avoid the security regulations here in Northern Ireland, with all the other problems that that causes: demand for housing, schools, jobs etc.

Mr Brady: I —

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure the Member will agree that, given the latest increase in racist abuse and attacks, it would be more likely that people from other EU states will want to leave these shores rather than return to pick up a few benefits that will keep them on or below the poverty line.

Mr Brady: I thank both Members for their interventions. In response to Mr Wilson, I will say that he need not be that worried that we will be flooded with "benefits tourists", because, as was pointed out, that is not necessarily a problem. When the Pensions Act was coming through, the Department told us that we would be in danger of being flooded by people from Wales coming to live here because they might get better pensions terms. It is a ridiculous proposition, and I think that it needs to be put in its intended context. Obviously, we will not be flooded, either now or in the near future. Given recent events, I imagine that people will think long and hard about coming to live here, particularly those from abroad.

Paula Bradley acknowledged —

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Brady: Yes.

Mr Maskey: Following on from the suggestion from one Member that departing in any way from parity would result in a flood of people coming here, why did that Member consider supporting the notion that we would seek split payments under universal credit and other deviations from what is supposed to be happening in Britain? If the Member can support split payments and not see that as something that would open the floodgates, why can he not see the logic of rejecting this particular SR? There is no evidence that doing so will lead to an opening of the floodgates. I am just following his logic.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention. He is quite right.

Going back to what Paula Bradley said, and I will get there eventually, because I am sure that she just cannot wait to hear what I am going to say. Paula Bradley acknowledged that all Members were not originally content with the regulations. She said that these are not directly related to more general immigration issues; rather, they are based on habitual residency.

We talked about habitual residency, and it is the rigid application of the three-month rule that is the issue. My view is that it is purely a technical way for the Department to make it easier to do claims. It would be a much fairer system to take each claim as it came in, as used to happen. For instance, if somebody was coming back from America, they had to show their passport, a one-way ticket, they had to be registered with the Housing Executive for a house and they had to show that their children

were registered with schools. So, each case was taken on its merits, which, to me, seemed a much fairer way of doing it. Paula Bradley was opposed to the prayer of annulment.

Dolores Kelly is concerned about the impact on those who have gone to work overseas or who are on a gap year etc. She stated that there is no benefit tourism and supported the prayer of annulment.

Michael Copeland raised a number of issues and said that there were outstanding matters that needed to be clarified. He referred to the habitual residency test and its applicability in particular to residents from here who are coming back from abroad. He said that flexibility has been removed from the test and that there are significant issues to be resolved. He was concerned about the petition of concern.

Stewart Dickson said that, although this legislation may be seen as innocuous, it could have a negative effect on citizens from here who are returning. He said that there was little evidence of benefit tourism and that the test was designed to tackle a problem that does not currently exist. He said that citizens from here who were working abroad could be affected when they return home, and he said that there could be an impact when there is a family breakdown. He supports the prayer of annulment.

The Minister explained the habitual residency test and the concept of the right to reside. He also explained that returning residents, including UK and Irish citizens, would be subject to habitual residency tests. He described the importance of the regulations in the context of immigration law to some Members but cautioned that they were not relevant to the debate.

We covered habitual residence, and I think that it is accepted that benefit tourism is a phrase that has been coined to reinforce the imposition of this kind of draconian legislation. I support the prayer of annulment. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 56; Noes 37.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Ms Fearon, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

UNIONIST:

Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr F McCann.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms P Bradley and Mr Clarke.

Total Votes 93 Total Ayes 56 [60.2%]

Nationalist Votes 38 Nationalist Ayes 38 [100.0%]

Unionist Votes 49 Unionist Ayes 12 [24.5%]

Other Votes 6 Other Ayes 6 [100.0%]

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Private Members' Business

Education: Area Planning Process

Mr 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 to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Kinahan: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses serious concern regarding the ongoing area planning process in the education sector; notes the critical comments made in the Justice Treacy judgement on area planning and integrated education; further notes that the current process places no formal recognition or promotion of greater sharing between schools and sectors; believes that decisions made now will determine the shape of the education system for many years to come; and calls on the Minister of Education, in the absence of either an Education and Skills Authority or the reconstitution of education and library boards, to suspend the current area planning process until there is clarity on the future strategic management of schools, and a long-term vision for education in Northern Ireland is agreed.

I welcome this timely opportunity to debate the effects that Judge Treacy's decision on Drumragh Integrated College will have on the Minister's area planning policy. As the motion states, we call for the suspension of the current area planning process until there is clarity on the future of the strategic management of schools and an agreed long-term vision for education in Northern Ireland.

It seems that we have a mess in the education system, whether it is the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), assessment, common funding, and even the lack of improvement in examination results as announced last week, as well as many other fields. Most of that failure comes down to the Minister's continual failure to understand the idea of consensus or, indeed, the whole basis of the Belfast Agreement, which relies so forthrightly on consensus and agreement between all parties.

Only last week, we saw the new ESA being publicised before it has even reached the Executive. There does not seem to be any sign of hope that consensus or agreement is the way forward. However, I hope that all that has changed and that the Minister changes that in the future. The Ulster Unionist Party will keep trying to do what it is right for Northern Ireland.

Today, we highlight the need for clarity on what Justice Treacy's judgement means for the present area planning policy. As usual, it is hard to interpret exactly what the judgement means. When considering the article 64 duty, he seems to clarify that the type of integrated education that is to be supported is integration between Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils, as opposed to integration in school of any set of pupils:

"the provision plainly envisages education together at the same school ... and not education that is delivered by a partisan Board ... Using an analytical tool to plan for an area is of course acceptable and necessary, however the inflexibility of the projections used will have the effect of making it difficult to accommodate the Article 64 duty in future day to day decisions. The Department needs to be alive to the Article 64 duty at all levels, including the strategic level."

That court ruling seems to blow the Minister's plans out of the water, and we need to go back to square one.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. I totally agree with a lot of what he said, but does he not see there being one danger, in that the longer we delay proper area planning, the greater the danger that Justice Treacy's ruling will be used to expand one particular sector at the expense of all other sectors and, indeed, make area planning even more difficult?

Mr Kinahan: Thank you. I partially agree with what has been said: it will certainly make it more difficult, and we must avoid trying to prefer one sector over the other. At the same time, I think that it is important to make it absolutely clear that these decisions will affect the long term. When we talk about the long term, we are talking of 30, 40 or 50 years, so we have to get it right. It is better to go through the battles now to get it right, and then we will take it from there.

To go back to the judgement, any decision that ignores the wish for increasing the number of pupils integrating, or any decision that takes an

action that makes it more difficult for schools to integrate their pupils, is contrary to Judge Treacy's interpretation of article 64. The Committee awaits the legal advice.

It seems clear to me that, if you accept the Programme for Government's aim to promote shared education, any challenge to Judge Treacy's judgement is contrary to that Programme for Government aim.

We have already debated shared education on numerous occasions and learnt that it seems that neither of the two main parties wants anything more than just a handful of shared campuses. In a statement from earlier this year, the Minister quoted, I think, 18 examples of sharing. We have 1,200 schools and just 18 examples of sharing. That is a miniscule proportion. Of course, there are many great examples of ongoing sharing, many of which are unquantified. These stretch from sharing occasional sporting or cultural events to much more full-blown collaboration between teachers, principals and governors. Of course, there is the excellent work of all the area learning communities, which we seem to be ignoring more and more.

Indeed, in so many cases, our schools do share, but we must not be conned by those who tell us that we already have shared education. Schools under the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) remit have but a few Protestant pupils, and most controlled schools are mixed. However, no one can argue against there being a desperate need for a much deeper basis of sharing and integrated education. That is why the UUP's long-term policy is for a single shared education system.

1.45 pm

We also must not forget that the survey of the integrated education sector showed that over 80% of parents wanted more integration, and if you overlay that example of parental choice for integrating education on Judge Treacy's judgement, all area planning decisions should favour only closures, mergers and amalgamations that lead to the maximum integration possible for that area. If that is so, nearly all the decisions to date that do not do that are flawed and open to challenge. With no known overall area plan for Northern Ireland, little interrelation or intersectoral area planning between boards and, in most cases, very little intersectoral planning within board areas, I once again say that the whole policy is flawed.

However the judgement is interpreted, it opens up the possibility of legal challenge to area

planning throughout the whole education system, and I believe it means that all area planning must be suspended. There are some examples. In the borough of Larne, CCMS closed St Comgall's College and was allowed to amalgamate post-primary provision in a joint grammar/non-grammar campus at Garron Tower in Carnlough. That means spending £166,000 a year moving pupils 20 miles in seven buses every day when they could have built upon the excellent area learning community and involved all the post-primary schools in Larne, such as St MacNissi's, St Comgall's, Larne High, Larne Grammar and Roddensvale. That would have been sharing and integrating. That could have been a shared campus and, despite the North Eastern Education and Library Board being against it, CCMS was allowed to go ahead.

There are other examples, such as the two CCMS schools pulling out of the proposed Armagh shared campus, Immaculate Conception College in Londonderry being refused a chance to go integrated, and closures of numerous other small schools, especially CCMS schools, without integration being considered.

In Crumlin, if rumours are true, we are about to see a complete travesty, with the closure of an integrated school when over 1,000 parents in a petition said that they wanted a shared school to remain in Crumlin. When the Minister has indicated that he is for shared schools, when CCMS and the transferors have indicated that they are happy with a shared school and, indeed, when previous studies of all stakeholders two years ago showed the same, it seems extraordinary that we are about to close a school for the reason that it has lost half a million pounds due to lack of numbers, yet some 1,100 are leaving Crumlin daily to go to other schools, costing three quarters of a million pounds to the taxpayer. If we close the school, that will add another 200 pupils to the daily exodus and cost even more. In fact, we could have built the new school in the next 15 years on the same money.

There seems to be a lack of will to ensure that the school remains in Crumlin. Even if you take voluntary grammar pupils out of the equation, surely it is cheaper to keep a school in Crumlin and build on it and expand for future success rather than for ever and a day have no post-primary education in Crumlin. Hopefully the Treacy judgement, if you take into account the petition of 1,000 parents and the need for a proper survey before any decision is made, will mean that we will still have a school in Crumlin.

Many other debates have shown how the area planning policy is flawed. The terms of reference for area planning included the following two objectives:

"identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis;

maximise the use and sharing of the existing schools estate".

We do not even seem to be following those guidelines.

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

Mr Kinahan: Today, the Ulster Unionists call for area planning to be suspended, and we oppose the amendment.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert:

"recognises the need to rationalise the schools estate in a planned and managed way in the promotion of educational equality for all and that the ideal vehicle to manage area planning is the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority; further recognises that area planning can, and must, be progressed in the absence of the Education and Skills Authority for the educational well-being of children; notes that the current process allows for the promotion of sharing between sectors; and calls on all sectors to redouble their efforts to bring forward proposals for greater sharing."

I call upon all those who seek a world-class and equitable schools estate here to support our amendment this afternoon. The need to rationalise and structure our schools estate in a manner fit for the 21st century has been debated countless times inside and outside the Chamber. However, some voices remain incorrigible to the direction of travel that we have embarked upon. I doubt that it is the virtue of the arguments that is lost on them but rather that they belligerently refuse to acknowledge the need for change. Indeed, in a similar debate in the House not so long ago, the Ulster Unionist Danny Kinahan called on the DUP to block everything that the Education Minister brings forward. I have yet to see any rationale for that call other than brute-force belligerence, which will do nothing other than to

harm the educational opportunities afforded to our children and our schools. Sinn Féin representatives have repeatedly called on those opposite to bring forward proposals on a number of different educational issues if they are so opposed to the direction of travel. Today is another opportunity for alternative ideas and propositions to be outlined for all to digest. However, what we are served up is nothing but rhetoric of the finest unionist vintage. Every policy is portrayed as a Trojan Horse and every announcement greeted with sneers that should have been resigned to the history text books long ago. It should go without saying that such posturing will achieve nothing for our system. I call on those opposite to embrace the need for change and help shape a fit-for-purpose system in the interests of our young people, not the narrow political agendas of a few.

For the best part of a generation, the need to strategically manage our system and schools estate has been viewed by many as mission impossible. In an area where multiplicity rules the roost, planning a cohesive and strategic schools estate has proved a difficult task. Nonetheless, it is a challenge that successive Ministers have taken head-on in the interests of our young people.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the area planning process is continuing throughout the most difficult Budget period ever faced by this Assembly. Never before has the need to invest been balanced so finely with the need to protect the public purse. In no way is that to suggest that area planning or, indeed, the establishment of a single education authority is about making savings for savings sake; rather, this is a process of change, enabling us to maximise the value of public money and make best use of the limited resources available for the funding of our schools, so that we are able to fund a world-class system for generations to come.

Area planning allows for unprecedented investment in the schools estate, while simultaneously ensuring that we are sustaining and investing our resources in the best possible way and in the right places. The various boards, CCMS and the Minister have very difficult decisions to make, which will not always prove popular, but if we are serious about raising standards and opening up educational opportunities for our children, we must accept that we are on a journey of change.

The Minister has repeated to the House on several occasions that the central consideration in any and all proposals will be the educational benefit to the pupil of today and tomorrow. In light of that, I welcome recent assurances from

the Minister that area plans will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and reflect local circumstances for years to come.

We all accept the need to raise standards and tackle underachievement and inequality in our system. We all consider the gaps in achievement as unacceptable, but some still appear unwilling to address the issues at hand. Few could argue with the fact that, at the heart of addressing such issues, we must focus on the provision of our education services and schools estate. We simply must address the fact that we have too many schools that do not have the capacity to give our children the broad and rich educational experience they so rightly deserve. Without a determination to deliver change, we set those schools an impossible task in the delivery of our curriculum. Faced with a highly competitive and globalised workplace, our young students deserve the best possible opportunity to succeed. It is simply no longer acceptable or affordable to do nothing. An education system that stands still only serves to limit the opportunities for our young people and to dissipate our scarce resources.

The absence of ESA should not be a barrier to area planning. Undoubtedly, the task of strategically planning the school estate would be a hell of a lot easier under the stewardship of a single education authority such as ESA, but we cannot delay as those opposite might suggest. How could we possibly continue to drive up standards and tackle underachievement without an effectively planned and sustainable pattern of schools?

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: Yes.

Mr Swann: The Member keeps referring to area plans and how vital they are. I declare that I am a member of the board of governors at Ballee school. When the Minister announced the closure of that school at 2.00 pm on the Thursday of the election, there was no area plan in place and no development plan in place as to where those 200 pupils were to go. That showed a failure in area planning and the number of development proposals that were put in place so that, when the area plan comes forward for Ballymena, it is a fait accompli.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am sure that it is a specific point that the Minister —

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Will the Member take a point?

Mr Hazzard: Yes.

Mr O'Dowd: For the record, it is very important to say that the Minister did not announce at 2.00 pm on the day of the elections the closure of Ballee.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Minister for that moment of clarity.

The Ulster Unionists tell us today that we should postpone the process of change until there is widespread agreement on how to move forward, yet we have been furnished with no alternative vision. We have heard no different ideas on how to keep driving up standards in our schools. It is the same "no, nay, never" attitude that does nothing for our schools or for our young people.

The hype about an agreed way forward has been a misnomer from the start, because, after years of negotiating and horse-trading, we had, in recent months, widespread support among educationalists for the ESA structures, yet the Ulster Unionists and the DUP still objected to the revised proposals. So, let us not pretend that this is anything to do with seeking an agreed vision. It is purely political obstructionism, and it is hurting our young people each and every day that it persists.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he not see the point that the concerns relate to the lack of consistency that there is from the Minister? On one hand, a controlled school can be closed at a stroke; on the other hand, the maintained sector can go forward with plans, regardless of what the impact will be on the local area; and, on the other hand, because there are now three hands on this, the integrated sector is allowed to expand, even at the expense of some viable controlled sector schools. It is that inconsistency that has caused the concern about the whole planning process.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention, but, again, we have the exact same thing: it is all rhetoric. You have absolutely no examples of where you are talking about; this is all political rhetoric.

It is time that we engaged in constructive educational engagements inside and outside of the Assembly. We must move beyond the politics of obstruction and belligerence. If we are to send a clear signal to our schools and

our community that the Assembly can deliver a world-class system, we must work together in the interests of those we claim to serve. Suspending a process of change is not an option. We must continue to build a system that we can all be proud of — a system that delivers for each and every one of our young people.

I call on Members to support the amended motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2:00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mervyn Storey.

The debate stood suspended.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

All Saints' Nursery, Annaclone

1. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Education what steps is he taking to ensure that a temporary variation in the number of nursery places at the All Saints' Nursery Unit, Annaclone is achieved to allow for a local parish solution. (AQO 6216/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The purpose of the temporary flexibility is to address a shortage of preschool places in an area and, therefore, to help to meet the Programme for Government commitment. It is not intended to be used to meet parental preferences for a particular setting. The education and library board preschool education advisory groups are responsible for managing requests for temporary flexibility. Based on their knowledge of demand and alternative provision in each area, they can make a recommendation to DE on whether temporary flexibility would provide increased capacity to help to address a shortage of preschool places in an area.

At the conclusion of stage 2 of the preschool admissions process, the Southern Board preschool education advisory group considered the need for temporary flexibility in All Saints' Nursery Unit and recommended the approval of two additional places. The Department has approved those, and the school has been informed.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his answer. The parents will be very glad to hear that. In future, Minister, can that process be expedited so that we do not have such stressful situations?

Mr O'Dowd: We have continually reviewed our operation of preschool placements over the past number of years. Indeed, just after I came into office, my Department carried out a review of preschool education. Where there are areas in which we can improve that, I am all for it. I accept that it can be a very stressful time for parents. We are placing somewhere in the region of 23,500 children at this stage, so quite a considerable piece of work and administration is being carried out in a very tight time frame.

We are certainly continually trying to improve the administration of the preschool programme.

Elective Home Education

2. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons for the draft policy on elective home education giving greater power to education and library boards than is currently the case under section 13 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. (AQO 6217/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Legislation places specific responsibilities in the education of children other than at school on parents and the five education and library boards. That includes those who are educated at home. The boards have directly prepared guidance that reflects the existing legislative requirements, and they are consulting on it.

I consider that the consultation process provides an important opportunity for views and ideas to be provided to the boards on how they best strike the balance between ensuring that the rights and needs of the children concerned are appropriately protected and facilitating parental preference for home education. As Minister of Education, my focus is on ensuring that the needs of children and young people are met. Therefore, I have indicated that I expect the boards to ensure engagement with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, including young people and their families, as part of that consultation and to ensure that the feedback that they receive is considered very carefully in reviewing the draft guidance. I have also made it clear that I will wish to review their guidance once it has been subject to consultation and reviewed and refined in response to that engagement once it has taken place.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. He stressed that there was a legal requirement to do what he is proposing. Will you confirm that it is your view that, under the 1986 Order, there is a legal requirement, and will you explain why your predecessor said in answer to a question that there was no legal requirement for home educators to register with the library boards? In any case, do the requirements that you are laying down not go too far by having to register children, inspect homes and approve the curriculum etc? That goes far beyond what happens in England and other jurisdictions.

Mr O'Dowd: With respect to the Member, it is clear that he did not listen to my response. I am not proposing anything. The education and

library boards are currently in a consultation process on issuing best practice for homeschool education. There are balances of rights in that. There are the balances of the parent and the parental home, and there are the balances of the right of the child to receive a good education. There is also the legal requirement on the education and library boards and my Department to ensure that children have access to education. All those things are being consulted on.

I am not consulting on anything. My Department is not consulting on any matter in that regard. However, I have made it clear to the library boards that I want the consultation process to be open and transparent for everyone to be able to make their views known. I expect the new guidance to be presented to me before it is finally signed off.

Mr Storey: If the Minister did not initiate the process, who did, given that I understand that his Department sits on a regional strategy unit with the education and library boards?

Following Mr Attwood's comments, we would like clarity on where this came from. Will the Minister give an assurance that this is not an attempt by some to require registration and make it more difficult for parents, particularly those from an evangelical Christian perspective, who take a personal view of ensuring that their children are educated at home in an environment that is conducive to their learning, to do what they have always done in a way that is honourable and within the law?

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that the process came about as a result of legal advice given to the North Eastern Education and Library Board, which then proposed consultation on guidance. The other boards, which now seek to work in greater cooperation with one another, also believed that it was the right time to consult on the matter.

As I said in response to Mr Attwood, there is a balance of individual legal rights in this debate, but I urge Members not simply to follow those who shout the loudest. At the very heart and centre of the consultation process is the children's right to education, whether in the home or in school. I assure the Member opposite that I am not aware of any agenda to stymie the rights of anyone, including evangelical Christians, to educate their children at home, if that is their wish.

My understanding of the process is that it is to ensure that the rights and entitlements of children to education and the rights of all others

involved are being upheld. I will ensure that that is the case before signing off or approving any guidance at the end of the consultation. Mr Attwood suggested that the boards overstepped the mark in relation to the Education Order 1986. I will satisfy myself whether that is the case before any final guidance is issued.

Mrs Dobson: Minister, you will be aware that I raised this issue with you recently. You know that this has caused anger among parents who choose to educate their children at home, especially the idea of people entering their home. When will the Assembly and the Committee be given the opportunity to debate and shape the future of elective home education?

Mr O'Dowd: It is for the Assembly's Business Committee to decide which topics are debated in the Assembly, and it is for the Education Committee to decide what is discussed there. I have no say in either.

Mr Allister: The Minister is anxious to point out that the guidance is not his. Does he accept that the guidance issued for consultation gold-plates what section 13 of the Order requires? Surely even he can see that.

Mr O'Dowd: No, I do not accept that; nor do I deny it. There would not be much point in the education and library boards having a consultation process if I, as Minister, were to stand here in the middle of it and say, "This is how things are". The consultation process is ongoing. Members of the House, political parties and individuals are perfectly entitled to respond. When the outcome of that arrives on my desk, I will satisfy myself that all the questions raised here today and others that I am aware of have been answered. I will also seek legal advice on whether the boards have gold-plated section 13 of the Order or whether, as Mr Attwood suggests, they have overstepped it. All those things will be satisfied before any final decisions are made.

Drumragh Integrated College

3. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the recent court ruling regarding the development proposal by Drumragh Integrated College. (AQO 6218/11-15)

10. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Education what impact Mr Justice Treacy's recent ruling in relation to Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh, will have on his Department's

approach to long-term planning. (AQO 6225/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 10 together.

I have noted the court's judgement. Some of the recent press coverage is, in my opinion, ill-informed. I will decide what action, if any, is required after I receive the detailed assessment by senior counsel of the judge's decision and its implications for the work of my Department. I will give careful consideration to that assessment when I receive it.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Mo bhúiochas leis an Aire go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can the Minister give us an update on the shared education campus programme, le do thoil?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. We have received 15 or 16 expressions of interest in relation to shared education campuses, which are part of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) scheme that was launched by the Executive late last year. My Department is working through those expressions of interest and matching them against the terms of reference. I hope to be in a position before the summer recess to make an announcement on those projects that are successful in moving forward.

Lord Morrow: The Minister, in answer to Mr Attwood, talked about "balances of rights".

Yet, in his statement of 19 February 2013, he said:

"until I ensure that those schools that wish to move onto the Lisanelly site are completed, I do not envisage moving forward with any other capital project in Omagh." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 82, p204, col 1].

Judge Treacy then said:

"This would mean that any development proposal requiring capital investment by any school not allied to the Lisanelly project would be refused without proper consideration."

Does the Minister accept that, if he were to proceed down that road, there will be a big degree of discrimination?

Mr O'Dowd: With respect to all assembled, the judgement has been made, but there are still

legal papers from the judgement to be issued by the court, there is still a full analysis of the judgement to be carried out by my own senior counsel, and I have no doubt that the party to the case is also having its senior counsel look at it. I know that there are barristers and legal professionals in the Chamber, but let us not all set ourselves up as legal professionals with regard to these matters. Let us not all pull lines out of the judgement that suit our argument. I could pull lines out of the judgement that suit my argument as well. That is not the way forward for this case.

I believe that my decisions on area planning in Omagh were correct, and I believe that the Lisanelly project, which is a Programme for Government commitment, is the correct way forward. However, Judge Treacy has asked several questions that require an answer, and I will answer them in due course.

Mr Kinahan: I guess that we will hear more of an answer in the debate later. Does the Minister agree that there needs to be a fundamental rethink on the area planning process, especially in light of the court judgement? When you look at the agreed overall vision for shared education, you see that, to paraphrase George Orwell, all sectors are equal but some are more equal than others. Does he agree that that is the case?

Mr O'Dowd: I will have a chance to respond to the debate following Question Time. In your opening remarks in that debate, you said yourself that the judge's judgement was not clear. I hope that the Hansard report will be available before I respond, but you are on record as saying that it is not clear. I think that it is wise that we wait on senior counsel's advice on that matter.

You throw out the line that some are treated more equally than others. Which sector is being treated more equally than others? Name the sector or the school where I have acted inappropriately. Name where I have been involved in discrimination against a school; name them. Those broad-stroke statements do not stack up. I can tell you of one case where I have acted differently and contrary to the advice, statistics and figures that were given to me.

Mr Campbell: One?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, one. In relation to schooling in east Belfast, I could have closed — the name slips my mind at the moment. Dundonald; apologies. I could have closed Dundonald and

defended that decision in any court in the land. I made a different decision on Dundonald. If I am accused of treating one sector differently, I have treated the controlled sector differently, in a positive way. I believe that that intervention was correct. If any Member wishes to present, either in the Chamber or outside, where I have treated another school in a discriminatory manner, I ask them to name it.

2.15 pm

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers. Does he accept that the judgement has caused some anxiety to parents of all secondary-school pupils in the Omagh area? What reassurance can the Minister give to the parents of children at Drumragh College, as well as parents of pupils at other schools who want to see the area planning process working? When do you think that can be delivered in order to end the uncertainty?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is on the ground in Omagh. I wonder how many parents have stopped him on the street in relation to the recent court ruling on Drumragh. I would say that it is a few if any, because I do not believe that the matter ever needed to end up in court in the first place. I had already indicated that I would review and retake the decision on the expansion of numbers at Drumragh Integrated College before it ended up in court.

The scenario that the Member may want to explore is this: what if I had approved an increase in numbers at Drumragh? Where would those pupils have come from? They would have come from schools in and around the Omagh area. They would not have come from anywhere else. The Member would then have been coming to me and saying, "Minister, why have you approved increased numbers at that school in Drumragh? Do you not realise those pupils are coming out of school A, B and C? What is going to happen to those schools now?" Members cannot have it both ways. You have to make decisions based on the information in front of you, not simply on the needs of an individual school but on the needs of education in an area. That is what area planning is about. We no longer make decisions on the individual needs of one school but on the needs of education in an area.

Schools: Capital Builds

4. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Education when he will announce his next capital builds list. (AQO 6219/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. It is my intention to make a statement to the Assembly before the end of June 2014 to set out my plans for future capital investment in schools across the North of Ireland. One of the biggest challenges that I face when considering proposals for large-scale capital investment in our schools is the need to balance the capital resources available to me with the investment needed across the estate. Therefore, it is critical that I ensure that any major capital investment is shaped by the outworking of area plans and is targeted at ensuring the delivery of modern, fit-for-purpose schools that will be sustainable into the future.

Accordingly, my officials have been working to develop a protocol that will ensure that potential capital projects are assessed and prioritised in a consistent and equitable manner. I can assure the House that I am mindful of the need for significant capital investment across the schools estate. My focus remains on the provision of a first-class educational experience for all our young people that will help them to fulfil their potential.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he provide an update on the projects that were announced in his previous capital build lists in June 2012 and January 2013?

Mr O'Dowd: In June 2012, I announced 18 newbuild school projects. Four of those projects are currently on site: Victoria Park in Belfast, St Teresa's in Lurgan, St Joseph's in Newry, and Dromore Central Primary School. A further three projects are targeted to be on site by the end of June 2014: Tannaghmore in Lurgan, Eglinton Primary School and Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin in Belfast. In addition, advanced enabling works have commenced on projects at St Clare's Abbey in Newry and Arvalee Special School in Omagh.

In January 2013, I announced a further 22 newbuild projects. The majority of those projects are at an early stage in planning, principally the economic appraisal stage. My officials are actively engaging with the relevant school authorities on those projects. I also understand that my officials will brief the Education Committee either this week or next on the capital builds programme.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra chuimsitheach sin. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. I speak as chair of the all-party group on construction.

Of the projects announced in January this year, how many can the Minister guarantee will be on site with construction work commenced as soon as possible, and I mean within this year?

Mr O'Dowd: In fairness, the Member will realise — I said it when I made the announcement in January 2013 — that those projects were in the early stage of planning and they have to move forward through that process. Since I made my first announcement in June 2012, I have become an expert in everything from bats to hogweed and anything else that can delay a planning application or a building. I have no doubt that we will continue to encounter problems as we move forward with the further building works, but I can assure the Member that every effort is being taken to move the projects forward as quickly as possible. Indeed, I have restructured branches even within my own Department to move the projects forward.

We are trying our best to resource and finance the boards to move those matters forward as well, and there is a significant learning process going on all the time as to how to move projects forward. However, there are certain elements that I cannot avoid and which, as I have said in the House before, take far too long to complete, such as business cases and economic appraisals, which we have to complete because of financial guidance and things that have been put in place by various Committees of the House which maybe were seen as a good idea at the time. I can assure you that the more complicated the processes and the more red tape that you have around a project, the longer it takes to deliver.

Mr Campbell: The Minister mentioned Arvalee school in east Belfast. Will he confirm whether it is a 14-classroom school, as opposed to a 12-classroom school?

Mr O'Dowd: I think that the Member may mean Victoria Park Primary School in east Belfast. I have recently had correspondence from the Belfast Education and Library Board. It is seeking to increase Victoria Primary School to a 14-classroom school. Again, we are currently working through the paperwork in regard to that matter, but I hope to be able to confirm that it will be a 14-classroom school in the future. A few i's remain to be dotted and t's remain to be crossed in relation to discussions with contractors, etc, but I do not see any major problems in the road of that scheme.

Mr Agnew: I declare an interest as director of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). Will priority be given to

schools such as St Colmbanus' College in Bangor, which are shovel-ready projects that had funding approved in the past until capital allowances were cut?

Mr O'Dowd: There are a significant number of schools which were committed to builds in the past. I have resisted the temptation to announce lengthy lists of schools that can move forward in the future. I have always said that I will only announce schools which I am confident can move forward within a reasonable period of time. Even in doing that, I have seen delays which were never envisaged to projects.

I am currently working my way through a capital announcement. We have asked the various managing authorities for their priority list. I need to match that against area planning and the needs and conditions of each of those buildings. However, I have to say, Members, that, following this Question Time, we will be discussing area planning. Members who vote to stop area planning are effectively voting to bring to a complete and utter end any capital builds programme for the foreseeable future.

Nursery Places: SEELB

5. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Education what plans the South Eastern Education and Library Board has to increase board-controlled nursery places within the Holywood, Bangor and Donaghadee areas. (AQO 6220/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that all children in the Holywood, Bangor and Donaghadee areas — postcodes BT18, BT19, BT20 and BT21 — whose parents engaged fully with the preschool admissions process to the end will have received the offer of a place, following the end of key stage 2, which was on 30 May. In the Donaghadee area, all children who applied were offered a preschool place in a setting of their choice at stage 1 of the process. I understand that 17 children in the Holywood area and 41 in the Bangor area did not receive the offer of a place at the end of stage 1 and that some 12 families decided not to submit further preferences at stage 2.

I have strongly encouraged the parents and guardians of children who did not receive the offer of a funded preschool place at the first stage of the process to consider the full range of preschool provision that remains available and provide a range of preferences at stage 2 to increase the chance of securing a place for their child. A number of funded places remain

available in both areas, and parents are advised to engage directly with the providers.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he fully recognise the need for such board provision in the north Down area, taking on board the increase in population and demand and, of course, to ensure equality of opportunity for parents and children regardless of their background or ability?

Mr O'Dowd: I recognise all those matters. I also recognise that I am dealing with a Programme for Government commitment, and I hope that the Member recognises that, over the last number of years, preschool education and the number of placements for it have improved dramatically. We have provided a significant number of additional places across the North.

The information before me tells me that there are sufficient places in the Holywood, Bangor and Donaghadee areas to facilitate parental demand. However, it is up to the local preschool education advisory group, working along with the education and library board, to request additional places if need be.

If there are settings in the area that believe that they could and should facilitate more children, they are more than entitled to bring forward development proposals.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am conscious that my question could be constituency-specific. It relates to the allocation of preschool places. If needs be, I can accept your reprimand or go ahead and ask the question.

Mr Speaker: I will not prejudge what the Member might ask, but he is right: it is a constituency-specific question. The Member might be inclined to widen the question out — that is maybe what his plan is — and I would prefer that he did not do so.

Mr Sheehan: I accept your advice on that.

Mr Speaker: It is unfair on the Minister as well.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat.

Entitlement Framework

6. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that the benefits of the entitlement framework funding become a lasting legacy for all young people. (AQO 6221/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The entitlement framework is about broadening access to courses for all pupils in Key Stage 4 and post 16, courses that are relevant to young people, engaging and motivating for them and that have clear, relevant progression pathways for them to continue in education or move into training or employment.

In 2003, some of our young people could choose from only six GCSEs and, in the worst cases, one A-level course. Schools are now working well towards the full implementation of the entitlement framework on a phased basis. It will be important for them to focus on meeting the full statutory requirements of 24 and 27 courses from September 2015.

Schools are funded through their core delegated budget to deliver their statutory obligations, including the curriculum. The additional entitlement framework funding has been a transitional arrangement, a contribution to the costs associated with developing an expanded curricular offer at Key Stage 4 and post 16. Although you will be aware that I extended the additional funding to the end of this budget period, it has never been intended as a permanent funding stream. Rather, the delivery of the entitlement framework will have been mainstreamed in schools and across area learning communities. However, I will continue to explore funding in future years if it is available.

The legacy of entitlement framework support will be the delivery of a broad and varied curriculum on an area basis so that every child can follow the right pathway for him or her. It has helped us all to focus on what is important, which is meeting the needs of our young people and ensuring that they are supported and equipped with the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to drive the economic future for us all.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. Along with me, he will acknowledge that many young people who struggled or could not cope in the normal school environment have taken advantage of that funding mechanism and obtained good qualifications in a college. As part of the wider NEETs strategy, is he not concerned that that will have a further detrimental impact on young people coming out of the system and becoming NEET?

Mr O'Dowd: The funding for the entitlement framework was never there to subsidise the role of the further and higher education sector. I accept that the sectors have worked well together and that it has been a good

collaboration. Indeed, Minister Farry and I have discussed it on several occasions, and I have met representatives of the sector on several occasions to discuss how it has worked out. I have also brought a DEL representative on to my area planning steering group so that we can coordinate facilities much better in the future.

Concerns have been expressed about the costs associated with working with the colleges sector. That needs to be explored further and if those costs can be reduced or managed in a better way it will allow us to move forward in a greater way.

The entitlement framework covers a wide range of subjects, and it has allowed many of our young people to flourish in different ways and choose career paths that were once not open to them. It has certainly helped us to ensure that many more young people leave school with relevant qualifications and a career pathway set out for them.

High School, Ballynahinch

7. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress of the rebuild for the High School, Ballynahinch. (AQO 6222/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no specific plans at present for a newbuild project for the High School, Ballynahinch. It has not been identified by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) as one of its priorities for newbuild, nor has any application been received during the recent call for projects under the schools enhancement programme.

The draft SEELB post-primary area plan, dated October 2013, states that enrolment at the High School, Ballynahinch is below the sustainable schools policy threshold. The SEELB is currently considering options to secure the retention of a controlled, non-selective post-primary school in the Ballynahinch area.

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions for oral answer to the Education Minister. We will now move to topical questions.

Ballee Community High School

1. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Education who made the decision to close Ballee Community High School and why was the decision taken in the middle of the election period. (AQT 1181/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I made the decision. I made the decision on the basis of the information provided to me in the development proposal and from engagements and discussions that I had with interested parties and local elected representatives. I have said in the House a number of times, I believe, to Mr Swann that those who were supportive of Ballee high school were dedicated to the school and the young people in the school. There is no question about that. My concern was about whether they had arrived on the scene in time to turn the situation around. Enrolment at the school was in such a state, and the prospects for increasing that enrolment were practically zero. I had serious concerns about the educational well-being not only of current pupils at the school but of future pupils at the school if I were to continue with that school open. I decided to close it, and I believe that I made the right decision.

I was pressed on making a decision on 20/21 May because letters had to issue to parents by 23 May. I accept that that was not an ideal time to make it, and, if I had to do it again, I would maybe make the decision much earlier or after the election. I did not announce the decision to the media on election day: others announced it to the media on election day. The press release from the Department of Education did not go out until, I believe, 23 May.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he guarantee that we will not have another Orangefield? What steps has he put in place to ensure that pupils all have places, that parents have choice and that schools are prepared and ready for September 2015?

Mr O'Dowd: I will not compare one school with another school or whatever it may be. The Member will be aware that my decision on the closure of Ballee Community High School from 1 October is also aligned with the increase of the enrolment of Dunclug College. Provision is being made in the area for pupils to move across to whichever school they wish, and I have certainly increased provision at at least one school in the area. I want to see provision being planned, and this goes to the crux of the debate that we are having before and after Question Time. I want to see area planning at the heart of all these decisions. Often, those decisions can be difficult and emotive for everyone involved, but I believe that the decision around Ballee was the correct decision. It in no way undermines those who campaigned for or who worked in the school. Clearly, they were dedicated to the young people they served, but, as I said to them at the

meetings that I had with them and as I said to Mr Swann in this Chamber, I had to ask myself whether they had arrived on the scene on time — they had not. That is the sad thing about that.

Area Planning: Shared Education

2. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Education to outline how the area planning process facilitates increased sharing between schools. (AQT 1182/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: This goes back to the entitlement framework. A number of factors are at play in relation to sharing in our schools estate. Area learning communities have been working away quietly with each other for several years on sharing across the curriculum, and, in many areas, that has broadened to the broader understanding of sharing between the communities and sectors and better understanding of each other. The very terms of reference of area planning refer to the need to increase sharing across sectors. Each time I meet the sectors at the steering group, I emphasise to them the need to introduce proposals on shared education and for them to challenge each other and to challenge communities, where we can, to think, at times, the impossible and take the next step towards sharing in the local community.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that response. Given recent events, can he outline how, if at all, the area planning process has been affected by the recent developments regarding ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: Ideally, area planning should move forward under a single planning organisation, that being ESA, with representatives of all the sectors and all the major political parties around the table, it has to be said. It would be a very democratic and collective way of moving the process forward. The absence of ESA has hampered area planning, but it is certainly not necessary to stop area planning because of it. We have to work round the obstacle of not having ESA in place. Indeed, I am reviewing the area steering group and considering breaking it down into more localised steering groups to work in board areas, rather than an oversight committee. However, I think that the structures that we have in place are fit for purpose.

Key Stage Assessments

3. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to address the concerns being expressed by the majority of primary schools about the educational appropriateness of end of key stage assessments. (AQT 1183/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most significant step that I have taken was to bring in the OECD, and we brought the OECD in to look at our assessment procedure. Its report has been very valuable in the ongoing discussions between my officials and representatives of the teachers' side in regard to these matters. The OECD points out that our assessment processes are robust and necessary but we have failed to convince those who use them — the teaching staff — of the merits of them, and we have not, up to now, engaged with them properly in moving that forward. Over the past number of months, there have been detailed discussions between my officials, CCEA and the trade unions, and I hope very soon to be in a position to announce that there is agreement — it all depends on agreement — and that we have found a way forward on assessments. I believe that assessments are necessary, but I am not seeking to impose assessments on the teaching profession; I am looking to work with the teaching profession on how we carry out assessments.

Mr Rogers: Thank you for your answer. I welcome your statement that you will work with teachers, but teachers are not happy with this because it is not a good assessment for learning. Would you consider suspending the present system until you can make a more informed decision about good assessment for learning?

Mr O'Dowd: In fairness, the OECD tells us that it is a good assessment for learning, but we have to adapt it and work with those who are delivering it on the ground, so I am not going to suspend it. I believe that our discussions with the unions are bearing fruit, and, if we keep going forward with the discussions that we are having with the trade union side, I am confident that we can reach agreement on the matter.

Education: Administrative Arrangements

4. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Education when he intends to brief the Assembly on the future administrative arrangements for education in Northern Ireland. (AQT 1184/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would be happy to brief the Assembly once the paper that I have submitted to the Executive hopefully reaches agreement. We are at a critical stage where we are heading towards April 2015, which will see the alignment of the new 11-council model. The boards or board, which is my preferred option moving forward, will have to be aligned to that model as well.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his response. He must surely be aware of the deep concerns prevalent in the teaching fraternity as the result of our inability to foster consensus in education and create a fit-for-purpose education and skills authority, expending on the project somewhere in the region of £17 million that could have been spent on improving literacy and numeracy. Will he outline what steps he will take to ensure that the creation of a single education and library board to replace the current five will avoid the pitfalls — if that is the right word — that the concept fell into?

Mr O'Dowd: The old saying is that charity begins at home. In this case, consensus will have to begin at home. I encourage the Member to ensure that his party is in the mood to seek consensus on the paper that will go before the Executive: as he is aware, he has a Minister at the Executive table. He will also be aware that some of the biggest opponents and those who carried out many manoeuvres against ESA were members of the Ulster Unionist Party. If £17 million has been wasted over the past nine years, all the parties in the Chamber will have to put up their hand, but those who will have to put their hand up highest will be the Ulster Unionist Party.

Home-to-school Transport Review

5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the home-to-school transport review. (AQT 1185/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The review is moving forward. It has had significant engagement with young people and the education sector. I hope to have the report by the end of August, I believe, and then we will move forward from there with regard to the recommendations.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister outline how pupils with special educational needs will be protected moving forward?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes. I assure the Member that I am not planning any changes that would deny transport to children with special educational needs. Throughout my tenure and, indeed, that of my predecessor, we ring-fenced funding for special educational needs, and I have no intention of denying transport to children with special educational needs.

Irish-medium Post-primary Advisory Group

6. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education to update the House on the recent report from the Irish-medium post-primary advisory group, which should be commended on the significant work that it has carried out since last summer. (AQT 1186/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The group presented me with a report in mid-April. I am studying its recommendations, and I will make a statement on the way forward from that.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the focus that the Minister has brought to this area. Certainly, the Irish-medium post-primary sector is an area that needs urgent development. Can I ask the Minister what plans there are to action the report?

Mr O'Dowd: As I say, we brought Helen Ó Murchú and her group together to look at how we promote and facilitate Irish-medium post-primary education in particular in and around the County Derry area. I think that the lessons and recommendations that she has brought forward will facilitate our developing bunscoileanna across the North. It has been a valuable exercise, but, as I say, I received the report in mid-April, and I am still studying the recommendations. I hope to make an announcement on the way forward, but, given that we are heading towards summer recess, I suspect that it will be early autumn before I make a full announcement.

Devenish College, Fermanagh

7. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education to outline whether any finance has been secured or ring-fenced for the proposed newbuild at Devenish College in Fermanagh. (AQT 1187/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I noted that, somewhere during the week, Mr Elliott told an audience that I had no funding to move Devenish forward and that

he believed that it would never happen. That is the power of social media.

I made an announcement on Devenish in January 2013. It is part of the building programme, moving forward. As I develop my building programme, I am conscious of the announcements that I have made. Therefore, they are built in to my budget, moving forward.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Could he tell us whether there is any opportunity to separate progressing the Devenish project without it being dependent on the merger of Portora and the Collegiate?

Mr O'Dowd: I have not got the full details for the Member's question in front of me. I am also reluctant to comment on an ongoing development proposal for Portora and Collegiate. Standing here, I am not aware of any co-joining of the building programme and the other development proposal, but I will clarify that with the Member in writing after Question Time.

School Admissions: Twins/Triplets

8. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Education whether, for enrolment to secondary schools, there are provisions similar to those for primary schools, to deal with a situation in which only one of a pair of twins or a set of triplets has been awarded a post-primary place. (AQT 1188/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It depends on the admissions criteria for the secondary school. I am aware of one set of circumstances in a selective school where one twin did not get in because of the grading that the selective school was using. My suggestion there would be to not use selection; that would solve that problem. Those are the only circumstances that I am aware of where twins or triplets not getting into a post-primary school was raised as an issue with me.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. Is there any advice at this stage that can be given to schools that have already chosen to use the selection procedure and are in that situation?

Mr O'Dowd: Stop using selection.

Preschool Admissions

9. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education how many children received a preschool place

in the school of their choice this year. (AQT 1189/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently, in or around 23,500 children have received a preschool placement this year.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister. Will he outline how those who did not receive a place in their school of choice will be accommodated?

Mr O'Dowd: The 34 children who have not received a placement are from families who stayed with the system through stage 1 and stage 2. I have asked my departmental officials for a breakdown of their location and why each child has not been placed. On receipt of that information, I will have further discussions with them on how we move the matter forward.

2.45 pm

Employment and Learning

NEETS: Funding

1. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the funded initiatives under the young people not in education, employment or training strategy, that specifically support care-experienced young people. (AQO 6231/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Executive's Pathways to Success strategy for young people not in employment, education or training introduced a number of initiatives to meet the wide-ranging needs of young people, including those in this category.

The collaboration and innovation fund supports five projects with a budget of almost £2 million that target care-experienced young people. DEL's local employment intermediary service (LEMIS) is also available on an outreach basis to individuals with a common employability barrier, including care leavers.

During the 2013-14 financial year, LEMIS providers received just over £2 million to deliver the service, and a similar budget is available this year. The European social fund is providing £2.2 million in 2014-15 for three projects that target care-experienced young participants but are not exclusive to them. The Member will be aware that the policy lead for work with looked-after children lies with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

My Department has a key role in promoting learning and skills, preparing people for work and supporting pathways to employment for looked-after and care-experienced young people. In this context, my Department has been involved closely with DHSSPS, the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts, and we are working to improve the education, training and employment outcomes for young people in or leaving care. In particular, the Careers Service has, for some considerable time, been working with the trusts and others in an attempt to ensure that these vulnerable young people have access to the right advice about their future.

Mr Speaker: Questions 6 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response, particularly on young people in the care system. How much funding is made available to Queen's University and the University of Ulster to broaden access? How much is spent on care-experienced young people?

Dr Farry: She raises an important point. It is worth stressing that increasing access and widening participation are key objectives of the Department, and that includes vulnerable young people. Those budgets amount to several million pounds a year for the institutions. I cannot give a precise breakdown of those that relate to care-experienced young people. In any event, they would be swept up in the general outreach and support that is made available to such young people. Training for Success is also sensitive to the needs of care-experienced young people in that they are eligible to stay on such programmes longer.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's responses to date. The Committee for Employment and Learning has been engrossed in the whole NEETs area for some time. A key element is the tracking and retention of data. Through the funding mechanisms for young people not in education, employment or training, how many young people with learning or physical disabilities have been through the schemes?

Dr Farry: I am happy to come back to the Member with detailed figures on the headcount for the different strands. It is important to remember that a number of interventions across the Department work with vulnerable young people. Some are specific programmes under the Pathways to Success strategy, most notably the collaboration and innovation fund.

Young people also access some of our other programmes, including some under the European social fund, and mainstream training programmes, so there is a very broad reach. It is important that we do all that we can to maximise the potential for everyone to engage in society. Where appropriate, we will invest in resources to address barriers that prevent some people developing and engaging to their full potential.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he clarify how the introduction of Together: Building a United Community will affect or has affected his Department's initiatives?

Dr Farry: The main impact will be on the United Youth programme, which will be an overarching framework that will cover a range of existing programmes on a revamped basis. It will also cover some new interventions. My Department is leading on behalf of the Executive and is working in close collaboration with other Departments on the design of that. We hope to be in a position to give some clarity in the near future on the way forward in that regard.

It is worth bearing it in mind that it is a hybrid of volunteering, good relations, community relations and employability, and it is designed to engage with a wide range of young people from different backgrounds with different training needs.

NEETS: North Belfast

2. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many young people aged 16-25 years in North Belfast are not currently in education, employment or training, (AQO 6232/11-15)

Dr Farry: That question has been transferred to DFP. That information should have been sent through.

SEN Provision

3. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department intends to work with the Committee for Employment and Learning's inquiry into post special educational need provision in education, employment and training for those with learning disabilities. (AQO 6233/11-15)

Dr Farry: I very much welcome the Committee's inquiry. As requested by the Committee for Employment and Learning, I

responded to its call for evidence by the original 21 March 2014 deadline, although the deadline was subsequently extended to 30 June.

The response provided information on issues raised under the inquiry's terms of reference. In addition, it included comprehensive information on the opportunities offered by my Department and its key delivery partners. I also offered to provide further updates to the Committee about any significant developments on issues that evolved during its inquiry in addition to any verbal updates that the Committee might seek from my Department.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. Is he of the opinion that much more needs to be done to provide opportunities for this severely disadvantaged group of people?

Dr Farry: Yes. It is worthwhile, looking at the overall context, to see how different interventions will fit in. First, my Department is conducting a review of the Disability Employment Service, with a view to having in place a draft strategy by the end of this year. That looks at particular issues around access to employment. We have a range of existing interventions on a broader basis that my Department is also involved with, including access to further education and careers advice. Beyond that, there is a much wider, essentially cross-Executive issue about how we better manage transitions for young people from a special educational needs background who are leaving school at 19 to ensure that they have a range of adequate services available to them.

The Executive subcommittee that monitors the implementation of the Bamford report on mental health and learning disability issues has established a mechanism by which we are looking at the issue. Departments have stated what provision they have, and we are conducting a gap analysis in that regard to see what more can be done. In the near future, we will sit down across Departments to discuss what more can be done and whose responsibility it will be to address those issues.

Mr Swann: The Minister said that the Executive subcommittee was looking at the gaps shown in the Bamford review. Has he spoken to the Health Minister in regard to the change that is coming for day centres? It is proposed that they will only accept those with severe behavioural or medical needs, and there will be an entire cohort of individuals who will not be able to access day centres. Has he spoken to the Health Minister about that?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for that question. That is very much part of the landscape that is before us. It is important that we seek to reconcile the policy direction in health with what can reasonably be done by a Department such as my own, which has a focus on skills and engaging people with the labour market. We need to work out how best to address the gap between those two responsibilities so that we can best service the needs of young people.

What annoys parents more than anything else is a situation in which Department A says, "These are our responsibilities", and Department B says, "These are our responsibilities", with parents almost stuck in the middle not knowing where to turn. It is important that we have a full spectrum of joined-up interventions. What the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is doing is very relevant to discussions that are happening in the Executive subcommittee. We hope to bottom out what should be a comprehensive suite of interventions in the very near future.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that, 16 years into the new Assembly, it is time for Departments to stop arguing about who has responsibility for people with special needs? Will he become the voice of those people, who have not benefited from the equality that was enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement?

Dr Farry: I assure the Member that I am happy to be a voice, but we need multiple voices from other Departments and, indeed, Members to fully address the issue. I reassure him that the issue is being taken seriously and that Departments are seized of its importance. Like all Members, we are acutely aware of the deep concerns that parents have around that transition phase and the move from the relative certainty of a school setting to the uncertainty about what comes next. My Department has stepped forward to coordinate that discussion on behalf of the Executive subcommittee, but there are other Departments with responsibility, in particular OFMDFM, which has a cross-cutting responsibility for disability issues on behalf of the Executive. There is good communication between Departments as we seek to fully address the issue.

Youth Training

4. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what lessons have been learned in relation to the review of youth

training from his recent visit to Denmark. (AQO 6234/11-15)

Dr Farry: I strongly believe in the importance of evidence-based policymaking. In recognition of the importance of learning from international best practice for the ongoing review of youth training, I recently undertook a visit to Denmark, building on a previous visit to the Netherlands. The key lessons I brought back from the visit include that work-based learning with an employer is a key element of provision, with learning alternating regularly between college-based and workplace-based approaches. Importance is placed on numeracy and literacy, and funding arrangements are in place to reward colleges for performance and employers for engagement.

I was impressed with the role that Denmark's central trade council and sector-based trade committees play in determining their vocational curriculum, which is securing a much simpler qualifications system than we presently have in Northern Ireland. Such structures have ensured that industry leads the development of qualifications to match the required competencies for each occupation.

The visit provided useful insights into ways of re-engaging young people and promoting a positive image of vocational training. Amongst other things, the Danish approach includes taster courses for those currently not engaged in either work or training and the provision of dedicated mentors to assist young people with issues not directly connected to their studies. There is recognition in Denmark that its system is not perfect, and I was interested in the steps being taken to improve the image of vocational learning and give it parity of esteem with academic routes. I will make a statement to the Assembly later this month that will provide an update on the progress of the review. Those key findings will inform the review of youth training interim report, which will be published in early autumn 2014 for public consultation.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he give us a little more of an indication of how those lessons are being applied to the current review of youth training here in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: The Member will appreciate that we are currently conducting that review of youth training. We are seeking to ensure that we have a fit-for-purpose offer for young people who leave school without the necessary qualifications to progress into work, an apprenticeship, further education or higher education. At present, we have a range of programmes that seek to address that particular

cohort of young people. At this time, the level of performance and outcomes is not perhaps as strong as it could be. There is also a sense that it is not as relevant to the needs of employers and the economy as a whole as it could be.

There are very clear lessons from Denmark on how we can better engage employers to ensure that the needs of the economy are taken into consideration. There is a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, which are fundamental in ensuring that all young people have the essential skills that are absolutely vital in any aspect of the world of work that someone may want to consider. A strong role for the mentoring of young people is very important. We have to provide that rounded support for young people, almost, in a sense, so that some of the pastoral care and access to extra-curricular activities that young people who remain in school obtain are replicated in the wider youth training offer that we will hopefully have in Northern Ireland in the very near future.

3.00 pm

Mr Campbell: During his trips to the Netherlands and Denmark, did the Minister come across the issue of hard-to-reach communities, which is something that affects quite a number of communities in Northern Ireland? There are young people in working-class estates for whom outreach programmes and attempts to get them into other programmes are proving very difficult. Did he get any information there that he can apply to Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: Yes. The Member has raised a valid point. The offers that we put in place have to be very inclusive, and we must seek to maximise participation, particularly among marginalised young people who have, maybe, motivational issues or are otherwise not encouraged to engage in the training opportunities that are out there for them. Particularly from the visit to the Netherlands, there is a very important lesson about the use of the community and voluntary sector and how it can work at a grass-roots level to encourage young people to come forward, and also about shaping the offer to meet the prevailing local circumstances.

It is about creating a culture where vocational training is seen as being as valid, in many respects, as more traditional academic routes so that we raise its status and, in turn, link it into people's aspirations. It is also worth stressing that, although we have a lot of young people who are currently not succeeding in a school-

based environment, that does not mean that they do not have the aptitude to engage in the world of work. Indeed, many of those young people are very talented in many respects, but maybe just have not been encouraged to bring their talents to bear.

It is important that we show the value of vocational training as a means by which we draw out those young people's talents and, in turn, that that creates a virtuous loop where they gain their own qualifications. Put in very simple terms, a young person who is interested in being a mechanic and who likes to tinker with cars or motorcycles may not necessarily initially see the value of sitting down and getting a maths qualification, but if they want to progress in doing that, they will need to achieve that maths qualification. The vocational training may encourage that young person to sit down and ensure that they get their basic qualifications.

Mrs Overend: How do the primary and post-primary education systems in Denmark compare with ours and how would our systems be impacted if a Danish-based model of youth training were to be used in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: In most of continental Europe, there are very clearly established academic and vocational routes. At times, they are more differentiated from each other in certain jurisdictions, and, in other jurisdictions, there is a much tighter relationship or an ability to change between the two. There is a much greater parity of esteem between those types of pathways, so there is not the same degree of hierarchy that we see in Northern Ireland society, where the academic pathway is seen as being the greater or more important one than the vocational pathway and where there is almost a stigma applied to those who are doing vocational training. Through our review of apprenticeships and youth training, we are trying to address some of those perceptions and to ensure that we can encourage people to pursue the most appropriate pathway for them so that they can play a full role in society and in our economy.

Steps 2 Success

5. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Steps 2 Success procurement exercise. (AQO 6235/11-15)

Dr Farry: Steps 2 Success is my Department's main programme for assisting unemployed and economically inactive people to find and keep

work. Steps 2 Success builds on the success of Steps to Work and will increase the flexibility to develop an individually designed programme to prepare participants to find employment. The procurement of Steps 2 Success is being carried out by my Department in conjunction with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The procurement is in two stages. Stage 1 was completed in November 2013, selecting six organisations to bid to deliver the programme in each of three contract areas. Subsequently, one organisation withdrew in the southern contract area. After discussion with the Central Procurement Directorate, it was agreed to proceed with the competition in the southern contract area with five bidding organisations.

Organisations in stage 2 are required to design a comprehensive service delivery model to meet standards set by the Department in service guarantees for each category of participant. Bidders are required to develop a comprehensive supply chain to enable a quality service to be delivered to all participants throughout the contract area. Stage 2 of the procurement is under way, with detailed bids to deliver the programme in the three contract areas presently being evaluated by officials. It is anticipated that I will be able to announce the results of the successful bidders this month, with the programme commencing in September 2014. Officials are also working to ensure that the required legislative, administrative, governance and financial systems are implemented to enable Steps 2 Success to be delivered to a high standard from the start of the programme.

Mr McKinney: The Minister will be aware that there is major local concern about the provision of the programme. Given the highlighted poor track record of some UK providers of other programmes here, what consideration is being given to smaller local providers who may miss out on the exercise?

Dr Farry: It is worth stressing that the procurement that has been conducted has been done very much in line with advice from CPD. We have a level playing field for the bids that were made. A select list was drawn up at stage one based on the responses received. If organisations did not meet that threshold, that did not necessarily imply that they were not up to delivering it. It was a competitive process, and only a certain number would get through to the second stage. At this point, there are opportunities in the supply chain for organisations across the board. Indeed, it is a prerequisite of bids that the future lead

contractors will have a supply chain and will not seek to deliver the programme themselves solely. I am satisfied that we will have rigorous supply chains in place that will create a wealth of opportunities for a wide range of organisations.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. Can the Minister give a guarantee to small local providers who are telling other Members and me that they will go out of business as a result of how that procurement process worked out, because the work will not filter down and it will be administered largely by organisations across the water that do not have local knowledge or engagement with local people?

Dr Farry: I cannot give the Member any specific guarantees about any particular individual organisations. All I can do is reiterate what I said to Mr McKinney, which was that the lead contractors will be required to ensure that they have a very comprehensive supply chain in place and that, in it, there will be a considerable number of opportunities for locally based organisations.

We are fully aware of the importance of local knowledge; that is why the programme has been designed as such. It is important to bear in mind that the rationale for Steps 2 Success is not about the interests, per se, of the delivery organisations, it is about actually ensuring that we have better outcomes in moving unemployed people into employment. That is how we will judge the success of the programme. Throughout that, the way in which we have designed the scheme has had that objective very much in mind to ensure that we have a step change in the level of performance from what has been a very good programme in Steps to Work to an excellent programme in Steps 2 Success. Ultimately we have a duty to all our constituents to tackle the scourge of unemployment.

Mr Copeland: At this stage, does the Minister anticipate any legal action on behalf of, or led by, the unsuccessful bidders? Can he give his assessment of the impact of any such actions on the introduction of Steps 2 Success? What steps would he take?

Dr Farry: I assure the Member that I am satisfied that great care and attention has been given by my officials, and indeed CPD, in handling that procurement. It is a very big procurement scheme. A lot of people have spent a lot of time to ensure we get it right and

that we do indeed follow procedures to ensure that we comply with all the necessary requirements.

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn. Raymond McCartney is not in his place.

Zero-hours Contracts

8. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed review of zero-hours contracts. (AQO 6238/11-15)

Dr Farry: On 6 May 2014, I gave a commitment to the House that I would launch a consultation on zero-hours contracts. I also indicated that my Department would conduct further research to establish the extent of the use of zero-hours contracts in Northern Ireland. It is my intention that the planned consultation will be launched before the summer recess and will seek views on a number of areas where action may be required. They include exclusivity clauses, the right of an employee on a zero-hours contract to request a move to a fixed-term contract, and the transparency of these types of contracts. My Department will also take forward a range of qualitative and quantitative projects as part of the consultation process.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answer. He mentioned making a start on the consultation before the summer recess, and I appreciate that. He will recall that I have spoken before on the issue. Can he give us any idea of how a programme might be rolled out and how we might reach an end point and result?

Dr Farry: The Member will appreciate that, when he asked me a topical question in the Assembly several months ago, I gave him — this is perhaps unusual in the Assembly — a direct answer. I said that we were looking at the issue in principle and that we were prepared to move on. When I answered that question, we were at a very early stage in the development. At that stage, I had simply accepted in principle that we would do a consultation on the issue and, arising from that, potentially move towards legislation.

On the timescale for moving forward, it is my intention that the consultation will go out before the summer recess and that it will unfold over the next number of months. I will then bring the outcome of the consultation to the Executive, with a view to seeking agreement on the way forward.

In parallel to that, it is my intention to bring another paper to the Executive on the wider employment law review. That exercise anticipates that we will have primary legislation to take into account the outcome of that review. So, it is my intention that we try to join up those two processes in due course and that the Bill on employment law may contain provisions relating to zero-hours contracts.

The Member will also be conscious that there has been a consultation on zero-hours contracts in Great Britain. That closed earlier this year, and there were something like 37,000 responses to it. This is now the final year of the Westminster mandate. As the Member will know, the Queen's speech is happening on Wednesday, so we will watch with interest to see whether there are any plans for legislation in Great Britain.

In that context, we may be the first jurisdiction in these islands to take action on zero-hours contracts, if the consultation process here warrants us taking action. We will take seriously the outcome of that process and see what we need to do.

Job Centres: Staff

9. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans are in place to increase staff capacity in job centres, should welfare reform be introduced. (AQO 6239/11-15)

Dr Farry: First, I advise the Member that the Department leading on welfare reform is the Department for Social Development. My Department is not responsible for welfare reform. Once the way forward in Northern Ireland is agreed, we will become a strategic delivery partner for universal credit and be responsible for providing a face-to-face work-focused service for universal credit claimants.

In taking account of the potential impacts of welfare reform, my Department has developed a resourcing strategy that will ensure we have the correct number of staff at the appropriate grades and with the relevant skills and competences to deliver services to a high standard. My Department is awaiting claimant volumetric information from the Department for Work and Pensions before it can calculate staff numbers.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for that. I am aware that there is an overlap. One of the outworkings of welfare reform is that more and more people are being refused employment

and support allowance and are being transferred to jobseeker's allowance, despite having medical evidence that they are unfit for work. How do you see that panning out in the future?

Dr Farry: Again, that process and the work capability assessments are matters for the Department for Social Development. However, we factor in the number of clients that we, as a Department, are responsible for, and we closely monitor that.

The employment service has close to 1,000 staff in total. It would not be right if I did not acknowledge the real work and commitment of those staff at present, particularly as they have been dealing with a peak in the claimant count over the past number of years. Thankfully, that is falling quite rapidly, but it has been well in excess of the anticipated number of cases to be handled by the Department. So, we do take into account all those different shifts in the different programmes and the impact of the pressures on employment service staff.

Mr Speaker: Before we move on to topical questions, I say to the Minister that no indication was given of the intention to transfer question 2 from Mr Humphrey, who has left the Chamber. We have checked that with DFP. It might be useful if the Minister takes it upon himself to make sure that Mr Humphrey receives a written answer to his question. I just wanted to clarify that issue. We will move to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Southern Regional College

1. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans there are for the redevelopment of the Southern Regional College campuses at Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge. (AQT 1191/11-15)

Dr Farry: First, I put on record that I pass on a formal apology to Mr Humphrey for the confusion between my Department and DFP.

Mr Speaker: I appreciate that.

Dr Farry: We will, of course, provide a full written answer to him.

In response to Mr Moutray's question, we have received the business case from Southern Regional College relating to redevelopments for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. We have

accepted that there has been an underinvestment in the Southern Regional College area relative to other parts of Northern Ireland. The Member will be aware that £1 million has been allocated by the Minister of Finance and Personnel for initial works in Banbridge. It is hoped that we will have clarity, particularly on Armagh, very soon, because the issues around site are fairly well advanced and fairly clear. It is our intention to seek to amalgamate the existing Lurgan and Portadown campuses in a new purpose-built facility on a site to be identified in the Craigavon area.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for the response. I was going to ask him whether he could be site-specific in relation to Craigavon, but I do not think he will do that today. Can I at least ask him whether he will give consideration to accessibility for attendees at any new campus, especially for rural dwellers?

Dr Farry: I was going to say that we are not quite sure which roundabout it will be at just yet. Take your pick. Any advice that the Member wants to offer in that regard would be particularly welcome.

One of the motivating issues behind the new campus is to have a purpose-built facility that meets the needs of the entire community in that area and has purpose-built facilities that are modern and first-class in nature. For that to work, we have to work to ensure that we are attracting people in from all areas. I am more than happy to take back his comments about rural accessibility so that we ensure that everyone has the ability to freely access the resource, which I think will be a major asset to third-level education in Craigavon.

Election Canvassing: DEL Scheme Employees

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he is aware of any schemes, such as Steps to Work or others, provided by his Department that allowed political parties to use the employees to canvass during last month's elections. (AQT 1192/11-15)

Dr Farry: That matter has been the subject of a number of questions for written answer from the Member's party colleagues. Some of the schemes, particularly Steps to Work, have safeguards in that regard. It came to light that some of the more recent interventions did not have specific safeguards in that regard, and that omission has now been rectified. I am aware that a number of political parties have

made use of the different schemes that are available in my Department, particularly for working with young people, and I welcome the fact that they are engaging with those schemes and offering young people that opportunity. However, I have no direct evidence of any political party or any MLA using any of those schemes to ask or require a young person to engage directly in political canvassing.

Mr Elliott: The Minister's answer is, I suppose, on the one hand, admitting that they are being used but, on the other, saying that he has no evidence of it. On that basis, does the Minister have any evidence that the Alliance Party used any of those employees to be out canvassing for the elections?

Dr Farry: I can give a categorical no to the second part of what he said. To clarify, the distinction that I was making is that we are aware of MLAs and political parties using the schemes to engage young people for a range of activities that, I presume, are legitimate. There is no evidence that those young people have been engaged in political canvassing, which is the particular issue that he raised.

Youth Policy and Strategy

3. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for detail on the new division in his Department to deal with youth policy and strategy. (AQT 1193/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for her question. We have had a minor internal reorganisation, which has brought together a number of particular policy development areas to ensure that they are properly integrated. Those include the current review of apprenticeships, the review of youth training, the work on the United Youth programme and, finally, the work that we are doing on economic inactivity. Hopefully, that reflects that there is considerable linkage between the different initiatives. It is important that we have a joined-up approach through the same senior people and other members of staff having proper knowledge of how they interlock with each other and that we ensure that we are adopting as much innovation as possible in policy-making.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he detail what discussions he has had with other Departments about the new division? What budget has he allocated to it so that it can carry out its work?

Dr Farry: The main focus of discussions with other Departments largely relates to cross-cutting areas. The main aspect in that regard is United Youth, which is a cross-cutting part of the Executive's work, as it flows from the 'Together: Building a United Community' document. The Member will also be aware that my Department has led the economic inactivity strategy in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on behalf of the Executive as a whole.

The specific way that Departments are structured is very much a matter for Ministers and permanent secretaries, but, hopefully, the revised structure will make it easier for us to engage with other Departments on areas that are, indeed, cross-cutting.

Labour Market Statistics

4. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the most recent labour market statistics. (AQT 1194/11-15)

Dr Farry: The latest figures are encouraging, but, clearly, there is a lot more work to be done. In particular, we are seeing a very consistent fall in the claimant count. I think that we are now talking about the biggest consistent fall in consecutive months for approaching almost 20 years. That is a sign of the degree of recovery that is happening in our economy.

We also have to recognise that we are moving in the right direction from a low employment base. We have had considerable problems with unemployment over the past number of years. Within that, there are particular issues with long-term unemployment and youth unemployment. We have designed and put in place particular interventions, whether it is Steps 2 Success or Pathways to Success and the youth employment scheme, to try to address those particular angles.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree with me that, despite the falling number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance, our economy is now dominated by people who may be in work but are underemployed and underpaid and that it suffers from high levels of emigration?

Dr Farry: I think that what some people call the jobless recovery or the problem of underemployment is affecting a number of countries in Europe and elsewhere in the world. By way of reassurance to the Member, I will say that we can see a recovery in the level of

demand. We are expecting a lot more pressure through jobs over the remaining part of this decade and, indeed, through to 2030. Some surveys suggest that we have the potential to create another 28,000 to 30,000 jobs through to 2030. That is outside the context of a lower level of corporation tax. If we were to achieve that particular power, subject to putting in place other supporting interventions, we could double the number of jobs that are to be created by 2030 to almost 60,000. So, there is a real prize out there, and you can see that there is a degree of pressure for employment. However, a difficulty may arise in a mismatch between supply and demand. That is why it is so important that we invest in the right level of skills in the right sectors of the economy and that we do such things as the review of careers when investing in apprenticeships and STEM places at university.

Belfast Metropolitan College: Millfield Stabbing

5. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a quick comment on the recent unfortunate stabbing incident at Belfast Metropolitan College. (AQT 1195/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. Clearly, there was a lot of interest in the community in the incident. On 22 May, a confrontation took place between two students at the Millfield campus of Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC). One student sustained serious injuries and remains in hospital in a serious but stable condition, and the other student was arrested and later bailed. The college immediately deployed first aid to the injured parties, and the Ambulance Service arrived within 10 minutes of being notified. The PSNI was also called to the scene and secured the vicinity. BMC reacted very quickly to make counselling services available to staff and students at the Millfield campus and to liaise closely with the families concerned.

It is also worth referencing the important interventions that were made by the lecturing and other staff in the college and how proactive they were. Perhaps that has not entered the public domain, but I think that it is appropriate to recognise the sheer professionalism of all of the staff in how they responded to the incident.

It is worth stressing that this incident was unprecedented in our FE sector. Hopefully, it was very much a one-off incident, which happened in very particular circumstances. Obviously, we have to take into account any lessons to be learned for the future, but it is

important that we recognise that our systems worked well in dealing with what, hopefully, will be an isolated case.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his very detailed response. Perhaps he will give the Assembly his estimation of what implications the incident will have for future policy.

Dr Farry: Again, I thank the Member for the question. Although it is appropriate that we congratulate all those involved on the manner in which they responded to the situation, there will always need to be a lessons-learned exercise to ensure that our policies are reviewed on the basis of such an experience to see whether things can be done better. Indeed, risk management should also be deployed to ensure that the policies are properly proofed. I am sure that BMC will do that. I know that it has already instigated an internal review around the lessons-learned process. I do not want our FE colleges to turn into some sort of facilities with a lot of security around them. We want to have a welcoming environment for students and others. We want to ensure that we attract people to FE, so it is important that we place this in its proper context.

Universities: Neutral Environment

6. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action has been taken to reduce intimidation at Jordanstown, given their previous correspondence about a neutral environment in our universities. (AQT 1196/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Member will be aware that the university has put in place a working group to look at good relations issues in its campuses. The group has a range of stakeholders, including different student voices. I am confident that they will reach some understanding on the most appropriate way forward on the use of symbols and on the particular issue that the Member raises.

I again put on record that the wearing of a GAA top or other type of sporting jersey should not, in itself, be viewed as not conducive to good relations or, indeed, a shared campus. The context in which these things occur is always important. The latest advice from the Equality Commission on campuses, in particular, is that a good, harmonious environment does not necessarily need to be a neutral environment. So we have to strike a very delicate balance between people's right to express their identity and interests and the need for good relations in different working or educational environments.

That is why it is important that the universities work out what is an appropriate policy for their circumstances.

Mr Speaker: I invite Members to take their ease as we change the top Table.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Education: Area Planning Process

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly expresses serious concern regarding the ongoing area planning process in the education sector; notes the critical comments made in the Justice Treacy judgement on area planning and integrated education; further notes that the current process places no formal recognition or promotion of greater sharing between schools and sectors; believes that decisions made now will determine the shape of the education system for many years to come; and calls on the Minister of Education, in the absence of either an Education and Skills Authority or the reconstitution of education and library boards, to suspend the current area planning process until there is clarity on the future strategic management of schools, and a long-term vision for education in Northern Ireland is agreed. — [Mr Kinahan.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert:

"recognises the need to rationalise the schools estate in a planned and managed way in the promotion of educational equality for all and that the ideal vehicle to manage area planning is the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority; further recognises that area planning can, and must, be progressed in the absence of the Education and Skills Authority for the educational well-being of children; notes that the current process allows for the promotion of sharing between sectors; and calls on all sectors to redouble their efforts to bring forward proposals for greater sharing." — [Mr Hazzard.]

Mr Storey: I am sure that when people got the Order Paper they were not sitting on the edge of their seat in their home because of the issue to be discussed, particularly the detail of the motion from the Ulster Unionist Party and the amendment from Sinn Féin. Yet again, we have an example of a political party that tells us, "All you have to do is get everybody round the table, and we'll be able to sort all this out". We were around the table for seven years on ESA. The Ulster Unionist Party takes great

credit; it claims that it stopped ESA. I recall the Member being delighted about not having progress. He talks about a vision for education. I remind the Member — if he ever takes time to read the documents that he gets at the Education Committee — that the vision of the Education Department lies in the corporate plan for education. I ask the party in the corner how, whether we have John O'Dowd of Sinn Féin as the Minister or a direct rule Minister, it prevents them ensuring that what is in the corporate plan of the Department of Education, which is, I believe, opposed to what the Member wants, is not fulfilled. The Minister states:

"I am committed to working with parents, teachers, governors, churches and others to ensure that selection and rejection based on educationally unsound testing at the age of 10 or 11 will no longer be a feature of our post-primary transfer system."

What has his party done? We know what it has done: nothing but criticise and complain about everybody else.

There is reference to the Treacy judgement in the motion. I ask the party in the corner where it stands on the 1989 Order. I heard the Member tell us all that he was opposed to it, but I never heard him tell us what he was for. The DUP has been consistently opposed to the 1989 Order. Why? The 1989 Order gave preferential treatment, which has now been confirmed by Judge Treacy, to the two smallest sectors of our educational provision: the integrated sector and the Irish-medium sector. In a few minutes, we will come to examples of where, as a result of that legislation and the actions of the Department, the controlled sector, which is a new word in the vocabulary of the Ulster Unionist Party in recent times, has been set at a disadvantage. When will the Minister come out into the public domain and give us the recent guidance that, according to his press release of 15 May, was issued by him to his departmental officials on the application of the duty? We have not seen it. We have asked for it, but we do not know what that guidance is. I will let the Minister answer on that issue.

I turn to what was said by Chris Hazzard and the Minister about there having been no evidence produced that sectors have been discriminated against or treated unfairly in area planning. Let me take you to Ballymena. The Member for North Antrim alluded to Ballymena when he said that he was a member of the board of governors at Ballee. The way in which the North Eastern Education and Library Board and the Department have treated that controlled

school in Ballymena is shameful. Indeed, "shameful" is probably putting it very mildly. The Minister corrected the assertion that the announcement was made on election day. Well, it was made the day after, on May 23, in a public press release. The press release states that the school in Ballee will close with "effect from 31 August 2014". There are other examples. At St Peter's High School in Londonderry, there is to be a phased closure. An announcement was made on the same day in relation to the future of schools in Coleraine: St Joseph's College, Dominican College and Loreto. They, too, will have a phased closure. I have to say, Minister, that having a phased closure and giving a school until 31 August to close is treating two sectors completely and absolutely differently.

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

Mr Storey: It is time that that element of area planning is looked at, because the way that Ballee has been treated —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Sean Rogers.

Mr Storey: — has been shameful.

Mr Rogers: We all recognise that progressing area-based planning is crucial to improving the educational well-being of all our young people. The Minister is right to pursue this fully but, without formally establishing the Education and Skills Authority, he is in danger of putting the cart before the horse. If we are to see our economic outlook improve, we need to pursue sound financial planning and recognise the benefits of sharing between sectors. We need a flexible education system that has parental choice at its core. The terms of reference for area planning place strong emphasis on sharing, but the published plans did not reflect this to any great extent. Shared education has to be at the centre of any decision-making.

ESA was introduced by Angela Smith in 2005 as a means of cutting costs and bureaucracy in education services and delivering more resources to the classroom. At that stage, I, like many others, was looking forward to it, but, unfortunately, the opposite has been the case. In fact, far from reducing costs, it has swallowed up almost £17 million without any tangible output. Without the implementation of ESA, the five education and library boards have come under considerable pressure, and any support that they have been able to provide to schools has been severely hampered. We

have heard people's views about who stopped ESA, but, at the end of the day, successive Education Ministers have failed to deliver it.

The SDLP is fully supportive of any initiative to deliver the real change that ESA promised. Any supposed changes to date have been achieved by scaling down the level of services, which has hit our teachers. In Judge Treacy's recent ruling with regard to Drumragh Integrated College, he referred to the Bain report, which is what I want to speak about. We need to revisit the Bain proposals. The Department has set minimum enrolment thresholds below which, it is believed, schools will find difficulty in providing an appropriate learning environment. Rural primary schools are expected to have more than 105 pupils, and urban primary schools are expected to have more than 140. Although the numbers are important, good leadership, academic achievement and financial viability are far more so. The designation of schools as rural or urban is also off the mark. Only schools outside Derry and Belfast are deemed rural. That does not take into account primary schools in an urban context by treating them as if they were rural, and, in fact, 40% of our rural primary schools are under enrolment stress. Cross-sectoral solutions are essential to retaining education in rural areas. We could pursue a similar argument with post-primary education where many great post-primary schools have fewer than 500 pupils.

It is my belief that area planning proposals are built on the shifting sands of the Bain proposals, which are seriously flawed. If we continue to adopt Bain, we will say goodbye to many of our rural schools, and I mean "rural" in the true sense of the word. We would say goodbye to many of our rural communities and even our rural economy. Do we really want to be in a situation where our major schools are all urban?

The most concerning aspect is that the Minister has used information gleaned from the area planning process to close schools. Little consideration is given to community-led development proposals. What consideration is given to Immaculate Conception College being the only maintained school in the Waterside? Will the unique location of St Mary's, Brollagh, and the unique circumstances pertaining to that community be considered, or will we just follow CCMS's recommendations? Any development should be assessed against all factors. Is an hour and a half's bus journey not a very important factor?

The aim must be to secure a network of sustainable schools while working out what the annual demand for school places is likely to be on the basis of current uptake and projecting ahead. Why has the involvement of further education in area-based planning been an afterthought? We need to ensure that our young people have access to different pathways. FE provides an alternative and proven successful pathway, but it was left out of the process, despite being a key player in area learning partnerships.

It is time for the Minister to urgently address the current problems with area-based planning. He must pause the current process, learn from the initial attempts and adopt a holistic approach to area-based planning, encompassing maintained, controlled, Irish-medium, integrated and further education. We must ensure that managing authorities do not recommend school closures in situations where the local community supports a shared solution. We must learn the lessons from initial attempts at area-based planning. This must be fully tackled before the strategic management of schools can be fully explored and a long-term plan for educating our young people devised.

Mr Dickson: Education has been for far too long and remains to this day a political football. We need to make progress on the issue. From top to bottom, reform is needed. Thousands of empty desks shout at us of the need to address planning in our school estate to deliver sustainable schools, appropriate selection and a common funding formula and to deal with the uncertainty hanging over small schools and underperformance.

We need to begin to trust one another to work to improve for the good of our children in Northern Ireland. We need to move forward to a modern education system that, I unashamedly say, should have integration at its heart. Integrated education is essential for a host of reasons. My party's chief reason is that we believe that there is good social value in integrated education. We believe that educating people from across the community in the same school provides for an improved society. We also believe that there are clear educational and financial benefits from doing so.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: Not at this stage.

Shared education, as outlined by the Ulster Unionist Party motion, is part of a spectrum of

choices relating to improving integration in the education system. However, it should not be pursued to the detriment of integrating education, as the decision in relation to Drumragh Integrated College showed last week. There is a real and genuine demand for shared education. The recent 'Belfast Telegraph' poll and the application rates for integrated schools demonstrate that. Yet, somewhere in the system, there is a blockage. There is a political roadblock preventing us from developing integrated education. Despite the demand, there is little political support for integration in our schools. Even when the DUP and Sinn Féin agree to identify 10 new shared campuses — not integrated, but shared — they are unable to do even that by any reasonable deadline.

Others have referred to schools in their locality. I want to make reference to Corran Integrated Primary School in Larne, which operates out of ramshackle temporary classrooms because of the failure and the inertia in the system. It cannot deliver modern and appropriate teaching facilities for a school that is bursting at the seams with parents who are choosing to have their children educated there.

The Education and Skills Authority would have been a good model for delivering a great deal of this, leading to robust area-based planning processes to genuinely facilitate and encourage integrated education. However, we are where we are today. I hope that the Minister will at least hint today at new proposals for the education administration. The question of how we facilitate and promote integrated education in any new system is essential.

I give way to the Member who, I appreciate, wants to say a few words.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he believe, as I do, that the requirement to facilitate and develop integrated education means that, at times, the integrated sector can and should be given priority over other sectors?

3.45 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker. In response to the question, emphatically the answer is yes.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way on that point?

Mr Dickson: Not at this stage, I really need to make progress and finish this.

We are in a position where, if we allow area-based planning to proceed without ESA or any appropriate structures in place, we could be putting the bricks and mortar for new schools in place, literally building segregation into our education system for another generation. That is something that I and my party will resist tooth and nail. We do not want to see a system that will deliver bricks and mortar that will provide for further segregation in our education system. This is why, following the recent Drumragh ruling and the scrapping of ESA, there is need for a rethink of how we implement the planning process to ensure that the decisions we take now are embedded with integrated education in the system for the foreseeable future. We are making decisions today for a whole generation.

Northern Ireland needs an integrated education system, and there has to be a mechanism in place to ensure that it is planned for effectively. That must be alongside other changes such as those for teacher training funding mechanisms, but the current system has clearly been shown not to work correctly, and that needs to change. We must stop making education a political football, a game that has gone way beyond full time. We need agreement now to deliver a fair and equal education system for all, one that helps to deliver shared and integrated education and no longer helps to segregate our society.

Mr Craig: Area planning: where is it? Have we really got it? I have heard much outcry here about the integrated sector and where it fits into the area planning strategy. I will make the bold statement that we cannot afford the policies we have today with all those sectors, some of them artificially competing with others. I have only to look at my area to see a prime example of what happens with the integrated sector. An integrated school was opened. Legally, it was allowed to happen, even though the vast majority of the community in the area was opposed to it, and the inevitable happened. In this case, a maintained sector school ended up closing over the opening of the new integrated school. That school now wants to double its intake, even though there is no demand there to prove that it can be sustained. Six controlled sector schools sit within two miles of that school, and all of them are undersubscribed.

We need to wake up to the reality of what is going on here. We have a school sitting there, as was pointed out, in temporary buildings, like most integrated schools, yet, as a Government, we have poured millions of taxpayers' money

into the six controlled sector schools. All of them are new schools from within the past five years. If we double the intake for the integrated school, what will we have done with all that public investment? Where is the logic in saying that this is the way for us to go? This is where area planning becomes absolutely critical.

I could also be very critical of my own South Eastern Board. I sit with four primary schools in my area, all of which are oversubscribed to the hilt. This year, we have seen pupils being asked to go in excess of 20 miles to other schools. Is that the way forward? I do not think it is. With my own board, I will ask the Minister to take a severe look at how it actually carries out the so-called area planning, because I think that the lack of electoral input to that board is having a major detrimental impact on it. I have asked the Minister on several occasions to look at that issue, because common sense seems to be out the window.

For three years now, we have had to ask for the Minister's intervention time and again with regard to preschool facilities in the same Lisburn north area, and every year he has had to put more money into that area. It was absolutely predictable that this year the primary school facilities would be bursting at the seams, yet absolutely nothing was done about it. In fact, over six months ago, an announcement was made by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) that a major movement of military with children was coming into the area. Yet the board made no plans to provide for that. When will the Minister tackle what is actually going on out there, shake somebody up and make them do their job?

We can talk all day. The reality is that very little area planning is taking place. The Minister needs to grasp that nettle, tackle it now and move it forward, before we are left with a complete and utter debacle out there.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I oppose the motion and support the motion as amended. As is usual with most Ulster Unionist motions, this is negative and offers no solutions. There are no real proposals in it; it is just about stopping area planning. Once again, we find that there is little actual policy in the motion.

The Minister has a difficult job to do with regard to area planning. Nobody envies that job. As Stewart Dickson has said, there are so many empty school desks that we, as the Executive and Assembly, fund at the moment. That situation is untenable and unsustainable, and it needs to be tackled. By tackling that problem,

we free up resources and funding that can go towards tackling underachievement in our schools and raising educational standards. This is something that we cannot dilly-dally with. We need to get to grips with it right away. Children, their well-being and their educational outcomes have to come before buildings and protecting the status quo for whatever reason. There have been situations in the past — I know of a number in my constituency — where previous Administrations have given capital funding to schools and, within one or two years, the school has closed. So, there has always been a need for a longer-term vision and longer-term planning in regard to education. That is why the Minister and the Minister before him had to put in place policies to deal with this issue.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Unusually, I agree with nearly everything that he has said to date. However, does he not agree that, to a certain extent, area planning has been made more difficult because the Minister has allowed himself to be shackled by not taking on some of the vested interests in education? We have already had examples of where one sector is promoted, even to the detriment of schools in a particular area, or one sector is allowed to go off and do its own thing regardless of the impact that it has on other schools. Is that not really where the problem with area planning has come?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McKay: The Member knows the Minister of Education, and I do not think that the Minister can be accused of being hesitant in taking on vested interests. The greatest frustration in education has been the deliberate fudging of many issues, whether it be ESA or other issues. ESA should have been in place many years ago and been central to dealing with many of the problems that we are discussing.

Locally, schools need to work together and share resources. I know of cases, besides that of Omagh, where schools are seeking capital support together to ensure that they meet the needs of the area rather than of the individual school.

To deliver a world-class education for our children — something that, I believe, we are all striving towards, regardless of our political opinions on the issue — we need to free up resources to invest in education, to provide choice and to put a greater focus on underachievement. To do that, we need to

promote the greater sharing of resources, stop wasting money on empty school desks and have a proper debate on educational outcomes and delivery. Today's motion is not about having a proper debate; it is simply a call to suspend area planning. Those who tabled the motion have been in the House long enough to know that you can oppose things — education or anything else — until the cows come home. We are up for a debate and will listen to whatever proposals the Ulster Unionist Party has. However, in order to move this debate forward, the Ulster Unionist Party needs to bring forward proposals for discussion.

Mr Newton: I suppose that, when I looked at the motion, I asked myself what aspect of it we had not debated before and on a number of occasions. I asked myself these questions in the context of what has happened in east Belfast: what is the current approach to area planning and what has it achieved? I want to focus on the east Belfast area plan and ask why the Minister is so hung up on an area planning process and exercise that has let him down on so many occasions.

I do not think that anybody would argue that area planning is unnecessary. Of course, it is necessary, but there needs to be a number of ingredients to it. It needs to be open, transparent and professional, and the advice given from the area plan needs to be shared on an equal basis with the parents and boards of governors of the schools that are impacted on. It also needs to be consistent across all the sectors, and it needs to be more than what it was described as by a number of schools, parents and boards of governors in east Belfast, who felt that it was disastrous.

I want to take a couple of examples. In Orangefield High School, the board of governors approved the closure of the school and recommended it to parents. It approved it on the basis that the area plan would allow the pupils in Orangefield High School to go, by and large and in the main, to Ashfield Boys' High School and Ashfield Girls' High School. At the end of the day, the Minister knows that that was unachievable. The parents were then encouraged to make other decisions about other schools, and the life of the school had to be extended for a year beyond what was anticipated. That was one example of area planning and how misinformation was given to parents about what would be achieved.

Newtownbreda High School is in south Belfast, but it serves quite a number of pupils from east Belfast. Parents were to be convinced that the area plan was workable through the

amalgamation of Newtownbreda High School and Knockbreda High School, but they now feel so strongly about it that they are seeking a judicial review. At the other end of the scale, parents of pupils in Knockbreda High School are also unhappy about the situation with the schools working together. It seems that the way in which the area plan has worked has let down the children in both schools.

The consultation process for that area plan was done by the South Eastern Education and Library Board, and I have raised the issue of there being no representation from parents, the public or political representatives on the South Eastern Education and Library Board with the Minister before. I am pleased that he has rectified that situation in the Belfast Education and Library Board and that it now has the political representation that it did not have until a few weeks ago. That situation cannot be allowed to continue. That process also affects the school in Dundonald, where, thankfully, the Minister took the decision to reverse the recommendation of the South Eastern Education and Library Board and allowed the school to remain open. Those are a number of examples of area planning being ineffective and, indeed, letting the Minister down.

That situation cannot be allowed to continue. We need a democratisation of the South Eastern Education and Library Board with representation from parents. The system — I will come to a conclusion — needs to be tested, tested and tested again to indicate that it is fair and representative. Area planning can be professional in those circumstances.

4.00 pm

Mr P Ramsey: Like my colleague Seán Rogers, I support the motion. There are many issues of great importance that require leadership from this Assembly and Executive, notably the economy and the failure to find resolution on the Haass talks. However, there is arguably no bigger issue for Northern Ireland at present than the future of our children's education. Yet, on this major issue, there has been a massive Sinn Féin/DUP leadership failure. The SDLP envisages an education system that focuses not only on exams but on a rounded education for our children and one that provides the parental choice of integrated, Irish-medium, state or faith-based education through the provision of appropriate access for all young people and students.

Alongside choice, the fact that spending for each primary-school child is less than half that in a grammar school must be addressed.

Further money and resources must be spent on early years primary and nursery provision to counter that injustice. There is a step towards investing in educational excellence that is key to achieving social justice and long-term economic value and growth for our shared society. As part of this drive for such educational excellence, there is a great need for a robust focus on the attainment of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects at all ability levels to provide our children and, as a consequence, our economy with the necessary skills base to excel in this era of global competitiveness.

All those important priorities are being stalled by the now seven-year delay in establishing ESA and the recent news that the Minister is rubbishing the plan. The Department of Education's website states:

"The purpose of education reform is to improve outcomes for all young people in education and to ensure equality of access to quality education provision."

Sadly, without the single education and skills authority, the five education and library boards and the different sectoral bodies in the system have had to move ahead on their own.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. There is an irony in the situation with equality of access because of the 1989 order. I have in my constituency a very successful post-primary integrated school in Harryville in Ballymena that the young people in Ballymena cannot get into. Why? It is because the process means that they are being bussed from Larne, which is in the constituency of my colleague the honourable Member. Surely that is not equitable and not treating everybody in a fair way.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr P Ramsey: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker. The Member makes a valid point.

It is undesirable yet inevitable that this has resulted in planning without formal recognition or promotion of greater sharing between sectors. While I agree with the Minister's actions moving forward, area based planning without formal recognition or promotion of greater sharing between sectors is far from ideal. The amendment neglects to point to the seven years of intransigence that has prevented the establishment of ESA, which was intended to be a single authority for area

planning and which has resulted in a jumbled sustainable schools policy that will, as in the case of Immaculate Conception in the Waterside and as Seán Rogers pointed out, starve a community of a school that has been at the heart of that area for many years and that provides valuable community services.

How can this House call for the suspension of the current area planning process before there is clarity on the future strategic management of schools and a long-term vision of education for Northern Ireland is decided upon, given that such a long-term plan has been actively resisted for the past seven years at a cost of £17 million? That is not to say that we will not scrutinise the Minister's actions. Reconfiguring the existing five education and library boards to fit the new superstructure of local government is a major undertaking and one that will have a major impact on area planning. This is of particular importance in ensuring that we protect rural schools, which are so often the heart of rural communities. The Minister must work for viable alternatives to the existing sustainable schools policy, as the resultant audits do not demonstrate an aptitude towards rural proofing and the opportunities for schools and the wider communities in giving the opportunity to be educated together while maintaining that rural school.

Now that we have the apparent dumping of ESA in favour of a unitary body, we must be clear how we will manage the long-term sustainability of schools to ensure that skills, as I previously mentioned, STEM subjects and employability are at the heart of the system. For far too long, there has been a political twist to education in the House, but we simply cannot ignore the increasingly clinical attitude of the Department to providing our children with an education that is fulfilling and meaningful.

I mention again, and will continue to mention, the plight of the Woodlands speech and language centre in my constituency, which was closed by the Minister despite being an example of best practice and despite objections from the Education and Training Inspectorate and the entire community. Far from sustainability, the focus in this case seems to be on faked adherence to legislation, which the Minister could have changed. We support the motion.

Mr Moutray: Today's motion is certainly wide-ranging. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it is a little bit of everything thrown into the mixing bowl, from area planning to the Education and Skills Authority to the sharing of resources and the long-term vision for

education in Northern Ireland. Mr Kinahan and Mrs Dobson have managed to say a lot in the motion but to mean very little. In my mind, the crux of the matter is that area-based planning has been a shambles and continues to be just that. Over the next couple of minutes, I intend to look more closely at the area planning issues and take the opportunity to reiterate to the House the flawed process in my constituency and the need to consult and listen to communities, not impose a ministerial ideology on a community that simply does not want it.

Judge Treacy's ruling certainly gives much credence to parent power. It is essential that the Minister ceases his plan to enforce an unwanted system on any community. To that end and given the flaws to date, I support the suspension or abolition of the current area planning process, which has been flawed from day one. If we look specifically at Craigavon, we see the Southern Education and Library Board and the Minister travelling down a road to decimate a system that has worked for over 40 years, is the envy of other areas and produces higher-than-average results yearly. We openly admit that there are accommodation issues, particularly on the senior high school's Lurgan site. However, when all that is needed is an estate upgrade, the area-based planning model adopted by the Minister and being implemented by the board is totally and utterly aimed at destroying the entire system and heading down the road of a comprehensive system.

The community has supported the operation of the Dickson plan for many years. They want it to continue, and they want to see all pupils, especially those in Craigavon Senior High School, in high-quality buildings receiving education appropriate to their academic and vocational needs and, in the case of the senior high school, with good links established with further education to provide vocational pathways from the school environment into the world of work. I have concerns about how my view on provision and those of my constituents have been misrepresented. Some have alleged that my party is interested only in grammar schools. That is wrong on every level. I am glad that principals — post-primary and primary — parents and pupils have been to the forefront of the battle and have demonstrated the level of support that there is for the Dickson plan and its continuation.

We have seen poor leadership in our education system, with the education and library boards being used to do the dirty work. In recent weeks, we have seen the shambolic area planning proposals in Craigavon and witnessed a ruling by Judge Treacy against the Minister

and the Department for their handling of the Drumragh Integrated College saga. We have witnessed inequality in the treatment of our children in that the Minister has not moved to set up a body that will speak up for systems such as the Dickson plan, which permits parental choice and offers different pathways for children on the basis of their academic or vocational ability. It is time to rework area-based planning into a process that is inclusive, takes cognisance of parental views and, at all times, protects parental choice.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an deis an rún seo a phlé inniu agus tuairimí comhghleacaithe Tionóil a chluinstin. I welcome the opportunity to debate the motion and to hear the views of Assembly colleagues, although, at times, it was more akin to having several Adjournment debates all in one. That is because every Member — well most Members, apart from my colleagues — seemed more interested in schools in their constituency than in the ideal of area planning or the need to tackle the inequalities in our education system.

I will start by correcting a number of observations made by the proposer of the motion, Mr Kinahan. In his opening remarks, he stated:

"It seems that we have a mess in the education system, whether it is ESA, assessment, common funding, and even the lack of improvement in examination results as announced last week, as well as many other fields."

Let me correct him on a few of those points for a start. Our examination results are improving significantly. The proportion of school leavers achieving at least five good GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent, including in English and maths, has increased by 3.8% over a five-year period. The proportion of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent has increase by 8.3% over the past five years. That is an improvement in anybody's book.

The proportion of school leavers achieving three or more A levels at grades A* to C has risen by 3.9% over the same period: our examination results are improving and not declining, as indicated by Mr Kinahan.

The common funding formula is in place. It is being run as we speak, and, as I committed to the Assembly and to others, no school lost as a result of my manoeuvres.

In relation to ESA, Mr Kinahan told me that I needed to realise that I am involved in consensus politics. I agree totally. I brought forward an ESA Bill that is not my vision. If I were in a one-party government, I assure you that the Bill would be completely different, but I accept that I have to compromise. I brought forward significant compromises on the ESA Bill on several occasions, yet I still cannot achieve agreement on it. I am all up for consensual debate, politics and compromise because that is what we have to do if we are to make this work. However, we all have to do it, including the Ulster Unionist Party. The Ulster Unionist Party will have to decide in the weeks to come exactly where it wants this debate to go in relation to a single planning authority.

I do not mean to pick on Mr Kinahan; I will pick on others as the debate goes on. I have a list here of people I am going to pick on before the end of the debate.

Mr Moutray stated that Judge Treacy had ruled against me. He did not rule against me. Even in Mr Kinahan's opening remarks, he said:

"we highlight the need for clarity on what Justice Treacy's judgement means".

Great legal minds are going over Judge Treacy's judgement to see exactly what it means for education. I assure you that I take the judgement seriously. I will listen closely to senior counsel's interpretation of it, and we will move forward on it.

However, nothing in the Judge Treacy judgement and nothing that I have heard in the debate today points me in the direction of stopping area planning. In fact, when I listen to Members debate the issues, it strikes me that some of them want me to do this: whatever you do, do nothing. That is not an option in any Department, and it is certainly not an option in education.

In my first major speech to the Assembly, on coming into office in September 2011, I outlined my vision for education and what action needed to be taken by my Department and by me, as Minister, to ensure that our education system moved forward in a progressive way. At the heart of it was area planning, and I set out the reasons why we needed area planning. At the time, and since, I have said this: as Minister, I could trundle along with the budget that I have and keep every school as it is.

Mr Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will give way to the Member in a moment.

I could keep every school open and ignore the fact that we have 85,000 empty school desks; ignore the fact that how the system was planned was on an individual school basis rather than on an area-needs educational basis. I could have ignored the fact that how we were planning our schools estate was having a detrimental impact on education. I could have happily trundled along doing that, but I did not enter politics to ignore the realities of a situation. No one who is prepared to sit back and ignore the realities of a situation should be appointed Minister.

I see that Mr Wilson is looking to get in.

4.15 pm

Mr Wilson: I thank the Minister for giving way. He is absolutely right to say that to sit back and do nothing was not an option with his budget and educational needs, but does he agree that part of the reason why anger and frustration is being expressed today about area planning is that it is seen as a vehicle for the Minister to get his way on issues that he could not previously get his way on, for example the destruction of grammar schools? It is being seen as an attack primarily on the controlled sector. The benefits of having fewer schools but bigger and better schools have not been sold to the public.

Mr O'Dowd: I challenged the Member and other Members during Question Time to show me examples of where I discriminated against any sector and to name individual schools, rather than claim that I discriminated against a sector. I counteracted by saying that I acted in a positive discriminatory way in relation to Dundonald.

I will cover the points Mr Wilson made in a moment, but Mr Storey stood up and said, "I'll give you examples of where the Minister acted differently: Ballee." He stated that I closed the school in Ballee on a particular date. That date was on the development proposal because the proposers of the development proposal, the North Eastern Education and Library Board, brought forward that date for closure. He said that the maintained sector will be treated differently and certain schools have been given different dates. I can set the dates on development proposals once they come to me for a decision, but the original date on any development proposal will come to me as part of that original proposal. Mr Storey referred to what is happening in Coleraine. I understand

that, in Coleraine, a number of development proposals have been published by CCMS. I have no part in those proposals at this stage. They are at a consultative stage and, when they come before me, I will make a decision on them.

This also goes to Mr Wilson's remark that, in some way, I am seen to be driving forward an agenda that I could not get in other ways. Again, show me the example of where I acted in a discriminatory way. Mr Storey has had to step out, but Ballee is an example of the effect of the grammar schools on our education system. Ballee is now going through the process of closure because it could not attract enough pupils. It was operating in an area that has a high dominance of the selective sector. Ballee begged the other sectors, including the selective sector, to work with it and it was ignored — not by me but by the selective sector. So selection is having a detrimental impact on non-selective schools, particularly in the controlled sector.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: In a moment.

That is not my doing or an effect of area planning. Area planning exists to help to rectify that impact. Everybody should have a fair playing field in moving forward.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for giving way. On the issue of Ballee, I challenge the Minister and I believe him to be wrong. Ballee closed not because of the numbers of selection places in grammar schools but because there was an integrated school in Harryville, which affected the numbers, and also the fact that, for many, many years — this is the nub of the problem — NEELB let that school down, let it wither, and did not support that school when it was needed.

Mr O'Dowd: I think the Member may be rewriting history slightly. I also ask the Member to examine his party's role in the decline of Ballee. Where was your attention focused for many years, whether in Ballymena, Craigavon or south Antrim? Your attention has not been focused on the controlled sector and the non-selective sector. You have been courting the selective sector so much that you actually forgot about the controlled sector. Now, all of a sudden, the controlled sector is raising its voice, and rightly so.

There was a wee dispute earlier between Mr Storey and Mr Kinahan about who spoke for the controlled sector the most. I have been

Education Minister for three years, and I have been my party's spokesperson on education for five or six years, and I can count on one hand the number of times any of you have spoken about the needs of the controlled sector.

Under area planning, everyone is around the table and everyone has a voice around it. Ideally, that would be under ESA, but we have to continue to work and move on. So, everyone has a voice around the table. I am asking the sectors to work together. Mr Kinahan said in his opening remarks that the terms of reference of area planning actually state that the schools and the sectors should work together in bringing forward imaginative proposals to:

"Identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis".

So it is at the heart of area planning, and the amendment from my party calls on the sectors to increase the number of proposals coming forward in relation to shared education.

In any motion that comes before the House, I expect an alternative to whatever decisions the Minister is making and whatever policy direction the Minister has put forward. What is missing from this motion is that alternative. We cannot simply stop area planning, because the problems that area planning is there to rectify will remain and the opportunities that area planning presents will be missed.

I am preparing a statement in relation to capital builds. Throughout that statement, and throughout my deliberations on it, are the findings and the judgements in relation to the discussions between the various sectors on how area planning is moving forward. In the absence of area planning, how do you make decisions in relation to capital programmes? How do you decide what schools are relevant going into the future? Mr Dickson suggested that, if we build schools now, we will be doing it for a generation. Yes, we are, but we will only be putting bricks and mortar together. Those schools, in their management type, management style and ethos, in the broadest sense of the world, can change. We need to ensure that we have a sustainable schools estate that our education system can be proud of.

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes.

Mr Dickson: Minister, I genuinely recognise that you see new buildings as bricks and mortar. We would all subscribe to the second comment you made, which was about the ability of the ethos of a school to reflect the real and genuine desires of parents, if that was what we were seeing in the buildings that you have to manage. The sad reality is that we are not seeing that.

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure that you have got my point. I am saying that an ethos can change, and does change, in schools etc.

As I come to a conclusion, I want to cover a number of points made by Mr Rogers about Mr Treacy's judgement. I suspect, and this obviously needs further deliberation and interrogation, that, if Mr Treacy is saying that the rural proofing of the schools beyond Derry and Belfast goes too far, that is not to the advantage of those schools. That could be seen as a disadvantage for those schools.

You asked two questions. The first was whether we want to say goodbye to rural schools. Let me give you a firm answer to that: no. You also asked whether we want all our schools to be in urban settings. The answer to that question is a firm no. There is no intent, deliberate or any other way, through area planning that will see that scenario arise. The sustainable schools policy has protective measures for small rural schools, and I will continue to enforce them.

The best and most important way in which anyone can protect a school, whether it is a small rural school or a school in an urban setting, is this. Signing a petition is one thing, and I am very supportive of participatory democracy. Signing a petition: fair enough, important. However, the most important thing anyone can do, if they are serious about supporting their local school, is to sign the admission slip and send their child there. That is the most important and effective way of securing the future of your local school. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The aim of all of us in this Chamber should be to help provide our young people with the best opportunities possible. Foremost among those opportunities should be access to a first-class education. An education system should have, as a priority, the aim of helping our young people in their academic, vocational or intellectual development and in developing the skills to interact with their peers and broader society in general.

The hope is always that our education system will help children and young people in their development to becoming well-rounded individuals. Equally, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that our education system continues to drive up educational attainment and outcomes so that, whether our young people choose to remain at home or leave these shores, those educational outcomes will stand up to scrutiny and competition from other jurisdictions.

To that end, it is imperative that we use whatever resources we have to provide an education system that is fit for purpose and cohesive enough, in spite of the multiplicity of sectors, to ensure that good practice is implemented across all sectors. Of course, the best vehicle to do that would have been ESA. The Minister has endeavoured, for a considerable period, to have ESA brought into being. Unfortunately, Members on the Benches opposite have set their face against it, as they do, let us be honest, with most progressive proposals. As usual, in these circumstances, we do not see an alternative to ESA. As usual, the Ulster Unionist motion, as with any motion it has put forward in and around education, does not contain an alternative.

The demographic changes alone mean that we need to think strategically about the number of schools in our system and their sustainability in the time ahead. I am honestly not sure whether anyone here is arguing against the need to rationalise the schools estate in a planned and managed way. Is anyone saying that?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. As he works out his particular view, could he give the House an opinion, as the representative for West Belfast, on how, for example, his party will approach the issue of the continuance of a very good school in West Belfast, such as St Dominic's, and the issues around St Rose's? Clearly, there is an issue there that needs to be resolved. Will he explain how he would put into place there what he is proposing for others?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Sheehan: I am not here to put forward proposals, at the minute. Certainly, as a party, we have a view on area planning in West Belfast.

Mr Storey: What is it?

Mr Sheehan: I am not going to go into it here because I do not have the time, but, if you want to talk to me about it at any time, I certainly will.

Surely, there would be no disagreement on the suggestion that the best way to carry out the process that I talked about is to have it implemented by a single administrative body. In that light, I welcome the decision by the Minister to bring forward a paper to the Executive seeking agreement on future education administration.

The Ulster Unionist motion states:

"the current process places no formal recognition or promotion of greater sharing between schools and sectors".

That is simply not true. The Minister has pointed out, on a number of occasions, that the terms of reference for area planning explicitly deal with working towards greater sharing and developing innovative solutions to deliver that.

The motion also calls for a suspension of area planning until there is greater clarity and agreement on a long-term vision for education. If we do that, what happens if we do not get agreement? Do we just carry on in a state of paralysis? No; we have Ministers here to make decisions. I am glad that this Minister is someone who will stand up and take those hard decisions when need be. Or, maybe the Ulster Unionists are suggesting that we bring in someone like Richard Haass to facilitate agreement. Guess which parties would still be saying no at the end of that process?

Of course, the DUP complains about children being bussed from Sammy Wilson's constituency into Harryville, I think it was. I do not hear you complaining about kids being bussed to grammar schools in Belfast.

Will area planning always get it right? No, it will not, and we have to face up to that.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: I do not have enough time. The Minister has already shown that he is prepared to step in and reverse decisions if need be. I ask the House to support the amendment.

4.30 pm

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the contributions that have been made by Members in the debate. It is clear for all to see that the area planning process is fatally flawed. However, as

demonstrated by the Sinn Féin amendment, it would appear that it is not so clear to them. To describe the area planning process as planned and managed is an affront to all who see the process as doing untold damage to the future education of our children. Our motion rightly calls for the suspension of the process until a long-term vision for education in Northern Ireland is agreed.

Communities affected by area planning were mentioned by Members on numerous occasions in the debate. They include Larne, Ballycastle, Armagh, Crumlin and, of course, Craigavon — the Minister would be disappointed if I did not mention my constituency — and the list goes on.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Very briefly.

Mr Storey: I appreciate the Member giving way. Will she clarify for once in the House where her party stands on the Dickson plan, particularly in relation to the comments of her party colleague, Mr Arnold Hatch, so that there is no ambiguity or doublespeak around the issue of, allegedly, supporting the Dickson plan?

Mrs Dobson: I thought that the election was over, but obviously it is in the mind of some Members. I have been clear from the start in my views on the Dickson plan. I do not see Mr Arnold Hatch on these Benches; I am speaking on my behalf.

Try telling these communities that area planning is planned and managed. Decisions are either being proposed or taken that will drastically change the entire education system. There has been an outpouring of anger among teachers, parents and pupils, and again I think primarily about my constituency and the sheer anger of people towards the issue of the Dickson plan. All too often, people feel that they have no rights and nowhere left to turn. However, as was said, in the recent judicial review taken by Drumragh Integrated College, Mr Justice Treacy joined the masses of teachers, parents and pupils, including those in Craigavon, in the belief that area planning is inflexible. That is a blow to the Minister, who must surely now recognise the importance of parent power in this ruling and, more importantly, of ensuring that area planning solutions meet the true wishes and needs of communities. What is area planning if it is consistently found to be unacceptable to the vast majority of people living in the area that it affects?

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: No, I am trying to make my points.

I will now turn to some of the contributions made in the debate. Introducing the motion, Danny Kinahan spoke of the need for consensus as we look for a way forward for our education system. That is extremely important and all too often forgotten.

Chris Hazzard blamed unionists for placing obstacles in front of progress and then pointed to tight budgets for failure to deliver. He said that the Minister had difficult decisions to make and that they would not always be popular. That was the understatement of the day, particularly in relation to Craigavon, Chris.

In his contribution, Mervyn Storey took a "plague on all your houses" approach, disrespectfully describing the Ulster Unionist Party on two occasions as the party in the corner. While failing to bring forward solutions in his contribution, he complained about others failing to bring forward solutions — criticism of others without any constructive suggestions.

Seán Rogers recognised the importance of progressing area-based planning for the future of our pupils, describing the failure to bring forward ESA and progression with area planning as putting the cart before the horse. He said that the published plans made no reference to sharing. He also raised concerns about the future of our rural schools, community and economy, and I agree with his points in that regard.

Stewart Dickson spoke about how education had been a political football for far too long. He called for action to deliver sustainable schools. While raising the issue of small schools, he spoke about the need to progress integrated education. He talked about the real and genuine demand for shared education among the public and the political roadblocks that prevent us from progressing integration. He urged us to rethink how we progress the planning process for generations of pupils to come.

Nine years on and having spent £17 million of public money on the establishment of ESA, where are we? We are nowhere. As Danny Kinahan pointed out when proposing the motion, we must have consensus on decisions. Given the Minister's announcement last week on a new ESA, it would appear that that is a lesson that he has not learnt. Indeed, the Sinn Féin amendment cites ESA as:

"the ideal vehicle to manage area planning".

It must be remembered that, on numerous occasions in the House, the Minister has pointed at the savings that ESA could deliver, savings that could be directed into front line education. That is the ideal of ESA, but all that we have seen to date are costs. The reality of ESA has been millions of pounds being deflected from front line education. Again, I ask this question: where are the interests of pupils in all this? We must not lose sight of the effects on pupils. All too often, they are lost in the debate. After those seven years, a primary 1 pupil will now be in second form, having realised zero benefit from the millions of pounds that have been spent on the Sinn Féin mess; in fact, quite the opposite, with millions having been channelled away from front line teaching.

ESA has caused considerable concern among board staff and, indeed, confusion among staff at all levels in the education system regarding when the new authority would eventually take up its responsibilities. Undoubtedly, decisions have been delayed and are sitting on shelves across the system because of the belief that ESA is coming down the line. That hardly puts pupils first; rather, it puts bureaucracy first in the Minister's ideal vehicle while forcing pupils to take a back seat. That has undoubtedly fostered a culture of indecision that, over the years, has done untold damage to the education system and to pupils' education.

Look to the future. The House must adopt a long-term strategic approach to sharing between schools. Continually finding blame in others for failure of leadership is not helping a single pupil to achieve. Indeed, as I said, failure to deliver is hampering pupils. That situation cannot go on. We need a consensus approach. The Ulster Unionist Party calls for the immediate suspension of the area planning process. I commend our motion to the House and urge Members to reject the Sinn Féin amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 25; Noes 62.

AYES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín,

Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Fearon and Mr Hazzard

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 62; Noes 25.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Fearon and Mr Hazzard

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses serious concern regarding the ongoing area planning process in the education sector; notes the critical comments made in the Justice Treacy judgement on area planning and integrated education; further notes that the current process places no formal recognition or promotion of greater sharing between schools and sectors; believes that decisions made now will determine the shape of the education system for many years to come; and calls on the Minister of Education, in the absence of either an Education and Skills Authority or the reconstitution of education and library boards, to suspend the current area planning process until there is clarity on the future strategic management of schools, and a long-term vision for education in Northern Ireland is agreed.

Centenary of the Great War: Funding for Commemorative Events

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to 1 hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Moutray: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide funding for events and initiatives aimed at commemorating the centenary of the Great War.

It is my privilege to propose the motion standing in my name and those of my two colleagues. As we all know, we are in the middle of what has been described as "the decade of centenaries". So far, we have had the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912 and the centenary of the signing of the Ulster covenant in September of the same year. This year, 2014, marks the centenary of the UVF gun-running and other events related to the home rule crisis. However, 2014 is a very significant year for an even bigger reason. Sometimes in history, the troubles and challenges faced by specific communities and nations can be overshadowed by wider, cataclysmic events of a global nature.

Even as the Ulster home rule crisis continued to deepen in the spring and summer of 1914, the storm clouds of a European war began to appear on the horizon. In contrast to World War II, where the causes of the outbreak were very clear, I struggle to get my head around the precise reasons why the world found itself at war in early August 1914. Indeed, at that time, many thought that it would be a short conflict, and the young men of Ulster, England, Scotland, Wales and of the South of Ireland headed off to the front in a positive frame of mind, confidently expecting that they would be home for Christmas. Sadly, as we know, such optimism proved to be naive and unfounded. The Great War, as it was originally known, was a horrendous conflict that dragged on until the autumn of 1918 and claimed the lives of over 16 million people, military personnel and civilians, and left 20 million wounded. It had a profound impact on society long after it was over. It was meant to be the war that ended all wars, but, in reality, it only paved the way for the Second World War just over 20 years later.

We speak a lot about the challenges of dealing with the past, but it is vital that we have a proper understanding of our history. One hundred years on, today's generation needs to know. They need to understand the horror of war and the sacrifices made by our forebears in the 1914-18 war in order to protect and preserve the civil and religious freedoms we enjoy today. The well-known motto "Lest we forget" is central to the thrust of our motion here today. We urge the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give the First World War centenary the priority it deserves and offer whatever help and funding that she can to those who are planning or would like to plan a range of centenary events. Some of those will be local and will focus on people and events in specific localities. Others might be Province-wide events. Some will be geared towards schoolchildren, and others might be part of a wider UK commemoration. Indeed, some events might have an all-Ireland angle to them.

I fully appreciate that people from all walks of life and from all community backgrounds fought and died in the First World War. Coming from the Protestant and unionist community, I have always revered the memory of the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division, who paid such a high price at the Somme and in other theatres of war. However, I am also aware of the role played by those of the nationalist tradition in the war effort, a role that was airbrushed out of history by some until comparatively recently. Justice has now been done, however, and those who fought in the likes of the 10th (Irish) Division are now at long last being properly recognised for the sacrifice they made. Carson's volunteers went to war in great numbers, but John Redmond's volunteers did so too. National Volunteer and poet Francis Ledwidge, who was to die in Ypres in 1917, is reported to have said:

"I joined the British Army because she stood between Ireland and an enemy of civilisation and I would not have her say that she defended us while we did nothing but pass resolutions."

I want the war to be remembered in its totality, and it is vital that the various centenary events are marked in an honest, open, balanced, respectful and dignified way.

We take great pride in the heroism of those who fought and died on the fields of battle, and anyone who visits the war graves in France and Belgium will never forget the experience. We do not approach this matter with rose-tinted glasses. We acknowledge the total horror of war, and the endless rows of war graves bear

testimony to that horror. When we look at the photos and the rare film footage of World War I trenches, we are reminded of the unspeakable suffering endured by those who fought there. Indeed, there are no words strong enough to even begin to describe it.

All these aspects have to be covered in any commemorations. Whatever is done and however it is done, it must be done well. To do it well requires funding. I raised the issue of centenary funding in a question for oral answer to the Minister back in January. I drew her attention to the fact that the British Government had allocated some £50 million for World War I centenary commemorations. I asked the Minister what discussions she had had with her Westminster counterpart Maria Miller, who was then the Culture Secretary, about how the war might be best commemorated here in Northern Ireland. The Minister informed me that she had not had any discussions with Ms Miller, who has now left office of course, but had been in contact with Ed Vaizey, a Minister in the Culture Department. She also referred to the support that she was giving the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and the Somme Heritage Centre. Perhaps today, six months on from that question and answer session, she will provide us with an update on these aspects.

I am aware that the Northern Ireland Office has a central, coordinating role to play in how the First World War is remembered. NIO officials sit on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport programme board for the centenary and are liaising with officials in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. I am keen to know to what extent the Minister and her officials are in contact with the Secretary of State and her officials and of any sources of funding emerging from that.

We are grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is funding local projects to the tune of £100,000. I want to praise the effort being made in various localities to stage exhibitions, events and displays on the basis of that funding. I also wish to pay tribute to the Woodland Trust for its plans for new flagship woodland in 53 acres in the Faughan Valley in Londonderry. The Princess Royal helped to launch this during her recent visit to the Province. It will be a wonderful legacy to be enjoyed by all. This initiative is entirely fitting and appropriate. Others are rising to the challenge. Today, Minister, I say that it is over to you. I look forward to hearing what plans you have in relation to funding.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I say that I

regret that my amendment was not accepted. It was an amendment that would have included all the centenaries and been in line with the Executive's statement of 15 March 2012, which outlined the important message that:

"These significant events will be organised under the principles of educational focus, reflection, inclusivity, tolerance, respect, responsibility and interdependence."

Back in 2012, during a debate on the decade of centenaries, I cautioned that how we celebrate our past is crucial to how we share our future. In some instances, this was heeded, while, in others, there was a blatant disregard. Do we need to commemorate the so-called Great War? Well, yes, if only to reinforce its futility and barbarism. The needless slaughter of millions was not for any perceived or actual freedoms, but the flower of a generation was crushed and trampled on in the mud of Flanders and elsewhere.

In 2012, we had the internationally recognised Titanic centenary, which caused much interest on a worldwide basis. That same year, we had the centenary of the signing of the Ulster covenant. More recently, we had the centenary of the Larne gun-running affair. These were little more than militaristic fancy dress parades. The Dublin and Belfast lockouts were marked by the left and trade union movements and the centenary of Cumann na mBan by women's groups and republicans alone.

With the decade wearing on, we must continue to examine the manner and means by which we commemorate the upcoming centenaries. We must also look at other significant dates and commemorations. Next year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Young Irelander and fellow Dungiven man John Mitchel, of whom Pádraig Pearse, leader of the 1916 rising, said that his writings were the most influential of any Irishman to date. Mitchel — who, of course, you were named after, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle — was not without his controversies. Two of his sons died and another was seriously injured on the southern side in the American Civil War, a war in which almost as many Irishmen fought and probably more died than in World War I. This month marks the 150th anniversary of the siege and battle of Petersburg, which was very much a turning point of the war in which a relation of mine was involved on the union side. This all goes relatively unnoticed.

5.15 pm

Last month, I was honoured to be asked as guest speaker to the inaugural meeting of the Irish Association of Professional Historians in the Dublin academy, which was opened by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan. We both spoke on the decade of centenaries. I spoke of the concern of many about how 1916 would be remembered, and Minister Deenihan fretted about how the civil war would be treated, especially in the South, where civil war politics can still prove divisive.

At the lecture, I had a long conversation with Professor Jeff Kildea, holder of the Keith Cameron Chair of Australian History and lecturer and author at UCD. His book 'Anzacs and Ireland' traces the individual histories of many Irishmen who fought in Australian uniform at Gallipoli, on the western front and in Palestine. He also traces a number of Australians who took part in the Easter rising. If, as the motion suggests, moneys are to be provided to help mark World War I, I suggest that we could do worse than to look at the research into the stories of the individuals from all sides of the community in this part of the world who were involved in the war. Their rationale and reasons were many and varied, and much is undocumented. Many, of course, went to their grave having never spoken of their experiences.

The history books tell us of the generals and the battles, but little is known of the men who fought. Some years ago, I read the autobiography of Harry Patch — 'The Last Fighting Tommy' — a modest, articulate and outspoken critic of militarism into his dotage. His story was a human story and more like it need to be told. My good friend Alistair Harper from Limavady has done sterling work and research into those from the Limavady and Dungiven area from different traditions who were involved in World War I, and I commend him for it, but funding is required for research, archiving and publication. If any moneys are to be made available, it is there that they should go.

Irish service in World War I has undergone a rehabilitation here in Ireland in recent years, and the individual stories, including those of republicans, must out, rather than having jingoistic parades and rallies. As I said earlier, I hope to bring a motion that will be inclusive of all centenaries and commemorations and will secure the support of all here.

Mrs McKeivitt: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's debate. It is reasonable to assume that each individual has a different

interpretation of the events of the First World War. There is no simple, clear-cut narrative of that period, and views regarding the involvement of the British and Irish can be exceptionally divisive. Nonetheless, I recognise the need to commemorate that significant and complex time in our history and would support the allocation of government funding.

In Northern Ireland, there is a tradition of holding parades and ceremonies to commemorate historic events, most of which are conducted in a respectful and honourable manner, while others can prove controversial and divisive to communities. A monumental number of parades take place across the region. They place a heavy financial burden on our ratepayers and stretch our police resources. We must be careful to ensure that any government funding awarded for commemorations of the war does not lead to even more parades and even more policing costs. It is important that other methods of commemorating that are considered respectful and inclusive are identified and funded appropriately.

During Question Time back in January this year, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure briefly outlined some ways in which her Department and arm's-length bodies will be involved in commemorations. They included a programme of exhibitions, talks on books in libraries and new collections in our museums. I welcome those educational programmes, but I am also keen that opportunities be provided for individuals to trace their family history to identify if a family member fought in World War I. Perhaps the Minister will address that issue later in the debate.

I have been impressed by the approach of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan, and others to re-involve the nationalist community when remembering the First World War. We should follow that example and ensure that the significant contribution of the Irish Catholic community is not lost. That said, I tend to agree with historian Heather Jones, who argues that commemoration should take a broad international perspective of the social, cultural and political changes brought by the war and its lessons for modern diplomacy and institutions. Let the commemorative period serve to unite our people with a common humanitarian history rather than divide.

Mr Copeland: I echo the appeals to the Minister to properly fund appropriate commemorations in connection with the outbreak of the Great War and, in particular,

work being undertaken quite close to my own heart in east Belfast on the Great War that is staggering for want of funding.

The final act in the Great War, which has some resonance even today, was the closing of the war map. Present when the war map was closed was Winston Churchill, who later went on to become a war leader during the second war, which had its seeds in the failure to satisfactorily conclude the first. As the map was closed, he spoke rather prophetically and said that, now that the greatest conflagration in the history of mankind had been concluded:

"the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone"

would re-emerge from the mist, restating the integrity of their struggle. That is a sentiment that, on some occasions, is echoed even to this day in this very Chamber.

The truth is that 353,000 Irish men and women of all and no religions volunteered, in the absence of conscription, to serve in the forces of the British Army, navy and air force. Indeed, foreseeing his own doom, one rather famously remarked that those he guarded he did not love and those he fought he did not hate; that his place it was Kiltartan Cross and his people were Kiltartan's poor.

The sacrifice, and I use the word advisedly, of the island of Ireland, as well as of the former Empire and Commonwealth, was on a scale that is almost beyond human comprehension in this day and age. It very much set the seeds for the world as it emerged subsequently.

The stories that need to be told are not those of generals, kings, prime ministers or emperors but of the common man and woman, bound by instinct to duty and prepared to face the unfaceable and to do the inconceivable in the service of a notion of patriotism.

My own experience, which is very limited, is that there is little glory in war and little honour, but war is in many cases a necessity that cannot be escaped or avoided.

Many years ago, I read of an incident that sort of summed up the commonality of spirit that pertained in the Irish regiments of the British Army — a tradition that goes on to this day through Irish Guards and the Royal Irish Regiment. Elements of the 36th (Ulster) Division, just before the second battle of Wyttschaete were relieved by elements of the Royal Munsters. During the handover inspection, the colonel and the regimental

sergeant major (RSM) of both units visited what were called "the displacement". They entered a large, sandbagged bastion embrasure. The Northern colonel looked at his Southern counterpart and admitted that his men had built this place from the sweat of their brows and the ache of their muscles, and called it "Derry's Walls". He looked, and said, "I suppose, and dare say, that your men will change its name." The Southern colonel, Irish and Catholic, grabbed his Northern counterpart by the hand, in the teeth of an almost incomprehensible impending maelstrom, and swore that the men of Munster would hold Derry's Walls for their Northern compatriots.

There was a chance, after that war, that things in Ireland could be settled peacefully. Unfortunately, the experiences that came from it produced a large number of republican irregulars who had seen service in Irish regiments in the service of the Crown, fighting against the Crown for the freedom, as they saw it, of Ireland, and a number of battle-hardened former officers, making up the Auxiliaries and, in some cases, the Black and Tans. The truth is that we remain one people on one island, several communities manacled by history to the opposite ends of the same chain, which will allow us to walk in parallel or towards each other. In displaying an appropriate degree of understanding of the significance of the events about which we are talking, the Minister, by adding her weight and financial support and discharging her duty on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland, could do worse than look kindly upon this motion.

Mr McCarthy: Undoubtedly, the First World War was an important historical event. It had a long and lasting impact on the way that the world operated for decades since. It also had a profound effect on the communities whose sons went to fight in the war, including many from here in Northern Ireland and, indeed, all of Ireland. It is important to commemorate the supreme sacrifice made by so many as part of that effort. It is important because we should honour those who paid the ultimate price by giving their life in the cause of freedom and because it reminds us of the total and absolute horrors of war.

The 100th anniversary is an important milestone. It is important to remember that many young people have no knowledge of that war or the Second World War. The commemoration of those who fought in the war and the impact that it had on Europe and on communities here in Northern Ireland will be all the more important when there is no longer a

generation who can remember it. That is why commemoration matters.

I also want to put on record the fact that those who fought in the First World War came from both sides of our community here and across the island. We cannot allow the commemoration of the war to become a political football. We must recall that Protestants, Catholics, unionists and nationalists made sacrifices. I do not want these important commemorations to be used for anything other than a solemn reflection, and using them to score points would be unacceptable. We should all be united on that issue.

In that vein, I also want to pay tribute to the recent efforts in the Republic to commemorate fellow Irishmen who fought and died in the war. That has taken place over several decades and includes the very visible maintenance of war memorials and so on. It is important that this part of history is not and will not be forgotten across these islands. Alliance will support the motion as it affords an opportunity to commemorate and reflect on an important event.

Miss M McIlveen: I support the motion. The background to the Great War is complex. It is a deadly mixture of imperialism, nationalism, political game-playing and score-settling. Whatever blame may be laid at the feet of political leaders at that time, the bravery of the soldiers embroiled in the conflict should never be forgotten, and the sacrifice of those who lost their life should never be taken lightly.

Over 70 million military personnel were mobilised during the First World War. Eight and a half million were killed and 21 million were wounded. The war was fought on a scale never seen before, and although primarily centred in Europe, it spread to Africa, Asia and the Pacific and involved dozens of countries. It was a war that scarred the world with its grotesque loss of human life and the settlement that followed, which involved the redrawing of boundaries and borders and the creation of protectorates.

Those who fought did so for a multitude of reasons, and my colleague Stephen Moutray pointed out that Carson's Ulster Volunteers and Redmond's Irish Volunteers fought on the same side despite seeking different outcomes. Around 80,000 men enlisted throughout Ireland in the first 12 months of the war.

Annually, Armistice Day services are held across this country so that we can not only remember those who died in conflict but remind ourselves of the horrors of war. The motion

calls on the Minister to provide funding for events and initiatives aimed at commemorating the Great War, not celebrating it.

The events of the Great War have now slipped out of living memory. There is no one alive who fought in it and can convey its horrors, but anniversaries such as this are important so that we can not only pay our respects to those who lost their life but educate future generations. Programmes of events and initiatives can act as a conduit to relay important messages so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

As has been noted, a Heritage Lottery Fund programme has made £1 million available each year until 2019 for small grants of between £3,000 and £10,000. That funding is, of course, available on a UK-wide basis, but the Minister needs to be aware that a large number of faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland will not avail themselves of such funds on religious grounds. I ask the Minister to look at this as a particular issue.

5.30 pm

In the years following the establishment of the Free State and, latterly, the Irish Republic, the contribution of Irish nationalists in the war was all but airbrushed out of history. Thankfully, that is now being redressed. The launch of the digital archive in Dublin of those who died and the visit of Enda Kenny to the war memorials at Flanders are massively important, and Mr McCarthy has already noted that memorials to the dead of the First World War have now been unveiled in towns and cities across the Irish Republic. That also has to be welcomed.

I welcome a new exhibition in the Ulster Museum, 'Answer the Call: First World War Posters'. I believe that, on 5 August, the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum will host a special anniversary event on the impact of the outbreak of the war. It should also be noted that National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) is working in partnership with Queen's and the University of Ulster on a First World War engagement centre project.

However, while those are worthy schemes, there needs to be a wider, more accessible, programme for Northern Ireland. It cannot be disputed that the Great War is a huge part of our shared history. It was a time when Irishmen of differing political views and differing religious backgrounds took up arms to fight bravely in the same army. Commemorations such as this should not simply be left to local councils, although I welcome the efforts of a number of councils across Northern Ireland to mark this

centenary. However, there needs to be something significant and appropriate from the Minister to demonstrate her and her Department's commitment to marking and remembering the shared history of our shared community. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments in response to the motion, and I hope that they are much more positive than those of her party colleague.

Mr McMullan: Members, this motion calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide funding for events and initiatives aimed at commemorating the centenary of the Great War.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. Can you lift the microphone up? Hansard will not pick up what you say otherwise.

Mr McMullan: My apologies.

I will outline some of the things that the Department has done. It allocates £450,000 towards the community festivals fund, which councils can match, and it demonstrates the fund towards those events. Northern Ireland Screen will be supporting three productions with a fund totalling £335,000. These productions all tie in with World War 1 and also include a factual serial, a feature film and a documentary. The Department has also offered the Somme Heritage Centre £90,000 over three years for a programme linked to the First World War and the battle of the Somme. It is hoped that that will garner some knowledge of the key events of this part of history and build relationships with other parts. The Department, through PRONI, is planning exhibitions and lectures, and other arm's-length bodies of the Department, such as Libraries NI and National Museums NI, are developing educational programmes, exhibitions, talks and online access to collections to help local groups and the public to research this period of history.

Members, we have an opportunity to build confidence and to build on a shared future, which is written into the document.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. As someone who very much supported the festivals fund being introduced, I say to the Member that, for those of us on this side of the House, it is very difficult to equate money going to the festivals fund, which is essentially for celebrations across Northern Ireland, largely driven by local councils, with the 100th commemoration of the Great War, where there was a slaughter unparalleled across this island and this continent. It simply does not add up

that people should be applying to the festivals fund, with all due respect.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for his intervention. Maybe when I get through what I am talking about, he will understand what I am saying. There are groups able to do that, and, if you throw your mind back to the gunrunning event in Larne, you will recall that money from the festivals fund came through for that. I will develop that as we go through this.

Therefore, we must now be ready to acknowledge all other groups' centenaries, such as 1916. Members, we all have a role to play in helping to build a shared future. The new super-councils must now show a real willingness to celebrate and have a tolerance for centenaries and treat them on an equal basis, not as they are at present.

Education must be the bedrock of any commemorations that we look to in the future. We had the gunrunning, and you celebrated that, but you left out the most important part of those celebrations, the Curragh mutiny, which was the bedrock of your gunrunning into Larne, and that is the kind of education that is lost. We must do this on an all-Ireland basis. We must look at the whole futility of war, and we must get the proper story out there. We know what happened, but we talk about airbrushing certain events out of history. It is good to see that the British Government have, at last, recognised that those who were shot for cowardice during the First World War were suffering from medical conditions, not cowardice. All of those things are now coming to the fore. That airbrushing that you talk about has now been made public and that has been got over.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

However, if we are going to celebrate centenaries, we must celebrate all centenaries, and we must have tolerance for every community. The Member can shake his head if he wants. Centenaries are coming up in Larne, and I hope to see tolerance in Larne for centenaries in a couple of years. You will have the centenary of the war of independence. Quite a lot of people who came out of the Great War had no job to go to when they came home, and they joined sides in the Great War only to get fed. Quite a lot of those who joined the army did so to get fed. The onus is on us to sit down and agree and acknowledge each other's centenaries because, if we are talking about

education, it must be for both sides; it cannot be for one side. The perception of quite a lot of young people is that anything to do with centenaries of war is for one side only.

When applications for republican centenaries went to some councils, they were turned down, and that is wrong. It has to be equal. The groups that were turned down, believe it or not, all got seeding grants from the same councils that turned them down. The new councils need to show a willingness for equality because, if we do not have equality, we will not move on, and we will not put out the right story to our young people about the centenaries.

I hope that we can look for the same money for all centenaries and not be one-sided, because the willingness is not there yet. Everybody recognises what went on during the First World War with those who joined it. We recognise those who came out of the army after the First World War —

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

Mr McMullan: — such as the Black and Tans and role that it had in the history of Ireland. I want to see a willingness for equality for all centenaries.

Mrs Hale: I welcome the opportunity to have some input into today's debate and to support my party colleagues' views on the issue of how we should do more to ensure that community groups have access to funds to commemorate the centenary of the Great War. To commemorate the service and the sacrifice of our forefathers is very personal, poignant and nationally important. The human cost of Governments' foreign policies should never be taken for granted, never trivialised, never marginalised and never politicised. The men, women and children who paid the cost and carried the burden have placed on us a moral obligation to be recognised in their towns and villages, churches, schools, and sports and social clubs.

On 14 January 2014, the Minister outlined the input from libraries, museums and those hosting educational exhibitions and how that would form the pivotal role of her Department's commitment to the commemorations of the Great War. Is that enough? Is that really the most that we can do to honour and commemorate those who made the ultimate sacrifice? No, it is not. The obvious piece missing from the jigsaw is funding to allow our communities across the Province to

commemorate the Great War in line with what they believe to be most fitting for their community. As my colleague Mr Moutray stated, decisions have been made in London to allow £50 million worth of funding support for commemoration activities, of which £34 million is ring-fenced for projects that support communities to conserve, explore and share local heritage in relation to the First World War. My worry, which is shared by many, is that, without the opportunity for community involvement, we will lose the ability to enable our young people to learn and share information at a local level.

I have deep concerns that nothing is being done by the Minister to help support schools financially that may wish to attend the battlefields to mark the centenary. Other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom are providing such financial support to help schools visit the European battlefields, with an additional £1 million being administered by Historic Scotland to include additional subsidies for groups travelling to the field of Ypres, Mons and others. Can the Minister confirm that her Department will financially support such visits by Northern Ireland children without prejudice to their school budgets? Mr Deian Hopkin, who was appointed by the First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, stated:

"There can be few more poignant but important centenaries than the outbreak of the First World War ... the consequences of which affected every family and every community ... but also forged huge changes in politics, society and the economy."

It will be a real indictment of this House and the Minister's Department if she does not do all that she can to muster support for all of our communities who fought side by side against the Axis aggression

As many Members know, I have both a professional and a personal capture with the issue of commemoration. Communities and individuals choose different methods by which to commemorate, many of which are not included in how and where the Minister wishes to place finances in relation to the commemoration of the Great War. As you travel from town to town, one is struck by the names on the monuments and the memorials to those who fell during the Great War. Even in the Republic of Ireland, monuments are, at last, being erected to those men and women who were for so long forgotten; families and communities not able to speak of them.

That tells us that local communities can commemorate in their own way, not in line with Departments and policies, and certainly not in line with funding. It would be fitting for the Minister to recognise that by providing community groups access to specific funds to commemorate, educate, learn and transfer this information to our future generations in a way that befits local need. I support the motion.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The motion calls for funding to support events and initiatives aimed at commemorating the centenary of the Great War. Glaonn an rún seo ar mhaoiniú le tacaíocht a thabhairt do ócáidí agus thograí atá dírithe ar chomórath céad bliain an Chogaidh Mhóir.

In 2012, the Executive decided to take the lead role in organising events for the forthcoming decade of commemorations, saying:

"The political, social and cultural consequences of what happened during the decade"

continued to reverberate throughout all of Ireland to this day. It was unanimously agreed that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure would jointly bring forward a programme that would offer a real opportunity for our society to benefit economically and continue its transformation into a vibrant, diverse and enriching place to visit. There was a common view that many of the commemorations would have international appeal and would, therefore, attract visitors to the region.

The Executive stated:

"These significant events will be organised under the principles of; educational focus, reflection, inclusivity, tolerance, respect, responsibility and interdependence. Ministers agreed that it was appropriate and necessary for the Executive to set the tone and provide leadership in putting an official acknowledgement process in place."

At another level, and by way of highlighting this decade of significant anniversaries, the Community Relations Council (CRC), in 2012, organised and funded a series of public lectures in an attempt to encourage informed debate and reflection. As a member of the CRC, I know that those lectures inspired a lot of interest and were very well supported. Mar bhall den Chomhairle Caidrimh Phobail tá a

fhios agam gur spreag na léachtaí sin suim mhór agus gur tugadh an-tacaíocht dóibh.

At the launch, Dr Eamon Phoenix, chair of the lecture series, observed:

"In Ireland, it has been truly said, we have a common history but not a common memory. For some '1916' conjures memories of Pearse the 'blood sacrifice' of the Easter Rising; for others, the 'blood sacrifice' of the Ulster Division at the Somme ... In the coming decade this society – itself emerging from bitter conflict – will be challenged by the roll-out of a series of centenaries connected with the Irish Revolution and Partition. While opinion remains divided over such iconic events as the Covenant, the Rising and Partition, we must acknowledge that they shaped our destinies on this island, north and south."

5.45 pm

It is clear that different aspects of our history will appeal to some more than others, and people will relate to the events that resonate particularly with them. The Great War was a huge tragedy, and the enormity of the loss of life arising from it can shock the hardest of hearts even to this today. But it is wrong to focus on a single event during that decade as a subject for this debate, as it does an injustice to all the others. It is important that we use such opportunities wisely and responsibly to ensure that in this decade of centenaries we adhere to the principles agreed by the Executive, which emphasise inclusivity and tolerance. It would be completely inappropriate if this were seen to be an attempt at exclusivity. So, while I can give my support to the motion commemorating the centenary of the Great War, it is with the clear understanding that we cannot be selective about this issue. There must be equality of treatment in funding, support and respect when we consider how best to remember all the historical events of 100 years ago.

Caithfidh cothrom na Féinne a bheith ann maidir le maoiniú, tacaíocht agus meas nuair atáimid ag smaoineamh ar an dóigh is fearr le cuimhneamh a dhéanamh ar na hócáidí stairiúla uilig a tharla céad bliain ó shin.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm deis cainte a bheith agam sa díospóireacht thábhachtach seo ar an chéad Chogadh Domhanda.

Thanks very much, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this important

debate, which affords us an important opportunity to deal with how we approach the issue of commemorations over the next number of years. Commemorations are an important part of life here and can be a good way of informing people of their history and heritage if approached in the right way and in the proper spirit.

There is an onus on the Executive to take a responsible and sensitive approach to organising events for the forthcoming decade of commemorations. As was said earlier, the political, social and cultural consequences of what happened during that decade continue to influence us on this island, North and South. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure have been given the role of bringing forward a programme for the decade, and I would be interested to hear whatever the Minister can share with us on that.

This is a vital opportunity to highlight the transformation our society has undergone over the past 100 years. A large number of commemorative anniversaries throughout the decade have international as well as local significance and may attract visitors to this region. Such events must be underlined by the principles of respect and tolerance. The recent racist attacks we have witnessed in Northern Ireland remind us once again of the need to promote inclusivity in all the events we propose to organise.

If we examine the past 100 years in a truthful way, we can achieve a deeper understanding of each other and build through reconciliation on this island. History must never be used to entrench division but to unite and inform. History belongs to us all, whether we like parts of it or loathe parts of it.

In the coming decade, this generation has the greatest duty ever placed on a generation of Irish democrats, be they British-Irish, Irish-Irish, Scots-Irish, nationalist or unionist. It is a duty to ensure that history becomes a foundation stone for a better future rather than a yoke that ties us down and mires us in the past.

The forthcoming decade of centenaries and how and why events of various types are commemorated will be a critical test of our political maturity. The Executive have an obligation to deliver a programme of commemorations that appeals to people across the community, the island and the world. These historical centenaries have the real potential, if used in the proper way, to promote tolerance and understanding between our people. That

should be their purpose, not to divide our people.

The approach adopted by the Executive must be underpinned by an agreed set of principles and protocols, informed by an ethical, critical and factual remembrance. That is the approach that we will take wherever the issue of remembrance and commemoration arises.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that the motion is about the commemoration of the First World War and that we should not bring the politics in the decade that flowed after that into the scenario? I have listened to a number of speeches from across the House that suggest that Members are doing that. A soldier, whether he was on the triple alliance side or the triple entente side, was there because his political masters put him there. We should not politicise this issue at all.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you very much. I thank the Member for his intervention. I am doing everything apart from politicising it. I am appealing for the approach not to be politicised or sectarian, and I hope that the Member would agree with that.

There are few families across the island who were not impacted on by the Great War, and it is fitting to commemorate that in a dignified and appropriate way. Achieving agreement on how we commemorate a decade of political turbulence 100 years ago is no easy task. However, it is an essential task, and we, as a society, have obligations to mark these events in a dignified, truthful and respectful way. There should be no empty gestures of support. We must support all appropriate attempts to mark our historical past so that we can learn the lessons it teaches us. The SDLP believes that commemorative events must be based on a clear understanding of and generosity to not only the diversity but the interdependence of our history.

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

Mr D Bradley: Although we may see different narratives, there is a clear interdependence between all events. We support the motion in the context of what I have said during my contribution.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Kinahan: I am very pleased to speak in support of the motion. Many of you know that I was a serviceman quite a long time ago but not as long ago, obviously, as the First World War. Like many people here, I grew up with many members of my family and all their stories. My grandfather was a submariner in miniature submarines in the First World War. That will become relevant when I move on.

It is not just remembrance that we are here to talk about when we mark the centenary of the Great War, nor is it just the shared history and the shared suffering. We need to look at all the other things. We have talked about education, and we have talked about communities, and there is a whole mass more that is part of the Great War.

There is the creativity and the ingenuity that went into designing machines and machinery, albeit it for war, that benefited the world afterwards in further machinery. For example, Short Brothers were leaders in building aircraft and were one of the few aircraft factories either here or in England that were building early aircraft. Where would we be today if we did not have our aircraft industry?

Look at the freedom that came from the war. There was the women's role in munitions factories, and the change that came from women doing what were traditionally seen as men's jobs. That led to the suffragette movement and the vote. Many, many changes came on the back of the Great War.

We should also look at the improvements that happened subsequently to pay and conditions in factories. That affected a whole mass more of society, and with that came the rebalancing of society. In the book, 'A Night to Remember', which is about the Titanic, the last two chapters after the fateful sinking of the ship are all about how the Americans were appalled at how we treated third-class passengers. The book marks how we needed to grow up, and it was the First World War that led us to look after each other. That is the sort of thing that we need to remember at the same time as marking the bravery and the heroism.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you very much for giving way. The Member referred to the creativity that the Great War gave rise to, and he mentioned some of the advances that came from it. Does he agree with me that that was a heavy price to pay for such advances? Does he agree that the other aspect of creativity — the literature that came from the First World War, from the war poets such as Francis Ledwidge, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen — has painted a

very clear picture of what it was like during that war? In the final lines of Wilfred Owen's great poem, *Dulce et Decorum Est*, he makes this appeal:

"My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est

Pro patria mori."

Mr Speaker: Order. I continue to say to Members from all sides of the House that interventions should be short and certainly should not be statements, especially when you are eating into another Member's time and the Member has been good enough to give you the Floor.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. The machinery of killing that happened on the back of both wars appals me, but I am pleased that you brought in the poetry and literature side of things, because that is something else. There is so much that we can learn by celebrating the Great War. I am pleased that we are debating this today but disappointed that there is a little bit of taking sides. There are no sides in this; it is just celebrating the Great War.

Look at all the countries that were involved in that Great War: we are talking of the Africans, the Croatians, the Serbians, the Indians, the New Zealanders, the Australians, the Ottomans and you could go on. Almost the whole world was involved. It might teach us a little, as has been alluded to, about where we are on racism. When you go to the German graveyards, you see that Jewish Germans fought for Germany who 20 years later would have been persecuted. When you go to our graveyards, you can see that north African Muslims fought on our side. It was a whole world war. We should all be learning how to get on together and learning from that. There is so much that we can learn. That is why we should put funding towards this, so that we can all learn, as communities and as families. It was meant to be the war to end all wars. Hopefully, the two of them end up as those wars. We want to build an understanding between our communities. That is how we should take this forward. We should learn from the Queen's visit; we should learn from President Higgins's visit. Let us see this being done properly, working together with no point scoring.

Mr B McCrea: I was struck by the intervention from the Member who said that we should not bring politics into this. The reality is that it is very hard to talk about anything in the Chamber without it having some political undertones. I am not sure that we should avoid it. History has a lot to teach us: maybe not to make the same mistake again or maybe to learn something for the future.

When looking at the history, I was particularly struck by the fact that all I had ever heard of, as far as World War I was concerned, was the 36th (Ulster) Division. It took me some time to discover that there was a 16th (Irish) Division relating to Redmond. You have to reflect on the history of the island of Ireland and what would have happened if Redmond's division had not been wiped out in the same way as the Ulster division was wiped out. It left different political entities alive on the island of Ireland. Our history might have been completely different if those things had not happened. There are a lot of lessons to be learned about why Redmond and his people went off to do this. There is a debate around home rule and what people were trying to argue for.

I am also struck by the words used when we talk about this. Some people use the word "celebrate"; some people use the words "reflect upon"; some people say just "mark". I was in Kansas City a few years ago, which is where the World War I museum for the United States is. It is a really large, impressive building. Of course, what I saw was that, first of all, Northern Ireland — Ulster — was not mentioned in great detail, because there were many, many other people, from right the way around the world; it truly was a global conflict. To get into that building, you had to walk over a bridge of poppies. Then, we get into our discussion here about how we deal with the poppy as an emblem. It is all very well talking about remembering World War I in a dignified way, but we then get into the difficulties to do with symbolism and suchlike.

Mr Kinahan talked about submarines. I was at the nautical museum in Bremerhaven. I saw the German World War I submarines. Anybody who saw them had to ask how on earth anybody survived in those conditions. There are a lot of things to be learnt.

6.00 pm

I also wonder about the timescale of 100 years. Given that my family on my father's side is from Donegal and all of them served in the armed services in World War Two, it was certainly an issue that, for many years, nobody could

mention the fact they had been involved in the British Army in some way, even going back to the Great War. It has taken to this time for us to be able to start to talk about these issues. Perhaps there is some clue for us here in the House about the time that it takes to fill the void and to be able to talk about the tragedies of the past.

My final point in all this is that, sometimes, people ask this question: what forms a nation or some form of identity? It tends to be a question of shared experiences. The great lesson from the Great War was just how traumatic it was for so many of our communities. It is something that we all shared and that pulled us together, but it was maybe the last time that there was such a focus on our communities. Things changed in how we recruited and built our battalions and regiments after that.

The question for us all here is whether we can move beyond the mere symbolism and can take the decade of remembrance and use it to build a genuine way forward to see what can be done about building reconciliation and trying to find a way to live together.

Mr Allister: The Great War undoubtedly marked the history of the last century and, indeed, this century because of the cataclysmic nature of the conflict across Europe. In Northern Ireland, of course, when we talk of the Great War, many of us think of the great, chilling slaughter and its scale at the battle of the Somme. As Mr McCrea said, however, we are right to remember that the war was about much more than that. Naturally, for us affected in this part of the world, that personifies much of the chilling slaughter of that war.

There are many families who to this day remember that they lost loved ones and that they have loved ones from previous generations lying in the cemeteries of France. My family is no different: I had a great-uncle, a William Mullen, who was a sergeant in the Royal Irish Fusiliers who laid down his life in the battle of the Somme. That is the story of many families, and it is something that is imprinted on the traditions and history of us all. So, it is right that, in this generation, we should most assuredly commemorate those hugely significant events and do it in a dignified and serious manner such as befits the awfulness of the occasion when the world went to war on that scale and so many people, running into several millions, lost their life. They were men who went forward in response to the call of duty and to being sent by, in many cases, the Governments to which they were loyal. Many

of them never returned. They were the heroes of that war. Many were ordinary folk — not landed gentry or people of great titles but ordinary individuals who paid the supreme sacrifice. It is right that we should commemorate and mark all that.

We should do it in a way that is not mean-spirited. I sense, from several of the speeches from the Sinn Féin Benches, an attempt to be mean-spirited, and I suspect that we will hear from the Minister a mean-spirited approach to the matter, which diminishes her and her party. Of course, she wants, in her own perverse way, to elevate something from that period to the same level, to which it can never be elevated, namely the grubby rebellion of 1916. In 1916, the real patriots of Ireland — the heroes, the soldiers of these islands — were giving their life for freedom for the rest of Europe. What we had at the post office in Dublin was a grubby rebellion by those seeking to take advantage of that. Sadly, there are those who would seek to introduce equivalence and a twinning of those events. I want to say clearly that there can be no twinning. There can be no equivalence between the sacrifice of brave soldiers in the fields of France and Belgium and the grubby rebellion of 1916. There is no equality there. I repudiate any suggestion that some equality should be imported into that situation. We are talking about commemorating the Great War of 1914. Let us do it in its own right. Let us do it without sully it in the manner in which the Minister would seek to sully it by equivocating about it and trying to equate it with that grubby rebellion of 1916. If we do it in that way, we will do —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes indeed.

Mr D Bradley: The Member has rebuked others for the meanness of their attitude. I regret to say that I feel that the Member has displayed extreme meanness of attitude in what he has said. It is, in my view, totally uncalled for.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Allister: I do not know what the Member means because he did not assist us by saying what was mean-spirited. I have saluted the memory, the bravery, the courage and the sacrifice of those who went to serve king and country from across Europe and gave their life. They were ordinary individuals who responded as soldiers. I have saluted their bravery and all

of that. I have contrasted with that those who sought to take advantage of a nation at war to promote a grubby rebellion. I do not apologise for that. I do not think that it is mean-spirited; it is an accurate assessment of what happened.

Mr Nesbitt: Mr Speaker, you are very kind. Thank you.

I do not think that history will take it kindly if we do not use every opportunity associated with this centenary to teach our young people about the horror of the Great War, the scale of the human cost — the unimaginable human cost — and the speed at which life was lost on an industrial scale, not through the use of modern weapons of mass destruction but through the relentless use of guns and grenades. Certainly, if we turn to the poets Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Rupert Brooke and the rest, we can teach children of some of that horror. The Member has already quoted:

*"Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori" —*

or "The old Lie", as Wilfred Owen put it. However, to my mind, there is no substitute for going to France and visiting the battlefields. You drive down regular country roads such as there are in Italy, Spain, here and the Republic of Ireland. The difference is that, after every second corner, a graveyard heaves into view — some small, some massive, but all regular with clean white headstones marking the graves of those who lost their life in the Great War. Those headstones, so pristine, are such a contrast to what life must have been like in the trenches.

We could send our children to Thiepval Wood to look at what life was like. At the end of the month, like many elected representatives from Northern Ireland, I will travel to France. On 1 July, I will lay a wreath at Thiepval and then at the Ulster Tower to commemorate the 36th (Ulster) Division. However, after that, I will travel onwards with many others to Guillemont and lay a wreath to those who lost their life serving with the 16th (Irish) Division.

If it is like last year, a wreath will be laid by members of the Orange Order wearing their sashes. They will lay the wreath, stand back and bow in respect to those from what is now the Republic of Ireland who stood with men from Ulster against the enemy. They will then stand respectfully for three anthems: the national anthem of France; the national anthem of the United Kingdom; and 'The Soldier's

Song', the national anthem of the Republic of Ireland.

As we politicians struggle to build a truly shared future, let us not forget that we have a truly shared past. The story of the service and sacrifice of men from all over this island surely is perfect for personal development and mutual understanding, which are key elements of Key Stages 1 and 2 of the revised curriculum.

I would like to make two further remarks. First, I commend the City of Belfast ABF, formerly the Army Benevolent Fund, which is fundraising to unveil a new monument to the First World War dead on the day that marks the centenary of the first shots of the First World War being fired. It wants to do that in Woodvale Park beside the peace tree that was planted there in 1919. What I like about its thought is that it commemorates not just the dead of the Ulster Division or the Irish Division, 16th and 10th, but everyone — Irish, British, French, Belgian and German — who lost their lives in the Great War. I commend it for that. If the Minister has any spare change in her ministerial back pocket, I am sure that it would be very grateful to receive whatever support she can provide to make that dream a reality.

Finally, I pay tribute to a relative of mine by the name of Johnny Curry, who was born in Portstewart in the late 19th century. To try to improve his lot in life, he emigrated to Canada, but he then found himself on a ship heading to France as a member of the Canadian Army. Although he survived the Somme, he was very badly injured in a grenade attack in which his hip was blown away. He returned to Canada before emigrating a second time to the United States, where, I understand, he made a fortune only to lose it in the Wall Street Crash of 1929. He finally returned to Portstewart penniless and physically severely injured. How many million stories such as that can this war tell our children about the horrendous human cost of war? I commend the motion.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I begin by thanking Members for bringing this important matter before the Assembly today. What is clear from the debate is that we need to work out how we commemorate the events from 1912 to 1922. All Members — the 14 who made speeches and the two who made interventions — mentioned that that is an important step to help us to build a united community today and to support a shared future.

With almost 300,000 Irishmen having fought in the First World War, it had a huge impact not

only on the families of those killed and injured but on all aspects of life here. We therefore have a collective responsibility to support inclusive ways of remembering the Great War and how it impacted on lives and communities across this island and beyond. Our history is, at times, painful, complex and intertwined, but it is shared and connected in so many different ways.

The 1912 to 1922 period shaped identities in Ireland and impacted on relationships in the north of our island, between North and South and between Ireland and Britain. Those events resonate to this very day, and that period in our history is, therefore, an important touchstone, providing the formative context to the society that we have today. Indeed, the make-up of the Chamber and some of the comments reflect the experiences and difficulties in the journeys and decisions that many in our society have taken. It also represents the will of the people and their desire to have their interests and aspirations protected and promoted, but within a new society of equals and in a new era of peaceful cooperation and partnership.

6.15 pm

Unfortunately, many people remember and commemorate a past that is too often based on partial knowledge, myth or a partisan viewpoint and narrow perspective. That is why I am pleased that the Executive agreed that the anniversaries should be commemorated based on the principles of an educational focus, reflection and inclusivity, with tolerance, respect, responsibility and, indeed, interdependence.

The significant anniversaries of 1912 and 1922 provide us all with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of our shared past and how it shapes British and Irish identities and relationships right up to today. The First World War and the battle of the Somme are historic and significant events. They are connected to other significant anniversaries in that period including the Treaty of Versailles, the Easter Rising, the rise of the labour movement, Lloyd George's convention, universal male and limited female suffrage, the 1918 general election, the war of independence, the Government of Ireland Act, civil war and partition. They are all connected in one way or other. The key issue for us is not whether those events are remembered but how they are remembered in the context of a shared and accepting society.

Centenaries should not be viewed in isolation. Particular anniversaries should not be considered as owned or irrelevant to different

sections of our community. The decade of centenaries is not a catalogue of unconnected events, with each anniversary being viewed in isolation. We all need to seek to highlight the connections across the decade and, therefore, maintain an appropriate focus on all the key events of the period. We need to look at the historical effects by acknowledging different interpretations. All of us gain a better understanding of who we are and how our past shapes our identity and our relationships today. The understanding, context and connections between the events as they happened and their impact on the legacy today will, I believe, promote greater understanding and an appreciation of diverse historical narratives and other points of view from traditions and political perspectives.

DCAL has led on this and will continue to lead on this. DCAL will continue to develop the Creative Centenaries initiative and promote it as a shared online platform for all activity related to the decade of centenaries. That will include the activity of PRONI, museums and libraries and NI Screen, but also the details of activities and events delivered by other organisations. DCAL will reinforce its leadership role in setting an inclusive and respectful tone for commemorations by engaging with other Departments and a range of organisations and stakeholders involved in the Great War and other commemorations with a view to using Creative Centenaries as a shared platform to promote and bring forward diversity in programme activity. My Department will also work with other Departments and stakeholders to explore opportunities to promote and enhance other funding opportunities for community organisations to deliver projects at local levels to commemorate the decade of centenaries.

There are a wealth of resources and events being delivered now and being planned by a diverse range of organisations. By setting an inclusive tone and signposting to supportive events and initiatives, DCAL can help and will work to maximise the impact and reach of such learning opportunities. We will do that by illuminating and providing opportunities for how we can share our past and uncover stories and insights to guide us to a better future, but based on historical fact.

Some people will continue to commemorate events of their own choosing and in their own manner regardless of any framework or approach suggested by government and elected representatives. I believe that the absence of an inclusive approach, cross-party support and proactive endorsement by all

Executive colleagues showing leadership increases the probability of a partisan and polarising activity, which none of us claims to want.

Culture and arts can and will continue to play a crucial role in discovering and sharing the stories of significant historical events. Remembering the past is also relevant to other Departments, and they, too, have their role to play. Links to tourism, economic development, learning and education, and social inclusion all demonstrate such relevance.

I support the motion, and I support the idea that funding needs to be provided for such events. It is important that all events in the decade of centenaries are funded. DCAL will continue to play a role in doing that. We will continue to make a bid to have the work resourced.

I will outline some of the work that others have mentioned. PRONI will continue to commemorate the Great War. That includes promoting a huge range of data and media clippings relevant to the event. It can also be accessed online by people here and across the world, who can be inspired to create some of the content and, as Karen McKeivitt pointed out, even trace their family histories.

We are also looking at how the Arts Council, in working for the 14-18 NOW festival, can help develop projects that will mark the onset of the First World War, as well as developing events that will happen following those years that need to be celebrated. They are looking at an individual artists programme as well.

Libraries NI has developed a programme of exhibitions, talks, books and launches to commemorate the start of the First World War and is working very closely with the Imperial War Museums and Queen's University Belfast on a number of projects. Libraries NI has significant heritage collections across the North and will be drawing on those resources to help promote public access to those collections. National Museums NI has planned a wide range of programmes designed to explore the context and the importance of the First World War and its impact on this part of the world. That includes online access to First World War collections and programming at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, and exploring the legacy of the Great War. We will also collaborate with the museums of Ireland, the Imperial War Museums and National Portrait Gallery in London on a number of initiatives.

Several productions with a First World War theme have been supported by NI Screen,

including a BAFTA-nominated drama, which was broadcast on BBC2, 'The Wipers Times'. The work of NI Screen's digital film archive is also providing valuable resources for schools and members of the public. The Somme Heritage Centre, with funding from DCAL, is providing programmes of work. That has been mentioned, particularly in the delivery of the Last Post project.

That is just a quick flavour of some of the work that DCAL has supported, and will support. It highlights the significance of funding and the need for resources to make sure that all significant events in the decade are given due regard. I hope, and firmly believe, that the use of arts, culture and the creative industries will help people to engage across this island. They can help us to find innovative ways to remember our past. They can bring our past to life and tell the stories behind those significant historical events in ways that stir the heart and broaden the mind. I believe that, moving forward, DCAL will continue to support the range of activities that I have just mentioned.

I encourage Members of this House to be a bit more generous in the ways in which we look at how we all collectively remember this decade of centenaries. I believe that we have absolutely nothing to gain by point scoring or being belligerent. I am absolutely delighted that there was only one Member who participated in the event, and one who asked for an intervention that did not set the tone that the rest did, which is disappointing. I believe that the inclusivity and the principles that we all agreed in 2012 can and still apply to the decade of centenaries. We need to provide a framework to examine our more recent past and to promote further opportunities for reconciliation. I firmly believe that, by doing so, all of us together can build a united community and support social change that has the central tenets of respect, tolerance and equality, which has been advocated by the people of this island in the past and in the present. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Anderson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, and I thank all the Members who have taken part in the debate.

The centenary of the First World War must be commemorated in a manner that is fitting to its deep historical significance, and I urge the Minister to rise to that challenge. The First World War shook the nations of Europe to the core. It was a war that many would say should never have happened, but, within a few weeks of the summer of 1914, the peace of Europe was shattered and nothing would ever be the same again. World War I was one of the

bloodiest conflicts in human history. In many ways, it was the last of the old wars and the first of the modern wars, and, because of that, the toll of death and injury was, tragically, on a huge scale. The carnage left behind at the end of World War I was staggering, with the killing and injury of millions of soldiers and civilians. It is only right and proper that we commemorate and remember that war, particularly those men who paid the supreme sacrifice so that those who followed could live in freedom.

In his book on the war, the historian David Stevenson said:

"Contemporaries on both sides at once hated the slaughter and yet felt unable to disengage from it,".

To this day, the symbolic significance of the First World War is highlighted by the fact that we continue to observe Remembrance Day on 11 November. We stand in silence on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month — the precise moment, on 11 November 1918, when the armistice was signed and the Great War brought to a close.

Sadly, of course, war has not ceased. The Great War was not the war to end all wars. Within a short time, the world was embroiled in a second conflict. This year, we marked the 75th anniversary of the Second World War. Since 1945, there have been many other conflicts, some of which continue to rage to this day.

As I reflect on the Great War, I think of young men, some still children as young as 14, maybe even younger, who volunteered and became known as boy soldiers. By the end of the war, many thousands of youths, too young to enlist legally, had been killed or wounded. They thought that it would be a short war and a bit of adventure. How wrong they were.

Laurence Binyon's great poem "For the Fallen" sums it up so well with the words:

*"They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe."*

We must never forget the part played by the gallant Ulstermen. On 1 July 1916, the first day of the Somme, around 2,000 men of the 36th (Ulster) Division were killed and over 3,000 injured. That dark day, which is deeply etched

in the folk history of this Province, had a profound impact in so many ways. It has been said that all of Ulster went silent as the news broke and that all that was heard was the weeping behind drawn shades. Every city, town, village and hamlet has a story to tell relating to the Great War, and it must never be forgotten.

On a number of occasions, I have visited the battlefields of the Somme. It is a memory that I will truly never forget. To see row upon row of headstones dominating the landscape and to walk through the cemeteries and war graves is a very poignant experience — one that touches even the hardest of individuals.

We have a wonderful opportunity to remember, to reflect on, to look back, with humility and pride, and to learn the lessons of 1914-18. Adequate resources must be in place to ensure that an event as momentous as the First World War is properly and appropriately marked. The Somme Heritage Centre and similar organisations do sterling work in that regard, but I think that more funding is vital if we are to properly mark the centenary of 1914.

I want to ensure that everything possible is done for the younger generation of today and that they have the opportunity to learn more about 1914. I am keen to see as many exhibitions, projects and events as possible, especially those that focus on localities. In that way, some of the unsung or forgotten heroes can be remembered by those who, perhaps, have ties of blood or neighbourhood with them.

As far as possible, I want the centenary to be inclusive. All sections of the community must feel part of it. I have mentioned the 36th (Ulster) Division, but other Irish men of a different persuasion fought and died as well. Indeed, those who paid the supreme sacrifice came from all backgrounds. Each of us will have our own perspectives on the war and its contemporary setting, but that does not mean that we cannot join together to remember and reflect in a balanced and respectful way.

6.30 pm

Some projects are being funded, and various funding plans are being considered and are in place. I pay tribute to all who are leading by example. I am aware that the World War I centenary committee is leading the way in organising many events to commemorate this centenary year and that funding is available from the Heritage Lottery Fund. I want to make sure that we do not look back on the centenary as something of a missed opportunity.

That is what I want to say as my contribution. I will now comment on those of some of the Members who took part. My colleague Stephen Moutray, in proposing the motion, referred to the great number of centenarians during the decade of centenaries. He also referred to the outbreak of the First World War. As I said in my contribution, young men left in August and expected to be home around Christmas time. Mr Moutray asked for priority to be given to the funding of these events. He highlighted the fact that unionists and nationalists fought side by side and that everyone endured suffering in the trenches. He also referred to seeking funding from the Culture Minister in London, and he asked about the extent of it.

Mr Ó hOisín suggested that we look at all individuals involved in the war. He talked about the need for research and funding to do that. Maybe we need to look at funding, but — I do not want to go down this line — I certainly do not agree with all the comments that came from that Member and some other Members about certain issues. We were debating funding for the Great War.

Karen McKeivitt of the SDLP recognised the need for funding. She supported the motion, but she said that any commemorations had to be carried out in a respectful manner. She also spoke about the need for educational programmes and, if I picked it up right, the need for the Catholic and nationalist community to get involved.

Michael Copeland, if he is still there, gave us a bit of a history lesson on the war map. He also spoke about the sacrifice right across the whole island of Ireland. He said that the common man and woman took part. He stated that they recognised the need to serve their country and that they were prepared to respond and do that. Kieran McCarthy referred to the supreme sacrifice and the many who laid down their lives. He said that both communities were involved, and that they were united in the solemn reflection of commemoration.

Michelle McIlveen talked about the bravery of our soldiers, and she said that that should never be forgotten. She stated that the war scarred the world due to the huge loss of human life. She said that the funding of events and initiatives was for commemorations, not celebrations. She also said that the mistakes of the past should not be repeated. She referred to the need for faith-based organisations to access funding, and she asked the Minister to look into that because they had difficulty with the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Oliver McMullan, along with some of his colleagues, related to a broader spectrum away from World War I. He outlined a number of initiatives already being promoted by the Department. Mr Humphrey, in an intervention, referred to the festivals fund and said that he did not think that that type of funding should be used for an event as great as the commemoration of World War I. Mr McMullan also talked about education on an all-island basis and the work of the new councils and what involvement they could have.

My colleague Brenda Hale talked about the moral obligations of commemorating the Great War. She also spoke of the need to raise funding. She referred to the £50 million funding in London, £34 million of which was for communities. She spoke of the great need for the community to get involved and of the need for support for schools to travel and visit the battlefields in France.

Mr Speaker: The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Anderson: My time is coming to an end, but I feel that the Minister must lead. She needs to work closely with her colleagues in OFMDFM, the Department of Education, DETI and with local councils and others in order to maximise the potential of all available resources.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide funding for events and initiatives aimed at commemorating the centenary of the Great War.

Adjourned at 6.35 pm.

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Published at 12.00 noon on Wednesday 28 May 2014

Mr Edwin Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a Written Statement to the Assembly to advise Members of the publication of the revised Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing.

The Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing was originally launched in June 2009. It set out standards in relation to the prevention, assessment, diagnosis, treatment, care, rehabilitation and palliative care of individuals and communities who currently have, or are at greater risk of developing, cardiovascular disease.

At the end of its three-year life cycle, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) commenced an independent review of the Cardiovascular Service Framework in April 2012. The review assessed the implementation of the Framework in terms of its effectiveness and impact.

The RQIA report was very positive, indicating that the implementation approach had been highly successful in underpinning a number of key service improvements and developments including the:

- Establishment of a new consultant post for adults with congenital heart disease;
- Introduction of a screening programme for abdominal aortic aneurysms;
- Expansion of arrangements for fast tracking of thrombolysis for stroke;

and

- Roll out of programmes of brief interventions in primary care.

It concluded that the Framework had led to improved coordination and prioritisation of actions to tackle cardiovascular disease.

As part of the review process and during the fourth year, Service Frameworks are also subject to a Fundamental Review.

This is conducted to consider whether any of the individual standards or associated performance indicators should be updated, amended or replaced. The Cardiovascular Service Framework has been subject to a successful Fundamental Review conducted by an extended membership of the Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Commissioning Group, a representative from the British Heart Foundation and the NI Chest Heart and Stroke Association.

Following the success of both the RQIA and the Fundamental reviews, the Framework itself has now been revised. The revised version contains 42 standards relating to a number of specific cardiovascular conditions such as:

- Hypertension;
- Hyperlipidaemia;
- Cardiology;
- Stroke;
- Vascular disease; and
- Renal disease.

It also includes standards relating to:

- Communication;
- Patient and public involvement;
- Health improvement and protection;
- Medicines management;

- Palliative and end of life care; and
- Research.

A specific standard relates to raising awareness of, and improving access to, emergency life support skills in order to improve the survival rate for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. In support of this aim I have asked my Department to lead the development of a Community Resuscitation Strategy, working with Health and Social Care bodies, other government departments and public bodies, and partners in the voluntary and community sector. The draft strategy has been out to public consultation and I expect to be in a position to publish the strategy in the near future.

A further standard states that all patients suffering from an acute cardiac event (ST elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI)) should have treatment within the agreed clinical timelines. This is also included as a Programme for Government commitment to expand cardiac catheterisation capacity to improve access to diagnostic intervention and treatment and the development of a new primary PCI (percutaneous coronary intervention) service model for Northern Ireland by 2014/15.

The introduction of this service (at Belfast and Altnagelvin) will mean that patients having a heart attack will be taken to a cath lab centre that is capable of undertaking the procedure 24/7. Patients bypass ED (Emergency Department) and are taken directly to the cath lab where they should have their procedure within 120 minutes from first call for medical help before transferring back to their local hospital for subsequent care.

Following a pilot at the RVH (Royal Victoria Hospital), the service became 24/7 from 30 September 2013. It is planned that the Altnagelvin service will provide a daytime primary PCI service later in the spring, with a 24/7 service in place from the summer.

The revised Cardiovascular Service Framework together with a press release will be published on 28 May 2014. It came into effect on 1st April 2014 and will build on its earlier achievements in continuing to deliver service improvements for cardiovascular disease sufferers.



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